

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: Hello and welcome to Hancock Conversations, the podcast about all things Allan Hancock College. I'm Superintendent/President Kevin Walthers, and today we're joined by the 2019-2020 Student Body President, Tyler Little. Tyler's a 2020 graduate of Allan Hancock College, and he is studying at UC Irvine this year, and he lives in Santa Ana. He will be majoring in film. Tyler's also a veteran, we'll talk a little bit about that as well. So Tyler, welcome.

Tyler Little: Hello, welcome, welcome. I guess. Ha ha.

KW: So thanks for joining us. And let's start off with, because you're from Ohio, let's talk about how you ended up at Hancock College.

TL: Okay, I'll do the ... it should be an interesting story. So, I grew up in a village in Ohio, and that was probably the second half of the time that I lived in Ohio. Before that, I kind of, as a kid, I grew up in, essentially, a forest, if that makes sense. So growing up in a forest, and then I moved to a village, lived there for a little bit and then I wanted to get out, kind of a thing. It's one of those small town mentalities, like you're kind of anchored in and you can't really figure out a way to get out. And so, eventually the military was my key to getting out. And so I got out, and I joined the Air Force, 2011, after I went to college once before that. Trying to be a computer science engineer, I suppose, but that wasn't really my forte. I didn't really care for it, so it's kind of hard when you're sitting in a room with like walls around you, you're looking at code all the time. I'm like, 'Nah, this is not what I want to do,' especially as a little kid that grew up in a forest, I want to be outside.

KW: Right.

TL: Yeah. So, left for the military in 2011. And then I've always had this dream since I was a little kid to do film. So when I was picking, it's called your dream sheet, in the military you pick bases that you want. Based on that, I picked everything in California, because in my head, if I want to do movies after I'm done in the military, then California is where I have to go. So, as soon as I selected all the things on my dream sheet, somehow, and this rarely happens, I got so lucky when I got stationed at Vandenberg Air Force Base in Lompoc. That was my home base the entire time I was in the military. And so, after about 2016, I was making my plans and starting to get ready to get out of the military, and I was looking at schools to do film, because that's what I wanted to do. I knew I had the G.I. Bill, I had learned all these things about these benefits that I can take advantage of. And so, I was like 'What school should I go to?' And then, you know, happen chance thing, one of the best community colleges for film - and after being through the program, I can also confirm that - just so happened to be right down the street from me. So my intention was, before I even left, that I was going to go to college at Hancock. I had never even considered going to a UC yet, because I didn't know if I was ready for that kind of a thing. So I was like, I'll just do community college and see what how that works. And then, the film program at Hancock, sometimes I don't know if it gets enough praise, like from the outside of Hancock that it should from the film community. It is the things that you do with the film program there as juniors and seniors, in UC's you don't even do. It's advanced level stuff, if you take it that way. So, when I was getting ready to get out, I had a plan. And somehow, my plan, you know, best laid plans of mice and men kind of thing. It

didn't work. And so, I ended up sadly, living in the parking garage of the Santa Maria mall in my car, for a few months. Yeah, that was super awesome. I had like a gym membership, so I'd go shower there, and then I had work, but didn't have enough money to have a place to, you know, first month/last month rent, that's expensive.

KW: Right.

TL: So, once I started Hancock, boom, my GI Bill kicked in and everything kind of rescued me at that point. And then, I had everything settled out after that, which was fantastic. And I had, luckily had some friends that helped me rent a room. So once I got into Hancock, it was like a big switch, big shift in my life. Essentially, from what seemed like one of my darkest times to probably one of the brightest times I've had in my life. So it was, it was a huge shift when I started there, if that answers your question.

KW: Yeah. So you obviously took advantage of the Veteran Resource Center here on campus. Talk about how the veterans program is helping students, like you, stay on track.

TL: So, one of the great benefits when I got there was the veterans programs. And what was great was that the people that work within that program are highly knowledgeable about veteran benefits. So one of the things that sometimes gets laid to the wayside, and when I worked in the Veterans Center a lot as an ambassador and helped with them. There's a lot of veterans who aren't aware of what benefits they qualify for, and what the best way to approach going to get these benefits are. So, what's really cool is that the people in there, whether it be Vernetta Crain, or Stephanie Crosby, or anybody involved with that program. I know I'm name dropping.

