

Community College Built Me: My Journey to FACCC

Mikala Hutchinson

Membership & External Affairs Specialist



I am grateful to join FACCC as the Membership and External Affairs Specialist, a role that's deeply personal, shaped by the impact of California's community colleges and the faculty who believed in me before I believed in myself.

My journey began at MiraCosta College at age 22, on the non-credit side, working towards the high school diploma I was unable to complete as a teenager. Systemic barriers, financial instability, and the need to prioritize survival over school shaped much of my early life. Like so many of our students, I understood what it meant to worry more about housing, food, and making ends meet than exams or assignments.

The plan was never to become a college graduate, but my professors saw my potential and encouraged me to keep going. With their support, I earned my high school diploma in 2022. In 2024, I completed three associate degrees with President's Honors, with my two young sons by my side, and transferred to UC San Diego on a full ride. I often joke that they are homegrown community college advocates as well, since their own educational journeys began at my campus Child Development Center.

At MiraCosta, I found my voice through student government and service on the Academic Senate, experiences that introduced me to advocacy and leadership. That path led me to the Student Senate for California Community Colleges, first as an intern and later as a full-time Legislative Specialist, where I worked alongside student leaders to advance policies that expand access and opportunity. Throughout my advocacy work, I fought for policies that reflect students' real lives. I worked to support efforts to strengthen Brown Act requirements to keep student voices central in decision-making, expand basic needs support, such as on-campus CalFresh access, and advance policies that redefine basic needs to better support student parents. I remained committed to protecting our undocumented and immigrant community, ensuring that every student can pursue education in a safe and accessible environment.

Now, at FACCC, I am proud to give back to the system that created the foundation for my life. I bring my lived experience as a community college student into this work every day. I have seen firsthand how education and advocacy can change lives, and I am excited to support faculty across the state as we continue fighting for the future of our colleges and the students they serve.

At the heart of it all is something simple: faculty believed in me, and I am committed to giving back to the community that helped build who I am today.

Q&A with FACCC Staff Member **Jason Henderson** Government Relations Specialist



What changed my trajectory wasn't luck. It was the faculty.

Q. What inspired your career path, and how did it lead you to the work you do today?

A: When very young, I often rode the bus with my grandmother as she went from job to job, where, at any given time, she was a housekeeper, a library custodian, and, occasionally, a schoolyard aide. She strung this work together just so my father could access education. Even at a young age, I recognized the importance of education to three generations of my family, and I also knew I wanted to help shape public education.

Seeing firsthand what it took to open doors for the next generation instilled in me a deep belief in inclusivity and opportunity. As I grew older, that belief became more focused, not just on access to education, but on the systems that make access real. Over time, my focus settled on creating foundational opportunities for learning and ensuring that the people serving our children and communities have equity, stability, and safe places to teach and learn.

Q. Was there a moment or experience that helped shape your professional direction?

A: My educational journey was challenging at first, not because I lacked ability, but because I lacked structure and connection within the large campus. The transition directly into a four-year program was challenging, and I often felt adrift. Something always seemed to be missing. I never finished my classes that semester and eventually had to step away from school altogether.

The experience that ultimately changed my trajectory came when I (re)enrolled at my local community college and took courses from two faculty members who didn't just teach content, they taught me strategic approaches to learning and education. They flipped the switch for me.

That experience stays with me to this day. It taught me that talent alone isn't enough, and that people need support, clarity, and someone willing to invest in them. It's also why mentorship matters so much to me now. I believe deeply in paying forward the guidance and patience that helped me find my footing.

What changed my trajectory wasn't luck. It was the faculty. The system worked for me because people inside it were allowed to care. Thank you, Professor Jason Newman and Professor Georgina Hodgkinson!

Q. What skills or values do you bring with you into this next chapter?

A: I bring a strong sense of preparation and care into my work. I believe in listening closely, taking the time to understand context, and being thoughtful about how issues are approached and communicated. I also place high value on learning quickly, but more importantly, accurately, and from the correct source. My strong work ethic is built on collaboration, follow-through, and building trust.

Q. What motivates you most in your work?

A: The pursuit of creating more equitable opportunities for communities to access public education, along with the constant desire to learn and understand, are deeply motivating factors for me. I'm dedicated to being a lifelong learner, using the knowledge and experience I have gathered from others to advance advocacy.

Q. What is one quality or trait you'd like FACCC members to know about you?

A: I care deeply about representing FACCC and its members with credibility. When I take on an issue or project, I approach it with responsibility and respect. I want members to know that I do this work thoughtfully, with poise and steadiness, and that I take their priorities seriously.

Q. What is something you enjoy outside of work that helps you recharge?

A: Family. Full stop. Spending time with them is how I recharge the most. Whether it's a day trip to a coastal town or sitting together at the dinner table for "Nackie-Nacks" (official name for my son's snacks). These moments of balance make the mission clear when I am present and focused on my work. My wife and my boys really put the battery in my back.