GANAS
Gaining Access ‘N Academic Success

For Hispanics in the United States, the educational experience is one of accumulated disadvantage. Many Hispanic students begin formalized schooling without the economic and social resources that many other students receive, and schools are often ill equipped to compensate for these initial disparities. (Schneider, Martinez, and Ownes 2006).

Gaining Access to University Preparation through Culture, Language and Mentoring

The California State University system is the primary destination for Latinos who transfer from California Community Colleges (50 percent). According to the report by The Campaign for College Opportunity only 63 percent of the Latino CCC transfer students to the CSU, graduate with their baccalaureate degree within four years. These statistics and trends show a growing number of Latinos entering college, however, when only 11 percent of Latino adults have earned at least a bachelor’s degree, the small numbers of graduating Latinos affects California’s economy and families.

California State University East Bay in an effort to raise the number of Latino baccalaureate graduates initiated a support program for entering juniors known as (GANAS) Gaining Access ‘N Academic Success. GANAS formed by a team of professors, counselors, and mentors work toward developing a support system that will keep the students focused on graduating within two years and lessen the chances of dropping out.

In an effort to assists incoming community college transfer students, A group of faculty members and other staff assisted by Dr. Lettie Ramirez, and Dr. Luz Calvo came together to write and apply for the Academic Affairs grant funded by California State University East Bay, Investments in Programmatic Excellence and Innovation in Learning (PEIL). These competitive grants provide funding to faculty teams to design; implement and research/assess new approaches to teaching that improve learning.
The program open to 35 students began in the Fall of 2013. Students from various community colleges applied to be part of GANAS. A team of professionals work together using a familial support system:

- A counselor guides the student throughout the school process and checks in with them at least twice a week.
- Weekly seminars provide students access to information that will assist them in making a smooth transition from school to career.
- A culture class builds and enriches their understanding of self through cultural knowledge and history.
- Peer mentoring is built in to assist students in their particular area of study.
- A professional mentor organization assists students in their senior year.

The program began its first year of services in the Fall of 2013. Students have completed two quarters as juniors (3 out of 35 have left the program for financial reasons. To gather information on the program’s first year of implementation, a qualitative study using a focus group design held in the winter quarter provided the team planners information on the various program components and how to improve its services for the following cohort.

The four major areas chosen for query included decisive data constituting the major framework of GANAS. The questions include:

1. How have the seminars, advisory and peer mentoring made a difference in the student’s transition to Cal State?
2. What insights have they learned about themselves?
3. How is the support students receive from GANAS different from support they receive from CSUEB?
4. What would help future GANAS students make the East Bay experience smoother?

Data collected will assist planners in determining the graduation results querying whether there was a significant difference in retention and graduation rates when compared with students not receiving these services?
There are more than 14.5 million Latinos, in California, which makes up 38 percent of the state’s population. If the California economy is to have the college-educated workforce it needs, we must find ways to significantly improve college completion rates among Latinos. There is no other reasonable solution.

THE NEED FOR GANAS

The Myth and Reality of Drop Out Rates

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 41% of low-income students enrolled in a four-year institution managed to graduate within five years. For higher income students, the graduation rates jumped to 66%. More importantly 47% of the students that left were in good academic standing.

One of the aims of GANAS is to concentrate its efforts and support on those students that can become part of the 47%, and to increase the number attending the 4-year university and graduating. Studies show that a large proportion of college dropouts come from low-income families (Department of Education).

GANAS as a PEIL-funded program specifically aims at reaching students that come from low-income families. Information based on the 35 entering juniors’ provides GANAS the incentive to double the number of students they will work with next year.

WHAT IT TAKES TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL ENTRY LEVEL PROGRAM FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

The following data collected originated from one on one interviews. Students from low income or new immigrant families attending community colleges from the surrounding area responded when applying to the program.

- 18 worked while they attended school and continue to work.
- 7 were part of the Puente Program at the junior college. Puente (Bridge) provides them with a mentor and other services in the academic area they request.
- 28 out of 32 are females.
- 7 have a child to support.
• All of the students have a need to earn scholarships or grants.

ORGANIZING FOCUS GROUPS

Number of Groups and Respondents

Dr. Lettie Ramirez, GANAS Assessment Lead, met with four different focus groups during the Winter Quarter 2014. GANAS students had at this time completed one quarter of work as juniors at California State University East Bay. Of the 33 GANAS participants 20 signed up to participate in the Focus Groups.

STUDENTS RESPONSES BASED ON PREMISE OF INTELLIGENT MATTERING

In each group students overwhelmingly demonstrated the pride they felt having made the transition from community college to a four-year university. The question, What are you most proud of after your first quarter? did not result in a set of specific answers. Students gave their reasons for their success as a life skill they acquired. The answers described their feelings of success and a sense of pride of who they are becoming. They took their junior status seriously because others believed in them. Their sense of success was not reflected in grades as much as it was in learning how to work within the system. The statement, “I won’t let you down” stated many times from various students spoke to the transformation-taking place in one quarter. Self-respect emerged in their responses of surviving:

• Riding the Bart for 3 to four hours a day
• Balancing their time between taking care of a child and studying.
• Finding the means to pay for their schooling and other expenses.
• Speaking up for themselves when visiting the various school offices.
• Learning how to speak up in a polite manner when disrespected in situations or protocol not familiar to them.
• Working and finding time to study.
Question 1: What are you most proud of after your first quarter.

