Finding What Works for Latino Student Success

Growing Knowledge about What Works for Latino Student Success is a collaborative initiative between the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and Excelencia in Education to support evidence-driven, campus-based change strategies for improving Latino student success and engagement through high-impact practices. With funding from TG Philanthropy, the project works with faculty and staff members from five Hispanic-Serving Institutions selected from the Excelencia in Action Network and AAC&U’s membership. Leadership teams from the campuses attended AAC&U’s 2013 Institute on General Education and Assessment to examine institutional student success data, to review current research on the relationship between student engagement in high-impact practices and underserved students’ self-reported learning gains, and to create campus action plans for implementing high-impact practices that best fit their respective institutional cultures and contexts.

Over the past year the five teams have received one-on-one feedback from both AAC&U and Excelencia staff on their action plans and implementation processes. They also convened in spring 2014 at the AAC&U Diversity, Learning, and Student Success Network Conference in Chicago, Illinois, to share their accomplishments, and to brainstorm strategies for overcoming challenges to project implementation with fellow campuses and with representatives from AAC&U, Excelencia, and TG leadership.

Included in this publication are descriptions of the campus-based change strategies that are being implemented to support Latino student learning and success at each of these institutions. A broad range of campus plans are represented here, including a faculty development model to improve cultural competency, a campus-wide initiative to implement electronic portfolios, and a set of redesigned educational pathways that embed comprehensive academic support programs. The methodologies may be different, but the motivations are similar. Growing Knowledge team leaders and members represent an emerging group of educators striving to improve the student learning experience for a growing population of Latino students across the nation. We hope that their journeys provide valuable insights.

Muchísimas Gracias! to Jacob Fraire, vice president of student and institutional success at TG, and Kristin Boyer, director of philanthropy at TG, for their continued support and commitment to building capacity and advancing knowledge to improve underserved student success.

AAC&U and Excelencia in Education Growing Knowledge Project Staff:
Growing Knowledge About What Works for Latino Student Success

Palm Beach State College

Pathways for Students to SOAR: Learning Communities Support Outstanding Achievement and Retention

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Palm Beach State College (PBSC) is committed to meeting the educational needs of its multicultural, majority-minority student body. PBSC’s student population is 26 percent black, 25 percent Latino, and 4 percent Asian; these students come from 168 countries, and 64 percent of them are enrolled part time. PBSC’s 2013–18 Strategic Plan dedicates both staff and resources to design and implement innovative strategies intended to increase multicultural student retention by 15 percent.

As part of this effort, the college’s Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Initiative conducted a survey of local postsecondary education outreach efforts specifically targeting the Latino community. This survey found only limited pockets of services to Latino students and a lack of coordination among these services. In an effort to create a unified strategy to reach Palm Beach County’s fastest growing ethnic group, PBSC’s Growing Knowledge team participated in AAC&U’s 2013 Institute on General Education and Assessment. Our campus team spent this time researching which high-impact practices would best support and accelerate the success of our multicultural students. The result of this analysis and planning was the design of a pathway for students called Supporting Outstanding Achievement and Retention (SOAR), an initiative targeting multicultural, first-generation college students who will benefit most from additional support to navigate and negotiate the college experience. The cohort program will prepare students for success by tracking their progress toward academic goals and providing intrusive support services. Equally important, the cohort programs will introduce students to an innovative learning environment—SOAR.

The SOAR program provides a comprehensive two-year cocurricular pathway from admissions to completion. The framework of the learning communities begins with pre-college recruitment. Students who self-identify as first-generation college students on the admissions application are invited to participate in the learning community. Our goal is to drive student participation and success with meaningful incentives such as priority registration, intentional articulation assistance, individualized and intensive advising, financial incentives, documentation of program completion in transcripts, and recognition at graduation.

The National Center for Postsecondary Research stresses the importance of integrating student supports and campus experiences into learning communities in order to increase multicultural student retention and completion. As such, SOAR offers a number of thematic learning communities that integrate thematic groupings of academic majors and provide intrusive academic support services. Themes currently being explored for development focus around “metamajors” such as business, health care, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics). Initially, 125 students will be recruited to participate in the first cohorts of the SOAR program. Going forward, there may be an opportunity to assess the success of Latino students with different demographic backgrounds by using disaggregated data analysis to target undeserved students’ success and foster intentionality of the improvement process.

