

Announcer: Welcome to Hancock Conversations, an Alan Hancock College podcast. Join President Dr. Kevin G. Walthers and members of the Hancock community as they explore the stories behind the people and places that make Alan Hancock College the unique hub for learning that it is today. You're sure to learn something new and even have a little fun along the way.

Kevin Walthers: Hello, welcome to Hancock Conversations. I'm Kevin Walters, the superintendent president of Alan Hancock College. I'm joined today by Alejandra Enciso, a member of the Alan Hancock College Board of Trustees. Alejandra represents Central Santa Maria and the community of Guadalupe. She currently works as the program director for community Partners and Caring and is the co-owner of Revolution Choreography in Santa Maria. Trustee and CISO was born in Santa Maria but raised in Guadalupe. She's a first-generation Latina American, first generation college graduate and a Hancock alumnus. So, we're happy to have you here with us today. Thanks for coming.

Alejandra Enciso: Hi, everybody. Hi. The Bulldog family. How are you guys? I hope you guys are doing good.

KW: So why don't you give us a little bit of background on yourself and maybe what led you to come to Hancock as a student and then what led you back as a trustee?

AE: Yeah. So, growing up my parents had very minimal education. My mom went to third grade in Mexico and my dad came to the US when he was twelve or 13, I can't remember exactly. He went one year at Mackenzie, which in those days was called Main Street Middle School. And then he went to Righetti where he actually started the Barima band and soccer teams there with Mr. Cavalon senior. And so growing up, my parents would always say your only job as a kid is to go to school. So, they knew that if I wanted to get ahead, not work, have labor intensive jobs, that I had to go to school.

KW: That's awesome. And we see that a lot in our farm families, right? When we talk to them and we ask if they want their kids to go to school, they absolutely 100% want their kids to go to college. They understand the importance of doing that, right?

AE: Yeah. My parents knew that they didn't have the opportunities that I would have if I went to school. They allowed me to go on field trips, Yosemite National Park to Washington DC to Mexico, all throughout, from starting from Pre-K to all the way to high school, and then in college I traveled more and they were always very excited that I was this little girl from Guadalupe that got out.

KW: That's nice. So tell me what your parents did for a living.

AE: So, my dad for the first 13 years of my life, was a migrant farm worker in the lettuce fields. So, he would do the track from Santa Maria to Salinas to Yuma, and we would migrate as we were kids. My mom cut strawberries and chilies growing up, and then we had a car accident. And then she started doing childcare at home. And then when she had my sister, after that, she decided to do. She started her own business in cleaning houses.

KW: Nice. So hardworking people, and they wanted to make sure that you guys had everything that they didn't get growing up.

AE: Yeah, they really worked hard. My dad, after working the lettuce fields, he went to go work for Michael Jackson's ranch. He started in the gardening, and then he went into the zoo, and he had a wonderful time there. He still talks about it. He's very excited about that time in his life.

KW: We might need to schedule him for some stories. That sounds pretty good.

AE: Yeah.

KW: So, you came to Hancock. You were a stellar student, and then you transferred. And tell us about where you transferred to.

AE: I went to Cal State Northridge. I have friends from Future Leaders that were in Oxnard County, and they transferred to CSUN. And I thought that would be a great space. It was far enough not to be at home as a first-generation student, but it was close enough that if there was an emergency, I can drive home.

KW: So, let's talk about the Future Leaders experience. So Future Leaders of America is a Central Coast organization, primarily Santa Barbara and northwest Ventura County, that really trains Latino young people for leadership roles. So, talk about your experience with that.

AE: Yeah. So, I started way back in the day when Hilda Zacarías was still directing.

KW: Another board member.