KW: Yeah. Good thing to do.

TL: But, yeah, the people involved with that program, are very knowledgeable of the benefits they get. So what was great was that essentially, when you would go into the Veterans Center, it's a great place for people to just kind of study. And then, what's cool is there's still that community kind of a feel, from other people that are veterans, like we all have this connection in a way. And then we could just talk about certain things that people who are not veterans wouldn't quite understand, in a way. So, it's really great space for that. And then what really helped is the fact that when I got in there, I had the benefits of everyone going 'hey, this is a scholarship' - the scholarships are a big one too. This is a scholarship you can apply for, you qualify for this, this is your GI Bill, let's get that. So, I'm not to compare or anything like that. The attention to each individual student at Hancock, as compared to, we'll just say the UC system, is light years difference. So the thing I guess I could get at Hancock was, this is how you do everything, this is what you need to do this is, this is how it is. And then, part of the problem with this pandemic and everything like that, is there's a disconnect. When I went to UC, it was a lot harder and more complicated for me to figure out how to do everything, like make sure that my plan matched what my GI Bill needed and make sure that everything, all my I's were dotted and all my T's were crossed kind of thing. And that's the benefit of having those veteran-oriented programs at Hancock that really helped me to make sure that I had my money and all my VA stuff was all lined up. We also have a VA advisor that she's right on top of it too, the counselor.

KW: That's great.

TL: Yes.

KW: So, let's switch tracks a little bit and talk about last spring, when you were student body president. And we talked on a prior podcast with Heidi Mendiola, who was our student trustee at the time, and we talked a lot about how student leadership was so integral in the planning process for how we were going to approach the spring semester, graduation, and the fall semester. Tell us what it was like being right there in the middle of all the action.

TL: Well I think initially, and this is a blanket for everyone, I think initially none of us really realized right out the gate when we first figured this out, what this was necessarily.

KW: Absolutely.

TL: So, as students we were just like, 'Okay, what is this? What's happening?' Again, two different kind of aspects, like is this the zombie apocalypse into the world virus? Or what is this? You know what I mean? So no one really knew, and there's so little information the beginning that we just kind of, all of us – staff, students – all of us went in the dark. And so what was really, I think, perfectly done is the fact that all of this kind of came together, the students, and the staff, and the administration, kind of was like figuring it out together, and everyone was inclusive in that. And I think that provided every perspective you need. Because when you make a decision on anything, having every perspective to be able to make the most educated decision you can is super important. So, when we figured out what this thing was, and when we went to that, really, I knew at that spring break meeting. When we had that meeting toward the end of the original week of spring break. We all met there. And we were just like, socially distance and everything was done correctly that way, but it was like we were trying to figure out what this was. And then, the staff would voice their concerns, and then students would voice their concerns. It was super interesting how we could just kind of all formulated together with that, and I think the most important thing was the fact that it was about us. And that, I think was the most beneficial thing that I saw coming out of that was that, I sat in that room with Heidi, both of us sat there and it was like, safety of us, because again we didn't really know what we're up against with this. So the safety of us was kind of a concern, the students themselves, because there were high-risk students to go to community college and all these different things, all that stuff was taken account for. I think that that was probably one of the best things about going through that. And we just kind of ...

KW: I wanna say what I really remember from that meeting in regard to the students is, you and Heidi sitting there and looking at your phone and scrolling through, I remember you saying something like, 'I've got 240 messages here from students.'

TL: Yeah. Yeah.

KW: And you guys were condensing down, like, the contacts that you have across campus were really helpful in that planning process for students and we got that message loud and clear. And I think this is something I even saw this this week, that, you know, somebody on a state level was saying 'Oh, this is going to make you know online learning, and emergency remote teaching, and all of that kind of stuff, it's going to leap forward and it's going to be the future.' And I'm like, 'No it's not, our students are really clear, they don't like it.' They understand why we have to do it. They want to be in person, they want to be with their peers, they want to have that interaction with other people. And we got that message from you guys and from all of our students really loud and clear, and that was a great way to help us plan what needed to be done.

