



ALAMO
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PALO ALTO COLLEGE

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Natalie Barajas, Public Information Officer
nbarajas3@alamo.edu; 210.486.3882 (o)

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Palo Alto College achieves success with Puente program for students

Palo Alto College has completed its first academic year as a member of the Puente Project, in which over 50 first time in college students participated in two semesters of writing courses and paired personal development courses, with support from a personal mentor. Students in both semesters had higher grades and completion rates than those in comparable non-Puente program courses.

The results from the program proved the concept of teaching students as a “familia” can be beneficial. Approximately 87 percent of students in the Fall 2012 reading and writing course and 91 percent of students in the paired college orientation course earned an A, B, or C grade, compared to the average 74 percent (reading) and 66.5 percent (writing) rates in similar non-Puente courses at the College.

Nearly 86 percent of students from the Fall 2012 cohort re-enrolled for the Spring 2013 Puente courses. Those courses had completion rates – anything other than an Incomplete or Withdrawal for the course – of 87 percent in the writing course and 93 percent in the paired psychology course, compared to the average 76 percent (writing) and 91 percent (psychology) completion rates for non-Puente courses in the previous spring semester.

“The Puente Project benefits students because of its integrated approach to academic success. The mentor, counselor, and professor work as a team while students build a sense of ‘familia’ in the classroom,” said Diane Lerma, Reading Instructor and Puente Mentor Coordinator at Palo Alto College.

The Puente Project expanded from California to five community colleges in Texas in 2012, including Palo Alto College. The academic preparation program aims to improve the college-going rate for educationally disadvantaged students by implementing three essential components – writing, counseling, and mentoring. Palo Alto College faculty members and counselors were provided training directly from the Puente Project’s training staff in a one-week immersion experience at University of California – Berkeley.

In a thematic learning community setting, students were required to take an accelerated writing course that incorporated Latino, Mexican/American, and other multicultural issues, as well as a student development course focused on college success. Other elements of the Puente model included a peer support network among the participating students, and outreach efforts with family to create a college-going culture.

“Being in the program has made me have more confidence in school,” said Yesenia Suarez, a Puente student at Palo Alto College. “I learned way more with my teachers than being in a regular class.”

Puente students received counseling for career and academic guidance to help retain them beyond their program year. Students were also paired with mentors trained by Puente to serve as role models and supporters for the students’ academic experience. Mentors for the 2012-2013 class included representatives from H-E-B, City of San Antonio, StandardAero, Parsons, and Texas A&M University - San Antonio, and more.

The Puente Project is open to all students, regardless of ethnicity, academic standing, or financial status. Participants are tracked until they graduate with their bachelor’s degree. The average transfer rate for Puente students is 55 percent, compared to the 20 percent transfer rate for the average community college student. Approximately 70 percent of Puente participants graduate with a bachelor’s degree within four years.

The Puente Project was launched in 1981 with the mission to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn college degrees, and return to the community as mentors and leaders of future generations. For more information about the Puente Project, visit www.puente.net.

Palo Alto College, one of the Alamo Colleges, is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award associate degrees. With over 9,000 students, the College also offers short-term certificates and non-credit continuing education classes. The campus is located on the Southside of San Antonio at 1400 W. Villaret Blvd. at I-410 and Texas Hwy. 16 and online at alamo.edu/pac.

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