AE: Another board member. And I wasn't an "A" student. I was never, like, a perfect A straight A student. I was more of a B C student. I have a learning disability, so my learning disability is in comprehension and writing and reading. And so, one of the teachers at Mackenzie, I can't remember which teacher told me to apply, but I would be doing good if I did it. And I remember in the late 90s, we were experiencing a lot of gang related activities. And so, I hung out with a lot of those folks. And they're like, "Alejandra, you don't engage in those activities, but you hang out with these folks." So, somebody in my life, one of the teachers, saw something in me and told me to apply, so I applied. It took a couple of weeks convincing my parents to let me go for a week by myself. And once they set on board, I learned about A through G requirements. I learned that college is really accessible. And in those days, they really tried to make sure that everybody went to college and so I knew that I was probably not going to make it to a four-year university and so I started asking questions about Hancock and they said "You know, Hancock's great school. You can always go there and then transfer." And so, then I said "Okay, so what do I need to do to transfer?" And they're like, "You need to get these courses and you need to get them done in the two years. If not, you're going to stay there." And so, I did. I came to Hancock. It helped my parents out with my sister because she's eleven and a half years younger than me and I worked while I was here and then I went to CSUN and I didn't work while I was there. I just went to school and then I graduated.

KW: Nice. You said you had a learning disability. It sounds like dyslexia, maybe something similar?

AE: It's not dyslexia but it's a general learning disability. So, when I write numbers I do invert numbers sometimes, but also comprehension. When I'm reading, I have to read things over and over again, especially if they're in English because my native language is in Spanish.

KW: Right. So, was that something diagnosed in your K-12 experience?

AE: Yeah, it was diagnosed in K through five and I didn't actually transition into English until eighth grade. I was kind of in Spanish bilingual ed most of my first years of school. And then it didn't help that I went to school in Mexico. I spent a couple of years in Mexico and when I was growing up as a migrant child and so my real basis was in Spanish. But even in Spanish I have some reading and writing disabilities.

KW: So that's not an uncommon thing. Right? And we're starting to see now more and more people recognizing that that's an issue. What were the things you had to do to adapt to that so that you could get to where you are today?

AE: Yeah, a lot of it was a lot of reading and reading and reading the same paragraph a lot of times over and over again. So, I learned that. I learned better by listening to things. So now that a lot of things are on audio, I do audio or, like even PDFs. I have it automatically read to me. When I write or test taking is really hard for me, so I asked for extended time in the Learning Center. And while I was in college I asked for extended time during my tests. So normally students would get 30 minutes or one hour, I would get double the time. And so that really helped to ease the pressure of like, okay, now I can go read through questions that I don't understand carefully, and then I can answer them.

KW: Yeah, that's incredible. We really try now, and it's transformational, right? That we start to see we're not testing how fast people can answer questions. We really want to test for knowledge. Right? We want to make sure people are learning. And so, there's a lot of ways to get to that idea of, have you learned the material? Have you mastered the material? So, your example for our students is tremendous. That if you know are mindful and really think about what they're doing, they, too can be successful. So, that's a great story.

AE: Thank you.

KW: So, let's fast forward a couple of years, and Larry Lahr was on the Board of Trustees, and he got an incredible opportunity to move to a really cool house in Buellton, which was not in his district anymore. And so, he decided to retire and you applied to go into that seat. And I think what's more interesting is your personal connection to Larry from before that time. So tell us about how you knew Larry Lahr. Larry was on the board for 26 years. So how did you know Larry before you became a trustee?

AE: So when my mom decided to open her small business of cleaning houses, my mom got connected to some of the people that Larry knew, and so she ended up going to clean their house. And so, my mom was the babysitter, the house cleaning lady. And even then, everybody says "She's not the housekeeper, she's not the house cleaning lady. She's our Juana. Like, they really adopted my mom in these families and I'm really proud of my mom, how she's fostered these relationships with her employers. And so, Larry knew me since probably when I was probably 13 or 14. So I grew up knowing his girls and not close "close close", but I knew who they were. And every once in a while in the summers, I would go help my mom clean. So I actually cleaned his house. And so, then when he stepped down, I actually didn't even know that it was a seat. It's pretty funny. And then Carmen called me, and she said, "Oh, we're going to release your name. And this is Larry's old seat." And I was like "Mom, we got to call Larry!" So, I called Larry, and I told him, thank you, I'm going to apply. Do you have any advice? And he gave me some advice. He says "Just try to read as much as you can and learn what's going on on the board, and you'll have fun. Have fun with it." And so with my appointment, which was very amazing. I was the first person from Guadalupe in our history. I was the youngest person. So, I even beat out Larry by eight months. And then we had a majority woman board for the first time.

