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ALERT

TOP STORY

Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Hancock emerges from the pandemic

May 1, 2022



Dr. Kevin Walthers

Declining college enrollment is a major news story across the nation. And Allan Hancock College is no exception.

Like other colleges and universities, Hancock is feeling the effects of the pandemic — our enrollment is down more than 20 percent since 2020. The reasons are varied: some students did not come to college because they needed to work; many feared exposure to COVID-19; and others struggled with learning online.

Students have been simply overwhelmed with the thought of attending college during the pandemic and are desperate for normalcy.

In “normal times,” staggering enrollment declines like these would be cause for panic. However, the State of California is taking a proactive approach that will not penalize community colleges for drops in enrollment. Gov. Gavin Newsom, the state legislature, and the Community College board of governors are protecting our budget, allowing Allan Hancock College to better serve our community.

While California community colleges continue to receive the lowest per-student funding of any educational system in the state, the current budgetary grace will create stability as we work to grow student engagement and enrollment.



New logo revealed: Hancock's mascot gets a makeover
Joshua Nelson jnelson@santamariatimes.com

We are already seeing signs of recovery at Hancock, thanks in large part to the Hancock Promise - our hallmark program that pays first-year tuition and fees for local high school graduates. After initial success, the Promise was no competition against a global pandemic, and the number of Promise students declined for two years with the rest of the college's student body.

As we look ahead, however, our college outreach specialists are rallying high school students with excitement about the Hancock Promise. This fall, students can return to traditional learning: sitting next to their peers in classrooms, learning from their faculty members in person, enjoying time to study or catch up in the student center, library, or tutoring centers.

Hancock Promise applications are on the rise with more than 2,250 applications submitted — an increase of 37 percent over this time last year! This bodes well for the future of our community, considering the ROI for students: the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University reported this spring that Allan Hancock College garners a 30-year net present value of \$686,000.

Moreover, our academic programs are turning heads nationwide. The Chronicle of Higher Education recently featured our agriculture program. In the 1980s and 1990s, Hancock moved away from offering a full agriculture program to avoid duplication of programs with Cal Poly.

Today, with Cal Poly's growth, local students need more pipelines to enter agriculture-related majors and careers. Through grants, private donors, and district support, the Hancock agriculture program is thriving, with a 14 percent increase in enrollment last year alone. Students passionate about agriculture will have more opportunity to pursue their career at Allan Hancock College.



Hancock College hosting annual fine arts student art show
Santa Maria Times Staff Report

Additionally, we remain focused on our older adult student population. Last year, the college earmarked \$1 million for the Promise Plus program, which pays tuition for any fulltime student, regardless of age or residency. Beginning this summer, any and every student who enrolls fulltime at Hancock has the opportunity to advance their economic future without the burden of tuition for this academic year.

This is a life changing program for families in our community, and for local businesses as they encourage employees to pursue ongoing education and apply for the Promise Plus in order to enhance their skills.

As we emerge from the pandemic, Allan Hancock College is as committed as ever to changing the odds for our community. We hope you will join us by spreading the word about both the Hancock Promise and Promise Plus programs or by donating to ensure that the promise we make today will still be a promise for decades to come. If we work together, we can ensure a strong future for our neighbors and our region.

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

MORE INFORMATION

Hancock College opens new and improved Veteran Success Center