TL: Yeah, and I think that's across the board. Even now, right? So I have acting courses this quarter. Right?

KW: Right.

TL: Try to imagine an acting course through Zoom, where you have to make a connection to another individual on the other side of the screen. There's something about the physical presence of being next to someone that allows you to connect to that person emotionally on a level that you cannot do. It doesn't matter how virtual reality or how advanced we get. I just feel like the physical presence, it's not there. So there's a disconnect that's online. So eventually, in what I have seen almost 90 percent of the students I talked to, want to go back. Like there are advantages to being remote. You know, if you have kids and things like that. But educationally, I feel like there is, if you have someone that graduates with a degree and that degree was done in person, as opposed to someone who graduates with a degree, and the whole entire degree was done virtual remote, right? Who is going to be the person that's better prepared for life in the real world, once this thing is over? You know, the current method, the Zoom person might be better set up, but afterwards, that person that graduated, normally is going to have the advantage in the actual work place outside of school, right? And I think that it's integral, in the future, that we push toward is being able to get us back in the classrooms. It's not taking the leap ahead, it just hasn't, it's not there, and I think that's important.

KW: Everything we do here is really established. And what we've honed our skills, our faculty, and our staff, is the exact opposite of what you should be doing in the pandemic. So, yeah, so we're doing our best and the optimistic news of vaccines and, you know, hopefully that we can, by next fall. Even perhaps by the summer, we'll have some face-to-face classes, but certainly by the fall. If these vaccines work we should be almost back to normal, if not fully back to normal. We're optimistic about that.

TL: Yeah, and I think part of what made the whole transition amazing, was the fact that administration kind of helped set us up. Like the reason I had those 200 messages, was because Nohemy helped set up like a town hall, and different things like that, where people had my contact information and went on the website and then messaged me like that. And that helped us consolidate that message. Like it's so valuable that we had that support, that I've not actually experienced in an educational environment like that, where it's like, here, give us the tools that we need to get what we need informationally. So, it was all hands on deck. Like it's interesting, you think when things hit the fan, kind of, per se, like you always wonder how people actually are going to be. Like, who are these people going to be when stuff actually goes awry? You know you always think that, and then there it was. I don't know if I got lucky or what, but everyone that was on the student body and then the administrators, it was like they did exactly what you wanted them, you hoped they would have done, in that moment. So it was like, it's overwhelming just to see that. So it made my job a lot easier.

KW: Our shared governance process and our emergency operations training that we do really prepared us for that. And on one of our other podcasts, our lead faculty in the fire academy was on, and his phrase is always that, you know, 'In times of crisis, you're not going to rise to the occasion, you're going to default to your level of training.' And we saw that across campus. We saw people using the frameworks for decision-making that we that we use every day, and just applying them to a situation where we had to move a little quicker. So, let's change topics. If you're a film major we want to talk about films, and so I'll start with this, "Punch Drunk Love." Adam Sandler's greatest movie, or just a great movie?

TL: Ooh, man, that was a curveball, wasn't ready for that one. "Punch Drunk Love." So here's the thing. I've, I've watched "Punch Drunk Love" pre-film school, and then after film school. I hated it the first time I watched it pre-film school, right? I was like, "What is this?" Because I walked into, you know, I grew up ... I'm a little older than most students. So I grew up with Adam Sandler being Saturday Night Live ...

KW: Being Billy Madison and all that, yeah.

TL: Billy Madison, yeah. That was my perception, so I see this and I'm like, 'Oh, what is this?' And I just kind of got bored and I was not into it really necessarily. Then the second time, I watched it again, later, after film school and I just, I found it very interesting. I think it's a good movie. I don't think it's Adam Sandler's best movie. And actually I think Adam Sandler's best movie is actually not a comedy either. I can't think of it off the top of my head but anyways, I think his significant other, it's been a while since I've seen it, dies in 9/11. "Reign on Me." That's what it is. That one. That was my favorite performance by Adam Sandler and he just killed that, like he just embodied that pain, losing someone during 9/11 happened and he just kind of never recovered from it. So that, I think that's my favorite Adam Sandler movie. But I think "Punch Drunk Love" is good.

