

Announcer: Welcome to Hancock Conversations, an Allan 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 Allan 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: Welcome to Hancock Conversations, your place for all things Allan Hancock College. I'm Superintendent/President Kevin Walthers, and today I'm joined by our student trustee for the 2019-2020 year, Heidi Mendiola. Heidi, how are you?

Heidi Mendiola: Good, I'm doing really well.

KW: You graduated in 2020. Give us a little sense of what your degree was in, and where you plan on transferring.

HM: Yeah, I got three associates: one in social behavioral for sociology; one for transfer, and one for administration of justice. I was able to get into several universities. Right now, I'm currently at UC Berkeley, and I was declared for a sociology and legal studies major.

KW: Great, and you're supposed to go in January, correct?

HM: Correct.

KW: Awesome. So, let's start off with just like, where you grew up. Did you grow up here in Santa Maria Valley?

HM: Yeah, I grew up in Santa Maria. I actually attended Alvin Elementary first grade through sixth grade. And then, my family decided to move to Orcutt. Because I was so young, both locations were a dramatic change, but were both part of my childhood.

KW: All right, so where did you graduate from high school?

HM: I graduated from Ernest Righetti.

KW: Alright. You've been really involved in our student government. And let's talk a little bit about what you think are your best achievements for your time as a member of student government.

HM: Yeah I joined my second year, and I was actually inspired by the student trustee back then. The proudest achievement, part of student government was definitely being the student trustee, because I met and worked with many incredible people, along with of course you, Dr. Walthers, and Nohemy. I was able to be a role model for first-generation students, and also make an impact to other students who didn't also become the leaders on campus. And it was really important for the board to have a student there, because as students we know, you know, what goes around campus. And I was able to make a difference on the student board, the trustee board, and also on campus and outside of the campus as well. So definitely being a student trustee and also just, you know, helping other students soon become other student trustees.

KW: Well, let's talk about some of the specific things that you did. So you, along with Tyler Little, who we're talking to on our next podcast. You and Tyler were really involved in the planning back in March when it was clear that we were going to have to close the college. Talk a little bit about how you approach that task of representing the students.

HM: Yeah, it was definitely difficult, being able to go to class, and then at the same time, go to the meetings with Tyler. But I think that we were both really prepared for this circumstance. I think that the school, and you as well, did a great, actually an incredible job on how you guys acted upon the situation. For Tyler and I our priority was definitely to represent the students, and to make sure that their voices were heard, and they were, they were heard, you did address them really clear. And I think, honestly we couldn't have done better. We did a great job, and Tyler and I are just really impressed by the way the school addressed the situation. I think the students are also happy that you guys put the students first, you know their safety, of course. And then, you guys also allowed them to have an opportunity to decide how they wanted graduation, for those who did graduate this year. And Tyler and I were part of the graduation, so I think it honestly went pretty well.

KW: So, I think it's important to note, that it was, as we listen to student voices, I remember you and Tyler sitting there and scrolling through literally hundreds of messages on your phone from other students. So you were spending hours every week to work on this, right?

HM: Yeah it was, it was actually pretty interesting to be able to just know what every person brought to the table with their circumstances, with their situation. And it just really impacted us. I guess, I mean, the COVID impacted everyone. But for us, for me and Tyler, it was definitely really interesting just to be able to represent students from different backgrounds and situations, because we had to think about parents that come to school, parents who bring their kids, and just students in general. So yeah, it was pretty interesting.

KW: So at commencement, you mentioned that we did a drive-through commencement. That was really, I thought, very successful in our Student Services staff and faculty over there really put that all together. You know, there are a lot of highlights that day. One of the highlights I had was meeting your family. Talk a little bit about what it meant for your family for you to graduate.

HM: It honestly meant so much, especially to my mom, because throughout the time that I was, you know, involved as student government, she was the one who always like gave me rides and was always present at my meetings. I know you also met my parents at the trustees meeting, and for them it was honestly really great for me to have graduated here at Hancock. My mom told me that when we came to Orcutt that for some reason, somehow I knew about Hancock, and she remembers me saying, 'I'm going to graduate from there one day.' And so, she didn't tell me that until I graduated from Hancock on stage. And it was really good to know that, I'm also the first in the family to graduate college and to go to university, so for them it meant a lot.

