

## A matter of degrees

The EconAlliance of Northern Santa Barbara County is a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting, supporting and encouraging economic development.

One element of economic development is an educated and literate workforce. In cooperation with other nonprofit organizations we are engaged in literacy programs for students and working adults. Increasing literacy by 1 percent will result in a 1.5-percent increase in GNP.

Allen Hancock College is our only North County post-high school college. When students finish their AA degree there is no local college for them to attend for a four-year degree.

Most first-in-their-family college students need to live at home to attend college. A third of my undergraduate college class-

mates were the first in their family to attend college and they were all commuters. Most were first or second-generation Americans.

Fifty years later this is still true. Cal Poly is about an hour or two away, depending where one lives. The closest CSU is Channel Islands, which is 111 miles from Santa Maria.

The current CSU legislation prohibits community colleges from offering duplicate degrees with CSUs. This makes sense in major metropolitan areas where there are multiple, easily accessible CSUs. It makes no sense in northern Santa Barbara County, which is often described as a "higher education desert."

The California Legislature is presently considering CSU legislation and lawmakers need to find a way to permit Allan Hancock College to offer four-year degrees so our students can live at home while they complete their college education. The ability for first-in-their-family college attendees to

commute to college is often the difference between attending college or not.

**Steve Pepe**  
President  
EconAlliance