

PAVING THE WAY: STUDENTS FROM FCC'S FIRST BACHELOR'S PROGRAM ARE GRADUATING

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Nyove Gonzalez, one of the 29 women graduating with a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene at Fresno City College in 2026 on May 4. Photo by Sophia Wilson.



For the first time, Fresno City College is graduating students with a bachelor's degree. The 29 all-female student body of the dental hygienist bachelor's program balanced long clinic hours, searching for patients and studying late into the night to become part of a milestone for FCC and themselves.

"It feels so special. It's such an honor," Vanessa Cervantes, one of the program's first graduates, said.

Her fellow cohort member, Nyove Gonzalez, sees this program as something bigger.

"When I'm 30 years older and look back, I can say I was part of a historical moment," Gonzalez said.

This program is the first within the Allied Health department to get a bachelor's program.

"I was hoping that, because we're the first class, that it'll show other programs that they can do it. I know with our program, it took a long, long time. It was in the works for many years, but I think it brings more out of Fresno City College," Gonzalez said. "I think it could offer more job opportunities, more confidence. I think it's great, and it's at an affordable cost too."

Students everywhere are committing to colleges and programs right now. One of the typical deciding factors is the cost.

"I looked into SJVC (San Joaquin Valley College) in Visalia, which is a lot closer to me, but they're charging triple the price," Cervantes said.

Students described the program as an affordable and accessible option, which makes it one of the best for them. FCC is an affordable option that does not diminish the quality of education, according to Cervantes.

"It opens a lot more doors and opportunities, and it's at an affordable cost," Gonzales said.

Prior to going to FCC, Cervantes was a dental assistant, but she looked toward a "move up" in her career. She is a mother of two children and wanted to go to a school that was both affordable and close to home.

When Cervantes originally started school, she took time off to start a family. And when she came back, she was pregnant, and she realized she wasn't ready to start again.

"My path was a bit longer than usual. I was pregnant. I was going to give birth in the middle of the semester. I was breastfeeding," Cervantes said. "Once I came back and was fully committed when it was the right time. Everything just clicked into place."

Cervantes noted that there are other moms in the program, so they all are there to support each other and understand what they are going through. They said their kids aren't a hindrance but a reminder of their priorities.

"We view our kids as extra motivation, extra push, keeps us grounded," Cervantes said. "We have something to work towards."

Part of the program is that students must accumulate clinical hours, meaning time with patients. Both students expressed difficulty in finding patients for those hours, because they have to find them themselves. Sometimes though, the professors will help with this.

Cervantes was given a previous faculty member to work on by her instructors.

"It's like I had a celebrity in my chair. I did not feel nervous. I was so grateful that my instructor had the trust in me to see her," Cervantes said. "It made me realize all patients should feel like her. Like you're my priority right now."

Gonzalez was originally a pre-dental student at Fresno Pacific and graduated with a bachelor's degree. But between burn-out and self doubt, she realized that becoming a dentist was not right for her.

"I thought, 'I can't be a dentist,'" Gonzalez said. "I felt like I was stuck in mud. Everyone was moving forward and I wasn't."

She still wanted to work in the field and decided to apply to FCC's program. Fresno City College admits 30 students for this program per graduating class. Gonzalez applied twice before getting admitted on her third try.

Despite the discouragement she felt from not getting in, she persevered partially because of her grandfather.

"My grandpa was sick and he ended up passing away, and I had a hard time grieving," Gonzalez said. "His big thing was he wanted me to finish school and my career, my dream."

The program itself came with its struggles, but the community and relationships that got built between the cohort members made it easier to survive according to Gonzalez.

"They're not just classmates. They're people who understand exactly what you're going through," Gonzalez said. "No one gets left behind."

When it came to taking her board exams Gonzalez said she studied for a week straight. While her professors and cohort members were always helpful, students have

to take the exam on their own.

"I've never done anything this hard before," Gonzalez said. "Passing my board exams on the first try. That was just me."

Both women expressed how they couldn't have done it without the cohort around them.

"No one else understands what you're going through except the people in it with you," Cervantes said.

Being the first class of graduates they paved the way for the future of the program along with the faculty. Gonzalez said that Linh Bui, Jeanice Howard, Fred Thomas and Mimi Myers were a few of the faculty members that stood out and left an impact.

"We're kind of like guinea pigs in a way. We hold ourselves to a high standard," Gonzalez said. "They're [professors of the program] not just like, 'It's hard, deal with it.' They want to help us."