KW: That's awesome. You kind of skipped over what I think is one of your biggest accomplishments as a leader in the students, and you and your fellow students. And I can look out the window right now and see, it looks like about 30 people in line from right here in the general neighborhood and then dozens and dozens of cars that are driving through for food share. What's it been like now for six months? You guys are, like have you passed 200,000 people that you've provided food to?

HM: Yeah, it definitely feels like more than six months, but it is honestly a blessing. One, because a lot of my friends, including just people that I know lost their jobs, and me along with other ambassadors were fortunate enough to go keep our jobs through Hancock. I think that, I definitely feel blessed because of that. And it's really, it feels really good just to know that we're helping the community during these uncertain times. And just to know that they're, you know, taking home with them. It really means a lot

at the end of the day. Well, working every day is pretty hard and you know, it's kind of, it gets stressing and sometimes draining, but at the end of the day we know that they go home happy because they got food, and that just makes it up for everything that we go through. It's honestly amazing that we're able to still work here, of course, these days. And because of Stephanie and Henry, we've done a pretty amazing job with the food share, and we set up the system pretty well. I know that the police station from Hancock definitely has helped us a lot with traffic because we do get a lot of cars. And we do get a lot of people to walk up to us, too. So we're able to do two systems, three stations with the cars at them and one station on the other side of the building. For those who don't have a car and come walking.

KW: Truly, that's when we talk about changing the odds for our community.

HM: Of course, yeah.

KW: What you guys have done this year, has been nothing short of amazing. And it's a great compliment to you and to the students and to you know, and as you said, Henry and Stephanie and all the volunteers from across campus who helped out. Well, so let's kind of finish up with talking about when you graduate from Berkeley, what are you going to do after that?

HM: So, right now I'm actually doing an interview through the school, it's a pre-law society and technically they prepare you for the LPC and the bar exam to become a lawyer. And that was never my intention, to become a lawyer. I do want to work in a law firm. I do know for, in order to get a law degree, you can graduate with any major. You just have to have a great GPA.

KW: Right.

HM: And then after that, I think I'm pretty sure I'll take like a year to either travel, or just save up more money. And then, definitely I'll probably take the bar exam. If not, I do want to work at a law firm, as a case manager. Or become a forensic psychologist, but right now it's kind of, you know, I'm going with the flow. And I definitely have things prepared, but I'm really excited to see what I will become later, or sooner, but definitely somewhere in the law field.

KW: Good for you. I think you'd be a great law student and I think you would really thrive in that environment, and we would love to see you be able to come back to our community and serve the community here because we certainly need some good advocates for our folks here.

HM: Of course, yeah.

KW: So, what do you got planned for the holidays?

HM: For the holidays, my family's coming up from LA. And I'm really excited because one of my uncles on my dad's side, he's been working in Oregon and it's been, I believe, 18 years since they haven't seen each other. So he's also coming for the holidays and it's also going to be awesome. I've actually never met him, so this is gonna be the first time. But I'm more excited for the holidays just to see my dad be with his brother, and then also just, you know, have fun and to stay home and be safe. And yeah, that's what I'll be doing.

KW: Well good. Anything else you want to add about your Hancock experience?

HM: No, I just, I want to say thank you, honestly. It's been, like working with every individual I've learned through Hancock that as much as you need the president, you need also the janitors, you know,

everyone here has purpose, and I was able to work with each individual here at Hancock and it definitely has helped me with my education, my personal life, and honestly every individual has definitely impacted just not me, but like my family. So I just want to say thank you and I'm really excited to see what Hancock is going to do next year.

KW: Awesome. And I think I can make a pretty good argument, we need it, it's more important to have the custodians than it is to have a college president. They keep the place going. Well Heidi, and we're so fortunate for our community, for our college that you were in that leadership position back in March, when the world stopped spinning. And I couldn't be prouder of the work you've done here, and we're just excited to see you go forward in the future. So thanks for joining us today.

HM: It means a lot, thank you.

KW: All right, this has been Hancock Conversations, your podcast for all things Allan Hancock College. We'll look forward to seeing you on the next podcast.