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EDITOR'S PICK

Your Community College

The fight for Hancock’s bachelor’s degree just got a major boost

| Kevin G. Walthers

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Contributed

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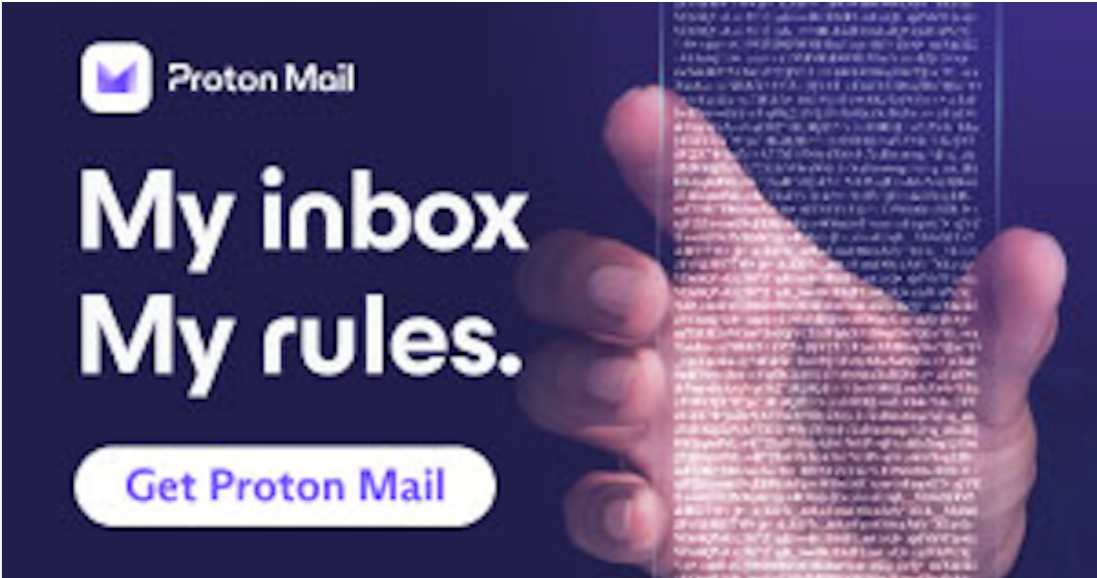
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A new bill in the California Legislature could finally break through the bureaucratic gridlock preventing Allan Hancock College from offering a bachelor's degree that our community desperately needs.

Last month, Assemblymember Gregg Hart (D-Santa Barbara) introduced AB 1462, a bill that would allow Hancock to move forward with our proposed Bachelor of Science (B.S.) Degree in Applied Professional Studies —without waiting for permission from the California State University (CSU) system.

The bill challenges a flawed approval process that has slowed community college's ability to offer bachelor's degrees to a crawl, often at the expense of students who have no other path to a four-year degree.

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At Hancock, we believe the time to act is now — a sentiment echoed by California Community Colleges Chancellor Sonya Christian, who often reminds us, "Our time is now!"

For those unfamiliar with our baccalaureate efforts, here's a quick recap: Our proposed degree is an industry-driven program designed to serve local, place-bound students who cannot relocate to earn a bachelor's degree.

The degree has already received provisional approval from peer reviewers, but final approval is stuck in a bureaucratic process dictated by the California Community Colleges (CCC) Board of Governors and the CSU system.

Currently, CSU campuses — some hundreds of miles away — can block our ability to offer the degree simply by claiming it duplicates their programs, even if they have no intention of serving our students.

This process, designed to protect institutional turf, has the real-world effect of denying educational opportunities to thousands of Latine students in our region and similarly situated students across the state. It's systemic racism in action.

Assemblymember Hart recognized the problem and took action. AB 1462 cuts through the red tape, allowing the CCC Board of Governors to approve our degree without needing a written agreement with an objecting CSU campus.

If CSU leadership in Long Beach won't do the right thing, this bill provides another path forward for our students and our community.

Of course, introducing a bill is just the first step. Over the coming months, AB 1462 will face committee hearings, debates, and likely resistance from the CSU system, which has a powerful presence in Sacramento.

However, other communities in higher education deserts — areas underserved by four-year institutions — may rally behind this effort, strengthening the push for change.

Our next step is to bring this fight directly to the CCC Board of Governors in March. Alongside industry leaders, students, faculty and community members, we will urge them to support our degree.

We've already requested an official agenda slot, but if denied, we will make our voices heard during public comment.

We also need your help. The overwhelming support from our community has been instrumental in this process, and now, we need even more. If you’d like to support AB 1462, visit hancockcollege.edu/unitedcc/letters.php to submit a letter. We will ensure it reaches Assemblymember Hart and his team.

We are grateful for the continued support from our community and deeply appreciate Assemblymember Hart’s leadership in standing up for local students.

With persistence, advocacy, and your help, we will push this degree across the finish line — because our students shouldn’t have to wait any longer.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the Superintendent/President of Allan Hancock College.

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