KW: Yeah, it's pretty incredible. Right? Yeah. And you also made it a majority minority board. Right? It's great that our trustee board looks very much like our community. I think it's really reflective of what we would want a board to be. So now you've been on the board for three years.

AE: It's going on to three years.

KW: Going on to three. So, what's the most fun thing that you get to do?

AE: The most fun thing that I get to do is actually talk to students. And then when I know that things are happening in the college, I come to the grand opening of the stagecraft building. Right? That was really nice. Some of the students, the theater students, got together with the actual people who do the sets and things like that, and they just support each other so well. And so I feel like we're creating families or support systems for these folks, and it's just amazing to see that. I also get to go to trustee development and I see other colleagues, and I'm starting to see that young people of color are really trying to engage in their civic duties to change what education looks like or what laws look like in their own communities.

KW: So, what do you think your most important role is as a trustee?

AE: I think my most important role as a trustee is to support the college. And by the college, I mean students first and staff and the college and learning environment. I also think that part of my role here is to be a representation of someone like me who can make it. I find that a lot of people don't have the force to, or the willpower to admit their learning disabilities and I think it's becoming much more open. So, I'm glad I'm part of that space of folks making it a point that even with a learning disability, even being a woman of color, that I can come and make change.

KW: Great. That's fantastic. So, part of your career is you're a great advocate for social justice issues. Talk a little bit about how you see your role in Santa Maria as contributing to building a more just society in northern Santa Barbara County.

AE: Yeah. Wherever I've been, especially this last year that I've been in leadership, a program, in actually leading an organization, I feel like part of it is pay equity and then also having people the ability to access health care. To me, those two things are very important. Fortunately, we live in the Central Coast and it's beautiful, right? But our pay gaps are very large, and so whenever I have a chance to speak on that or say, hey, we can compensate through health insurance, then let's see how. Let's figure it out.

KW: Yeah. So those are really important things that we look across. I think your work with Community Partners in Caring is a good example of social justice, too. Right? For taking care of the senior folks. Why don't you talk a little bit about what it is they're doing?

AE: Yeah. So Community Partners in Caring is a local nonprofit that's been around. We're on our 26th year in November, and what we do is we ask volunteers to either call a senior who's isolated, take a senior to an appointment, or go grocery shopping for that senior. We had a current situation where a senior had her home flooded because a pipe burst, and so we were able to connect that senior with another agency in our community to provide that service. And so, we're kind of bridging and we're working with collaborating with other agencies to make sure that our senior population stays safe and are able to age in their homes, because that's what most of them want.

KW: Yeah. And it's a safer space for them. Right? As long as they're able to take care of themselves in that space, then it's great that your organization is working with so many others to make sure that people are eating the right meals and getting transportation to doctors. It's a real labor of love, and it's certainly something to be proud of.

AE: Yeah. We've extended our services to individuals who are chronically ill, who have chronic illnesses or people with mild disabilities. So, if they're slightly having sight issues or hearing issues or things like that, we can actually support them as well.

KW: Cool. So, being a locally elected official now, does that seem kind of weird to you?

AE: Yeah, it does. When I hear it, they tell me "Oh, you're a locally elected official." And I was like "Oh, that's right."

KW: But your position is a little different. And we're fortunate that we have a board that understands the way colleges work and the way, by our own accreditation standards, is that it's different than being on the City Council. On the City Council, you take the information from your community and you give it to the city manager or the mayor, and it's from the community to the city. And colleges kind of work differently than that. We have standards we have to uphold under state law and under accreditation standards. And a lot of times, the role of the trustee is to explain that back to the community. Do you find yourself having to do that sometimes?

AE: Yeah, I do, actually. There was a funny issue with the building, the one right by the offices in the front that we had to just recently take down. Right. That building. A lot of people were like "Well, why are they taking it down?" And I explained, that's something that was passed, like, ten years ago when measure I was passed. So, we need to do it now because the state is on us about making sure that we have appropriate buildings and that we give our students the best that we can and we're too impacted. And so, I had to actually explain it, and they're like "Oh, I didn't know that you guys were just doing it random." I'm like, "No, there's nothing random about what the board approves or anything like that." Also, there's shared governance with the committees on campus. They really help us to see what students need, and then we rubber stamp them at the end.