The program isn't perfect, they still have to work on improvements and have asked for feedback along the way.

One portion of working in the field is being able to market yourself. This bachelor's program is setting students up for working in the real world and having classes that helps you learn to do that would be a good addition according to Gonzalez.

"It would be nice to have classes like business or marketing to expand what we can do with our degree," Gonzalez said. "They prepare us not just for school, but for the real world."

Gonzalez and Cervantes praised the program and encouraged any person who is thinking about applying to the program to do it.

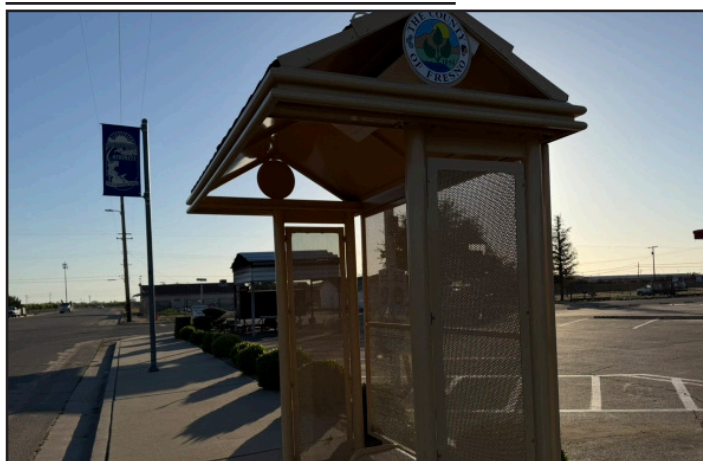
"Believe in yourself," Gonzalez said. "You can do anything."



Vanessa Cervantes, one of the 29 women graduating with a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene at Fresno City College in 2026 on May 4. Photo by Sophia Wilson.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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FCRTA bus stop in the small town of Caruthers on May 1. Photo by Reoz Marquez.



Fresno's bus stop 28 located on Van Ness picking up students on April 29. Photo by Reoz Marquez.

The Fresno Area Express (FAX) has over 1,600 bus stops across Fresno with two on the Fresno City College campus, making it easily accessible for students in need of transportation. Students, however, show mixed feelings about using the bus as needs of getting around.

Although FAX offers free rides for FCC students who present student ID cards, it only offers stops within Fresno, making it a long journey for those who rely on the bus system.

Devon and Miracle, who only gave their first names, are FCC students who used the bus nearly every day for years, but they say they wouldn't if it wasn't necessary.

"It's like an hour on the bus because we take two buses, it's a daily thing for them to be late at least on one of their stops," Devon said.

Devon, who's used Fresno's bus system since he was 13, emphasized that riders need to be early to their stops due to inconsistencies within the bus schedule.

"If you need to get somewhere on the bus you gotta make sure you go an hour early, so, even if they are late you can still get there on

time," Devon said.

Delays and long travel time could be due to the lack of rural transit systems in the area. The Fresno County Rural Transit Agency (FCRTA) is a bus system with only one departure and one arrival for each rural stop daily that travels into Fresno.

FCRTA offers connecting stops to FAX through 25 transit subsystems that travel through 13 rural cities including Coalinga, Fowler, Kerman, Selma, Easton and Riverdale.

With FCRTA being the only public transportation option for students who live in these areas, it would be easy to accidentally miss a stop or experience frequent delays since FCRTA operates from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on weekdays only.

Another FCC student, Akyre, has used the FAX bus for two semesters, but rides four times a week since her stop is only about eight minutes away. She only rides for one stop and has had an overall good experience as a rider.

Other riders believe the bus is the quickest option as a student.

Carlos, an FCC student, said he

uses the bus as often as he can but prefers his bike when the route is over 30 minutes.

"I wouldn't say it's much of a delay, it's more just taking a scenic route or dealing with certain alterations that happen inside the bus that's gonna happen from the day-to-day basis. So, that's something you can't avoid," Carlos said.

While some students commented on the cleanliness of the buses, suggesting they should tidy up during breaks, others said the inclusion of hand sanitizers and air conditioning is "as clean as it can get," according to Carlos.

For shorter rides the bus seems like a cheap, reliable and accessible form of transportation to wherever you need to go as a student. But if you live further away or have a routine schedule, it may be better to find another way around due to the frequent delays.

"If you're a student it's the cheapest thing you can get, if you can get a car, bike, something else, go for it," Carlos said.