SOAR builds on Palm Beach State College’s long history of developing and implementing programs that enhance retention, academic success, and quality of learning for multicultural students. Excelencia in Education’s Growing What Works database also includes a number of Palm Beach State College’s successful programs to support Latino students, including the First Generation Project, First Year Experience, and SCORE (an early alert system). SOAR will build on existing initiatives that aim to increase multicultural student access and retention through direct outreach, support services, early intervention, and peer mentoring.
Borough of Manhattan Community College

Creating a Conceptual Framework for General Education Through the E-Portfolio System

John Montanez, Dean of Grants

Located in New York City’s Tribeca region, Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) enrolls more than 24,000 students in its credit bearing programs, making it one of the largest—and most diverse—undergraduate campuses in New York City. BMCC’s students self-identify as 33.5 percent Black, 36.7 percent Hispanic/Latino, 14.6 percent Asian, 15 percent White, and 0.2 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native.

As part of the Growing Knowledge project, BMCC was invited to participate in the ACC&U’s 2013 Institute on General Education and Assessment, an experience that was instrumental in shaping the college’s vision for the use of e-portfolios. Where BMCC initially viewed e-portfolios as a means of simply showcasing students’ academic achievements, the institute facilitated an understanding of e-portfolios as an integrative, reflective tool that could be used for assessment and integrative learning.

Using a Digication platform, BMCC developed an e-portfolio system that promotes authentic learning by allowing students to organize and build connections between their learning experiences. The first year of the program has focused on advising, students’ relationships with their learning communities, and their engagement with the college at large. Through a series of activities aimed at encouraging reflection, students are required to create a running narrative of their learning experiences and interests. Digication’s “Digi Directory” allows students to view and comment on other e-portfolios, fostering a sense of community among students and their advisors. Program advisors, all of whom have received the same technical training, use the e-portfolios to coordinate academic support services and assist students in articulating their learning experiences. In addition, Digication provides an assessment tool that facilitates program evaluation. Nearly 400 first-year students have participated in BMCC’s e-portfolio project during the ten months it has been in place, and BMCC aims to increase the total size of the cohort to 1,000 students by fall 2014 through portfolio-enhanced courses.

While the expansion of the e-portfolio system continues at a steady rate, some faculty have been slow to sign on. Recent focus groups indicate a growing concern surrounding the integration of e-portfolios in the classroom and their effect on student evaluations. While faculty gave high marks to BMCC for providing initial e-portfolio software training, many expressed frustration with the brevity of that training, indicating the need for greater emphasis on integrative learning pedagogy and expanded support in the form of mentoring or a guided practicum.

Through its involvement in AAC&U’s Institute on General Education and Assessment, BMCC realized that the absence of a shared vision for the use of e-portfolios was a major challenge that could jeopardize the project’s future. To overcome this obstacle, the college made two critical decisions at the outset, which accelerated implementation and provided widespread support for the program:

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1. **Adopting Best Practices**: To rethink and reorganize its efforts, BMCC utilized the services of LaGuardia Community College’s Making Connections Institute. LaGuardia’s student body mirrors BMCC’s, and the two colleges have similar IT infrastructures. Learning from LaGuardia’s experience, BMCC minimized many of the challenges inherent with the startup of new programs (e.g., template design, IT platforms, and technical support), which allowed the college to accelerate the deployment of e-portfolios in less than six months.

2. **Creating a Conceptual Framework for General Education through the E-Portfolio System**: Immediately following the Institute on General Education and Assessment, the college organized six working groups comprising a broad cross-section of the college community, each chaired by a member of the Growing Knowledge team. The groups reported to a steering committee responsible for providing institutional resources and articulating the project’s shared vision to students, faculty, and the college’s executive cabinet. The steering committee also worked to align the project’s goals with BMCC’s strategic plan and prepare to institutionalize the reforms developed under the Growing Knowledge initiative.

Over the next year, the college will continue to expand and improve on the use of e-portfolios among students in its two largest programs, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Freshmen Learning Academies. To address the focus group concerns, the college will centralize faculty training and student support through its e-Learning Center and develop a year-round faculty mentoring program, with the goal of doubling the number of faculty successfully trained by spring of 2015. BMCC will underwrite these costs using a combination of grant funds and tax levy support as part of its current strategic planning process. BMCC’s goal is to ensure that by summer of 2015, at least 90 percent of its freshmen class will be using e-portfolios through courses embedded in ASAP and Freshmen Learning Academies.

