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Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: New year brings new opportunity for AHC

Jan 6, 2024



Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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The dawn of a new year always brings a sense of optimism. We set new goals, plan to finish ongoing projects, and think of the ways that we can improve over the previous year.

The faculty, staff, and students at Allan Hancock College are no different. We are more committed than ever to changing the odds for our community in 2024.

At the top of our to-do list this year is the submission of Hancock's proposed bachelor's degree in applied professional studies. Everyone in our region knows that access to higher education beyond a two-year degree is almost non-existent for local students.

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More importantly, access to affordable higher education on the Central Coast is available only at community colleges such as Allan Hancock College, Cuesta College, and Santa Barbara City College.

Unfortunately, that affordability ends at the associate degree level. Students seeking to transfer for a bachelor's degree usually must move at least two hours away, attend a pricey online university, or compete for one of the few transfer

spots available at Cal Poly.

Last September, Allan Hancock College and Cuesta College launched the UnitedED Central Coast initiative to address the issue of access and affordability.

Hancock is developing a generalist degree designed to support local businesses while Cuesta is taking on the challenge of training more teachers for TK-8 schools with an education degree.

Both submissions face significant hurdles including potential objections from the California State University (CSU) system, a legislative limit on the number of degrees to be approved statewide in any given year, and the lack of understanding of our region by policymakers in Sacramento.

The first round of submissions for 2024 are due in just a couple of weeks, but it will take many more weeks after that for the approval process to play out.

Our proposal demonstrates an innovative solution to a compelling need. The Bachelor of Science in applied professional studies will prepare students for entry-level leadership positions throughout the region.

This is perfectly suited for sales professionals, office managers, small business owners, local government employees, and those in community support agencies such as the YMCA or Boys and Girls Club.

While CSU does not have veto authority over a proposed degree, they can slow it down by filing objections based on perceived duplication of programs.

In developing the degree, we have taken painstaking care not to duplicate courses or programs at the Cal State system. Of course, even if there were duplication it would seem to be rendered moot by the fact that there is no open-access Cal State University within 100 miles of our college.

Elsewhere on campus in 2024, work is continuing on our Guided Pathways program. The Guided Pathways initiative streamlines our degree and program offerings, making it easier for students to understand how to complete their

credential.

Guided Pathways also seeks to leverage faculty capacity by creating instructional and counseling faculty teams that manage students within the framework of an academic program.

By building teams, students will have more direct interaction with discipline faculty and counselors who specialize in a particular program.

The Santa Maria campus itself will see some major transformation this year as well. On the north side of campus, the original Building O — that included instructional space for industrial technology, arts, and PCPA stagecraft — is coming down after more than 50 years of service.

The structure no longer meets safety standards, and all the programs have moved into modern spaces within the newer Industrial Technology, PCPA Stagecraft, and Fine Arts buildings.

Additionally, we will open the new Student Wellness Center later this spring, complete with clinical space, mental health counseling, and a food pantry. We are seeking grant funding to pair with an appropriation secured by Sen. Alex Padilla to build expanded nursing classrooms, and are optimistic that funding for a modernization of our classroom/athletics facility will gain some traction with the state.

The new year is all about optimism. Allan Hancock College is putting its optimism into action. We hope you will come visit us this year to see for yourself how Allan Hancock College is changing the odds for our community.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.

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