KW: Well, I would be careful to say you rubber stamp, because I don't think our board does that. You guys ask some very hard questions. And really, it's about the process. And I think that's when we try to talk to boards about what they should be doing. Most of those decisions are, did you follow the process to get to this spot? Did people have input on campus? Did the students have input into this? Does this make sense? And I think our board is very good at making sure that they've read the materials, understand them, and they've been engaged along the way for big decisions. So, when something comes up where we are removing buildings, so for people listening, they may not know. We got a beautiful new Fine Arts building and the Boyd Concert Hall that came with it, and the state contributed some money to that, which was great. But part of the state's participation was we came to the state and said, we need your money, because we have these old buildings and it's really not feasible to keep them up to modern standards. And building O, that's on the north side of campus is not seismically sound. We need to pull these down. And then the state says "Okay, we're going to give you some money, but you have to do that." Right? We could have kept buildings E and F instead of tearing them down, and we could have kept building O. But we'd had to give the state back \$24 million. We're not going to do that. And they were. They were very difficult buildings to manage and maintain. Buildings E and F, the HVAC systems were inside the classrooms. It was just a really weird 1960s design that they put in. So, I appreciate the board having enough knowledge to be able to talk to the community and saying "Yeah, we're doing what we promised to do when we accepted a whole lot of money from the state."

AE: Yeah. And then the other part, I think, that is educating people on the Brown Act. Right? We have members of our community that go to our board meeting, and we always welcome them, and then we hear them out and we process what they hear. Unfortunately, due to logistical reasons, in Parley Pro, we can't really respond to them at that moment. But we're definitely keeping our ears open for anything that any of our students have concerns about.

KW: Well, let's talk about more fun stuff. What do you do when you're not being a trustee or you're not at work?

AE: What do I do when I'm not being a trustee or not at work? I have a dog. Her name is Manchita. She's going to be two in December, and she's half Maltese, half Shih Tzu. So we go on walks, and I do a lot of binge-watching TV because I love to just sit in the quiet at home. And recently I just went to Disneyland.

KW: Oh, nice. Nice. How long were you there? I was gone.

AE: I left Friday and I came back Sunday.

KW: How many rides did you get on?

AE: We got on all the rides. We did Disneyland Friday, and then Saturday we did California Adventure, me and my boyfriend, and we had a wonderful time, and it was really nice.

KW: So you're binge-watching TV. What are you watching that you think nobody else is watching? That nobody else is watching, like, a show? Like, you get done with that show and you're like "Man, I wish I had somebody to talk to about that show with."

AE: "Yeah, no. I do Law and Order SVU. I just finished binge-watching from the beginning of the first season to the second season.

KW: Wow.

AE: Yeah. It took me about four to five months to do that.

KW: That's a lot of crime.

AE: Yeah, it is.

KW: A lot of very specific, depressing crime that you're.

AE: There's a thing out there that says that women like to watch investigative shows and the crime files and things like that, and I'm starting to believe it's true. There's this woman, her name is Bailey Sari, and she does makeup on Mondays, and she does a murder mystery makeup tutorial, and she just talks about a certain serial killer and things like that. And so, yeah, I think that's something that a lot of women watch.

KW: Well, it looks like the writer strike is over, so we're going to get some new shows, but most importantly, we're going to get our hero back, right? Yes. I can't wait to see Stephen Colbert again.

KW: You got to go see him live in New York, right?

AE: Yes, I got to see him live with Hilda when we went to New York for our national conference. And it was amazing to watch him in very, you can tell that he's a genuine, caring person, although he's getting stuff together in between things, he definitely does care about what he says.

KW: Yeah,

AE: It's potato.

KW: It's potato. Everything is potato. Everything is potato. Well, I think that'll wrap us up because once you got to potato, there's nothing else to talk about.

AE: No.

KW: So we're going to thank our record-setting, groundbreaking trustee, Alejandra Enciso for being with us today. I'm Kevin Walthers, superintendent president of Alan Hancock College, and we look forward to seeing you again on our next podcast.

AE: Thank you. Bye.

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