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**University of Texas at Brownsville**

**Linking Hispanic Students to Successful Peer Tutors/Mentors in Collaborative Learning Environments**

*Leslie Kimberling-Jones, Co-Director of The Learning Enrichment Center*
*Ethel Cantu, Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs*
*Arlene Ready, Co-Director of The Learning Enrichment Center*
*Selma Yznaga, Director of Academic Advising and Growing Knowledge Project Leader*

The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) is situated along the US-Mexico border in deep south Texas. In the 2013–2014 academic year, UTB’s enrollment was 91 percent Hispanic. According to the freshman profile, 94 percent of the students reported being bilingual, 73 percent were first-generation college students, 54 percent attended part-time, and 68 percent were financial aid recipients. With the majority of the student population having “at-risk” characteristics, and with an institutional history of low pass rates in many of the first-year core courses, the UTB administration decided in the summer of 2013 to focus on increasing success in first-year courses. Participation in Growing Knowledge provided the impetus to identify which high-impact practices help increase Latino students’ academic success. The result of this process was the design and implementation of Link2Success, a full-scale academic support program that takes academic support directly to the students, embedding it within the courses where it is collaborative, contextualized, and relevant to students. A review of literature demonstrates the correlation between student success and multiple factors such as students’ level of engagement, interaction with faculty and peers, participation in active and collaborative learning, and the amount of time and energy dedicated to studying and utilizing college resources: all Link2Success strategies (see Greene, Marti, and McClenny, 2008).

*Link2Success intentionally places*
Texas A&M–Corpus Christi

Inclusive Excellence in South Texas

Bradley Shope, Director, Center for Faculty Excellence

Texas A&M–Corpus Christi offers a New Faculty Support Series every academic year to facilitate activities and conversations about the unique history and culture of our South Texas location and how these aspects of our geographic location can be incorporated into effective teaching, learning, and course design across campus. Each year we begin the series with speakers who discuss the history, culture, language, and music of South Texas, and we encourage faculty to consider the university’s Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status in their approach to teaching and learning. To further promote recognition of our HSI status, last year the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) designed faculty communities of practice in course redesign under the theme “Inclusive Excellence in South Texas.” This project created a platform for a group of self-selected faculty to creatively and collectively redesign courses in a way that embraces our unique location in South Texas. Each participant partially redesigned one course under this theme and presented his or her work to the university at our institution-wide Islander Forum. Participation in the Growing Knowledge project has informed the approach and direction of these projects.

Several elements were necessary in order to successfully bring this academic support program to scale: (1) a research-based model of high-impact educational practices, (2) a comprehensive assessment and evaluation plan, (3) strong administrative support, (4) a collective effort across divisions and departments, (5) an appropriate infrastructure and funding, and (6) a plan to disseminate results to all stakeholders and use of the results for continuous improvement. Given the strong evidence of current success and areas for future improvement, the Link2Success team is confident that it can continue to improve Latino student outcomes and campus engagement through peer-mentoring and critical academic support.$^*$


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to increasing the college’s overall retention rates, and increased pass rates and decreased withdrawal rates in history and English courses; however, there was not noticeable positive change in math courses. Based on quantitative and qualitative data, the implementation of Link2Success in history and English was effective and valued by students and student employees. Faculty and staff are still working on designing an effective academic support model for math courses. Targeted efforts to improve student success in math courses for the 2014–15 academic year include (1) breakout rooms for study sessions with a smaller Link2Success leader-to-student ratio; (2) enhanced peer tutor/mentor training in collaborative learning, classroom management strategies, and peer mentoring; and (3) a focus on researching how students’ beliefs about their ability to learn math may affect their outcomes.

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and has helped shape our understanding of the potentials and possibilities for faculty development on campus.

Our university strategic plan states that “we will attract, retain, and graduate a diverse and highly qualified student body consistent with the university’s mission as a Hispanic-Serving Institution.” Our executive leadership expects the university to execute our mission by collaborating as much as possible and synchronizing efforts between the CFE and other stakeholders, such as the CASA Writing Center. CASA (Spanish for “home”) recently offered a series of writing workshops, ranging in focus from basic writing processes to manuscript formatting and documentation styles, in an effort to help close students’ learning gaps in the transition from high school to the university. Since then, CASA has expanded to offer more than thirty-five writing workshops. The workshops are relevant across all disciplines, majors, and student classifications.