KW: I've always thought of Adam Sandler as being the guy with an enormous amount of talent, who's also figured out that he can just get a bigger check by being a goof, and didn't have to work so hard. So, and then what was the movie that he made on Netflix right as the pandemic started?

TL: Oh, there was like 12.

KW: The jewelry guy.

TL: Oh, Un, Un Gem. No, not Un Gemmed. "Uncut Gems?"

KW: "Uncut Gems," yeah.

TL: "Uncut Gems." That's it.

KW: That was a stressful movie, but I thought it was pretty good.

TL: Yeah, that was really good. It was, yeah it was definitely ... yeah, it made me like, he kept making decisions and I was like, 'What are you doing?' Like, 'Why are you doing that?'

KW: Your shoulders hurt the whole time you're watching it, you're just like, 'Oh my gosh.' But you know, that movie. You know, I've talked to people about it and I thought you know, in a way, although he was trying to do the get-rich-quick kind of thing all the time, but you know for a lot of our students, they're always kind of, like, one step away from disaster. And I really think about that a lot. That our students are trying to get housing, they're trying to feed their families, or trying to make sure that their siblings are in school. And you think about our students who are living with that every day, not by their own choice, and just trying to make sure that we've got the services in place for them to be successful, but we can help them going forward. I think about that a lot.

TL: Yeah, I mean I relate to that in a sense. Like I had all these plans, laid out ready to go for when I left the military and every one of them failed. And it was just two decisions essentially that caused those to fail, and those decisions were incorrect decisions and that left me living in a car in a parking garage. It's

very easy to be on that edge. You know the military, kind of, I don't want to say coddle, but they kind of make it to where they say you can't fail. You can't really fail in the military, unless you are really bad person, in which they'll get rid of you. But you can't really fail, they kind of set you up to succeed. They set you up to be the best version of yourself, they give you housing, all that stuff. So when you leave that, suddenly there's nothing to catch you if you fall.

KW: Right.

TL: And it's really easy to go boom and it's like, holy cow. And so you have to figure out a way to recover from that. And there's a ton, I know students. I actually had an experience one time, I was over at Panera Bread, and I cannot remember her name now, but there was a student that you could tell she was living in her car and I recognized it immediately because I had been there. And I was over at Panera and I walked out and I saw that, and she had locked her keys out of her car. And so I called and had AAA come and unlock her car, and then I asked her, you know, while we were waiting she said 'Yeah, I'm a Hancock student' and stuff like this. So it was amazing that in that moment I was like, 'Oh, well, you need to talk to this person,' and then I was like, and then I gave her contact information and everything like that and I followed up with her later. And that's just one experience I had. And then there was another experience I had with a gentleman who had just gotten out of, he was previously incarcerated. And it was really great, he walked in one day. And I was working as a student ambassador and I was just sitting at that front desk, and for everybody that works that front desk, knows that this can happen. This guy walks in has no, he just wants information, right? And I literally went and walked with him every step of the way. And we went from him going, to just walking around and browsing, to him registered at Hancock, got his plan, got him scheduled with a counselor, all this stuff. And then I got his phone number and followed up with him on a constant basis. And when you do those kind of things as someone who is a student ambassador, does work for the school, you feel really good about it. It's a good feeling because you're helping someone. And I still have contact with him today and it's really great to see someone that comes out of that, and now they're becoming a chef, he's learning to cook, he's in the culinary program. You know, it's fantastic to see those things. So, all it takes, when students are in that moment, is just a little reach out for someone to help them out a little bit and man, it makes the world of difference.

KW: Yeah, that follow up is so important. That's a good lesson for, hopefully, all of our students are learning is that you know when somebody comes and ask for something it's not enough to write down a name on a piece of paper and give them a phone number. You know what I do when I run into students is they say, 'I want to come to school' and I'm like, you know, I could just say 'Hey, oh great, well here's where you register.' Like no, you give me your phone number, your name, and I'm gonna have somebody call you. And I, you know, I call up Dean Teniente and I say, 'Hey, can you have a counselor call this student?' And then we're gonna follow up and hound that student until they come to school, because we know the outcome from them being there is gonna be so much better.

