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Your Community College

Does everyone need a college degree? | Kevin G. Walthers

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Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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Last month, the LA Times published an opinion piece by award-winning journalist Karin Klein that caught my attention. The title? “California Needs to Break Down Walls Between CSU and Community Colleges.”

In her essay, Klein deftly advocated for passage of SB 985, a bill that would create a “commonsense pilot program” to allow a select number of community colleges to offer a bachelor’s degree in nursing.

Klein’s column went on to advocate for “dismantling the wall between community colleges and four-year universities.”

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Klein is speaking Hancock’s language! Her opinions paralleled the ongoing sentiments here at Allan Hancock College: our students deserve more educational options.

As the article was making the rounds among Hancock’s leadership, we thought it would be great for Klein to visit Hancock to see the amazing work happening here that advances our shared beliefs.

So, we invited her to campus.

It turns out that Klein is currently on a tour promoting her new book about educational pathways, *Rethinking College: A Guide to Thriving Without a Degree*.

Our first reaction to the title was to recoil.

After all, Hancock's entire existence is built around the notion of awarding degrees and certificates as a means to economic mobility. Did we just invite someone to campus who thinks we shouldn't exist?

Our cognitive dissonance dissipated, however, once we read her book.

Klein's book is not a treatise on dismantling colleges and universities. Rather, it's a thoughtful look at the options available to those who don't want to pursue a bachelor's degree but still need a financially viable career.

Her thesis is essentially that it is erroneous and harmful to assume that every student should be tracked into a university-bound program of study.

Rethinking college means strategically evaluating goals. Do you want to be an attorney, an accountant, or a doctor? Then you need a university degree (and usually more than one).

Are you interested in joining a creative field, starting your own business, or getting paid-on-the-job training? Then maybe you should pursue an apprenticeship, a training certificate, or look at a career in the armed forces.

Over 12 chapters, Klein offers real-world examples of pathways to careers that don't require a four-year degree (and the debt that too often accompanies it).

From Hancock's perspective, Klein's book perfectly aligns with our guided pathways program. For the past five years, we have been building academic program maps for students to find their path to success through a chosen area of interest.

For example, someone who enjoys the creative arts may be interested in our fine arts program in order to pursue a degree or certificate in animation, graphic design, or sound production. Those considering the aerospace industry may choose an engineering path to a bachelor's degree or prefer to learn state-of-the-art machining skills needed to keep rockets and planes flying.

The key to all of this is to ensure students understand that there are many options available. We're proud to offer a wide array of career education programs that can financially support a family on the Central Coast.

We are the provider of choice for first responders, sending nurses, fire fighters, paramedics, and law enforcement professionals into the community throughout the year.

Our graduates are scattered across the region as automotive technicians, welders, dental assistants, veterinary technicians, and viticulture experts.

Allan Hancock College is committed to meeting the needs of our local community. That is why we have been such vocal proponents of "dismantling the wall" that keeps baccalaureate degrees out of reach for too many of our neighbors.

It's our job to expand the conversation and show students the various pathways and options available to them.

And that invitation to campus we made? Well, Klein accepted! She's coming to campus on Wednesday, Sept. 18, for a public conversation with me and the audience about her book.

The event kicks off at 5 p.m. in Boyd Hall followed by a book signing at 6 p.m. (books will be available for purchase). The event is free and open to the entire community, and I hope you will bring your questions and insight to the conversation.

Our educational and economic landscapes are quickly changing, and rethinking how we best prepare the next generation is an important conversation both here and in Sacramento.

I'm happy that Hancock is creating the local forum to continue that conversation in creative and critical ways.

I hope you'll join us as we move our community forward together.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College. To learn more about author Karin Klein and the Sept. 18 event, visit <https://www.hancockcollege.edu/klein/>

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