In addition to providing one-on-one support and writing workshops, the CASA Writing Center began offering online synchronous writing consultations for distance students, students unable to make it to campus due to other commitments or transportation issues, and students whose learning styles work best in an online environment.

Another initiative to be piloted fall 2014 is the Coastal Bend Writing Project, in which CASA Writing Center professional staff will help develop writing centers in local high schools, particularly in South Texas schools with underrepresented populations. Project staff will recruit interested high school leaders, who will train with the CASA professional staff in administration and writing center theory and pedagogy. CASA will help create a pipeline of writing support to enable adequate transfer of knowledge from various writing contexts, i.e. high school to college, undergraduate to graduate, in an effort to help the high school writing center become self-sustaining by the second year. CASA will also offer monthly training workshops on campus and will bring in first-year writing faculty to discuss the expectations of college-level writing to an audience of interested high school students, high school writing peer tutors, and high school faculty. This suite of programming reinforces Texas A&M—Corpus Christi’s dedication to providing a culturally relevant environment that supports the success of Latino students from pre-enrollment through graduation, and represents one part of TAMUCC’s contributions to accelerating success in higher education among Latino students across the nation.
Bronx Community College

Bronx Community College’s First Year Program

Luis Montenegro, Associate Dean

In partnership with AAC&U and Excelencia in Education’s Growing Knowledge about What Works for Latino Student Success project, Bronx Community College (BCC) is spearheading a college-wide First Year Program, which is designed to support the success of all first-year students. BCC’s Latino population, which comprises 61 percent of our total enrollment of 10,700 students, benefits directly from this program. Informed by an institutional self-study and improvement plan conducted in 2010–11, and with funding from the John Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, the First Year Program is designed to engage students in applied learning techniques that help them develop academic habits and skills that prepare them to succeed in all of their courses, in all subsequent semesters. The First Year Seminar (FYS), a central component of the First Year Program, integrates several high-impact practices that have been shown to enhance student engagement and success in the first semester.

The First Year Seminar combines orientation activities with an introduction to academic content and the academic skills required of successful college students. The academic content provides insights and information on a topic of broad interest, creating natural opportunities to develop and practice academic skills. Students create an e-portfolio, which provides a vehicle for reflection on their transition to college and an online repository for their academic work. Academic and social supports are also integrated into the course. To help new students adjust to college life and to facilitate their academic and social integration, peer mentors are assigned to each course section.

First piloted in spring 2012, FYS courses now engage approximately 700 students—about one-half of the freshman class. Based upon promising early results, BCC was awarded a CUNY Student Success Research Grant to collaborate with the Community College Research Center of Teachers College, Columbia University on a joint research project to provide BCC with objective feedback on the implementation of the FYS and to investigate how a student success course with a focus on applied content may contribute to sustained improved student outcomes.

Studies of each of the entering cohorts since the fall 2012 suggest that student success rates are strongly associated with participation in an FYS. As the table below illustrates, students in an FYS demonstrate higher one-year retention rates, four-semester retention rates, grade point averages, and cumulative credits (as of spring 2014) than students in our traditional first-year seminar and students in neither seminar. An additional benefit of the FYS program is that faculty from all disciplines are invited to teach the course, which involves an intensive professional development program. Faculty report that participation in teaching an FYS positively affects their teaching in their regular courses, too. These strong outcomes are already impacting many student success metrics and are expected to continue to contribute to increased student progress and persistence at BCC.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Year seminar status (original n)</th>
<th>One-year retention rate</th>
<th>Four-semester retention rate</th>
<th>Average cumulative GPA (in Spring 2014)</th>
<th>Average cumulative credits (in Spring 2014)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FYS (n=418)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>37.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Freshman Seminar (n=780)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>28.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Seminar (n=326)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>27.18</td>
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1. 62% or 258 students of this cohort were Latinos.
The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found online at www.aacu.org.

Excelencia in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education by providing data-driven analysis of the educational status of Latinos, and by promoting education policies and institutional practices that support their academic achievement. Founded in 2004 as a national, not-for-profit organization, Excelencia in Education has become a trusted information source on the status of Latino educational achievement, a major resource for influencing policy at the institutional, state, and national levels, and a widely recognized advocate for advancing evidence-based practices to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. Learn more about their network of results-oriented educators and policymakers working to address the U.S. economy’s need for a highly educated workforce and for civic leadership at www.EdExcelencia.org.