TL: Yeah, it's literally a life-changing point. You know this is someone who, especially someone who was just previously incarcerated they go from this is their life, to look at the opportunities. It's when people see that they have opportunities that they really focus on changing and just really improving themselves. So opportunity just breeds higher expectations for yourself. It's fantastic.

KW: Yeah. And when you think about those, you know, there's a parallel between what you're describing in the military and the formerly-incarcerated students. You're both coming out of highly

structured organizations. In different, obviously different missions, but highly structured organizations. And, you know, one of the things we have to do is we need to keep providing that structure so that you can kind of work your way in. I've known people in my life that get out of the military, and you know all of a sudden they don't show up for their job, you know, the MPs aren't coming to arrest them, right? They get lost because they lost that structure.

TL: Yeah, and that happens a lot.

KW: Let's wrap up, because I want to talk a little bit about your post-graduation, not necessarily post-commencement. After the semester ended and you had finished all your courses, you took a long road trip around the country. Give us a couple highlights of what happened as you were driving around the country, and what you enjoyed.

TL: Yeah, so I took the opportunity to drive all the way to Ohio and then back before I moved down here. So, what was really cool was that we went, I went and I had someone go with me who also works in film with all the time, and we went and did all these amazing things. So we went to the Grand Canyon and did the mule ride, which was super cool. And then we went to see Graceland, which if you've never been to Graceland, definitely go to Graceland.

KW: So Graceland is a place every American should go once, and only once.

TL: Well I've only been once.

KW: You filled your quota. So while you were there, I'm gonna ask you this again. Did you go to Sun Records, where were Elvis performed and Johnny Cash and all those guys?

TL: So the sad thing is when we did this, it was during the pandemic, right? So mostly it was, I've driven across the country, multiple times like this. I did it the first time I went to California, when I left for Ohio for Vandenberg. But what was crazy was like each state was so totally approaching it different. And so, Tennessee, the cities were locked down but the country wasn't. So when we went to the cities, we got so lucky. When we got to Tennessee, the two big highlights of there was when we went to the Grand Ole Opry and then Graceland. We literally got so lucky because we were there the first day they had reopened Graceland. So there was nobody there, there was like seven people there.

KW: Wow.

TL: So we had all of Graceland to just do whatever we want. And it was still fully staffed, but there's only like seven people there and so we got to talk to all the staff, they were hanging out with us. And then what was great was that. So I'm from that area right? So I'm used to southern cooking. And the person that went with me was not. And it was the first experience she had ever had, having Memphis barbecue, and it brought tears to her eyes, it was so good. [Laughter] But yeah, so we got to eat southern barbecue, and then we got to go to Graceland with basically no one there. And that was the same thing that happened with Grand Ole Opry. It was the third day they were open, I think. No, I might have those switched around but it was still really early.

KW: Is that the new Opry Hall, or was that the historical Ryman Auditorium?

TL: That's the new Opry Hall that got flooded. Yeah, yeah, but they took, do you know about the circle?

KW: Uh huh.

TL: So yeah, so what's really cool is we got to go through the Grand Ole Opry and actually stand in the circle.

KW: Nice.

TL: And they take your picture in the circle and everything, so it was really cool to do all that too. It was a great tour to go through, that was really cool. So those are probably my two big highlights.

KW: Well, cool. I love Memphis, I just think the history of Memphis is, especially as it relates to the Civil Rights movement and, you know, one of these days I want to get back there and spend some more time. It's just a fascinating place. That sounds like a great adventure.

TL: It was.

KW: So Tyler, we're grateful for your time here. We're a better college because you were here, better college because Heidi was here, a way better college because the two of you were here, and we're excited. We're excited, you know. When you get that first screening of your major motion picture, just remember your old college president, and send me a couple tickets and we'll come down and watch. But I will say thanks. Thanks for joining us, and I know you'll stay in touch, and we look forward to seeing the great things you have in store.

TL: Absolutely. I'll see you, I really appreciate you having me on.

KW: All right, well thank you Tyler. This has been Hancock Conversations, your podcast for all things Allan Hancock College. Thanks for joining us and we'll look forward to seeing you on our next podcast.