State chancellor's office recommends BC offer four-year degree

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Bakersfield College is on the cusp of becoming one of the first 15 community colleges in California to offer a bachelor’s degree — in industrial automation — as part of a temporary, pilot program.

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors approved a 15-campus list of schools recommended to offer four-year programs Tuesday, including BC.

Thirty-four schools had applied. A final vote is scheduled for March.

The chancellor’s office will work with the colleges over the next couple of months to answer questions and outline implementation plans. At BC, students could start junior-level classes next fall.

Liz Rozell, BC’s dean of instruction, said students would end up spending less than one-fourth the cost of tuition at UCLA and less than half the tuition at Cal State Bakersfield. A four-year degree at the local community college would cost a little more than $10,000.

BC is already developing upper-division curriculum. The four-year degree would train students to oversee operations in oil, agriculture, logistics and manufacturing.

“Today, Bakersfield College has made history as we look to the future evolution of the community college role in California and importance to students,” BC President Sonya Christian said in a statement.

Alex Dominguez, BC’s Student Government Association president, said he was “ecstatic” when he learned the news. For him it is about more job opportunities, oil and agriculture being two of the biggest industries in Kern County.

There are typically more than 200 openings in Kern County’s oil, agriculture, manufacturing and logistics industries, with a median income of $85,000, BC officials said, citing research from Economic Modeling Specialists International.

The school still has to work out a fee structure, financial aid offerings and the process for acquiring accreditation to offer a bachelor’s degree — not to mention get final approval.

But comments after a local press conference Tuesday were celebratory.

“I think this is a historic moment,” Rozell said. “It’s not just about putting a feather in our hat.”

She added that with one of the lowest baccalaureate attainment rates in the nation and one of the highest poverty rates, the new degree option is about building the Kern County economy.