- Something I'm proud of, with GANAS is how they helped me balance my time because it was really hard for me transitioning from a semester to a quarter system; that was really hard for me.

- This is my first quarter at East Bay, and I'm a single mom so it's hard to juggle, you know, my responsibilities and schoolwork and commute because I don't live close to school. But I feel really successful that I passed all of my classes and I maintained a decent, above 3.0 GPA. So that was an anchor to me, and I really believe it was because of the guidance I received from GANAS. If I were to just be navigating myself through my classes it would have been more frustrating for me to be successful.

- I agree. At the beginning I was lost with what class to take and how to go about school in general. Also, …Dr. Luz (culture class) in our first class, made me feel welcome and comfortable in this new environment I wasn't used to, which made me feel very supported.

- I have other people believing in me so that’s all I need. Just someone to believe in me to boost up my confidence in school. It was hard, the transition from semester to quarter system but now I like it better.

- GANAS referred me to a lot of tutoring centers and the library and I talked to Melissa [Cervantes]. [She] helped me… because I have a son, she’s like, ‘you have to be able to manage time’. So now I have a schedule; I know the time I’m supposed to go home, deal with him first, and then I start with my homework and start studying. (This student received a 4.0 this quarter.)

Question: 3. How is the support you receive from GANAS different from that you receive from CSUEB?

For this question, the central premise or idea that emerged involved engagement and personal contact. Students over and over again emphasized
how they felt privileged and important because they had counselors, and teachers who knew them by name and took a personal interest in them. Learning about their culture was important to them, which was one of the directives important to the program but it was not the subject matter as much as the presentation. Students felt a sense of belonging and as one student said, they were not just a number.

- I think the most accessible tool we have is the direct connection we have with Evelia (counselor). It's easy to contact her. All these counselors are so busy with all these other thousands of students, so it's awesome that we have someone that we can email directly and we know that she'll respond to us; and she does a really great job of doing that.

- I think the teachers are really helpful and they really try. With all my other teachers you're just a student, but with them (Dr. Luz Calvo and Dr. Solomon) they're really supportive and they try and connect with us in a different way and that's been really helpful for me because teachers don't usually take the time to do that. If I email them, they're really fast to respond, and it's really hard to find teachers like [them]. I really do appreciate that.

- Being a shy person, I really like that Luz [Dr. Calvo] is that way because she made me more comfortable and at home. So I felt, you know, comfortable if I had a problem or an issue I can easily go up to her and ask her something. My other class, last quarter, I was very intimidated by the professor, he was very scary to me. I was struggling a little. And I went to see him, but I didn't feel comfortable. I don't know, I didn't feel connected to him and that made it a lot harder for me to approach him.

- I have a friend that doesn’t have that much. She [is in] EOP (Equal Opportunity Program) but it hasn't been that helpful for her and she used to cry. I was so traumatized coming into this school because I would see her and she’d be like I gotta carry two backpacks, one with lunch and [the other] with books I was telling her about the program and she said, “Huh (inward sigh) oh my God are you serious. You have water in there? You have the refrigerator in there? You’re able to put your lunch in there?” She’s like wow.

The majority of the GANAS students are the first to go to college in their families. They have not had the privilege of joining sororities or parents
who can provide them with the confidence and experience they need when they have questions or do not know what questions to ask. The GANAS students are learning how privilege can make a difference in their university experience.

**Forming a Community of Learners**

**Question 2:** Have the seminars, advisory and peer mentoring made any difference in your transition to Cal State?

Once again students gave varied answers to this question depending on what their needs were coming into the program. Some had experience with resume writing, financial assistance and other topics covered in the seminars and for this group of students, they questioned the need for seminars during a time they needed to take classes. Other students felt the seminars were absolutely essential.

Outstanding or primary was the importance of building community. Many of the students felt that becoming a community of learners made the difference leading to a successful first quarter. One of the students mentioned the importance of building community but inherent in creating a community of learners is the risk of cliques forming and once again the danger of creating divisions. One of the purposes of GANAS is to build friendships and sources of support.

- I believe that most helpful has been having a certain amount of classes together. We take the classes [together] as a whole class because it builds consistency and it also builds our community with each other. If for some reason we're not able to attend some of the workshops or the support meetings given by staff members, we have that community within ourselves that we're able to bounce off information and just -- ultimately just grow, you know, between classmates.
- I agree with the girls. The most important thing to me, or that has helped me the most, is being able to have the connection with the classmates because I know that if I miss class that they'll help me out. I think that the community we've grown is really supportive for me and it's something that I needed and I really appreciate that.
- Yeah we do. And because in GANAS we have similar major…we came together to take our Criminal Justice classes together. You
know that’s how we are able to study and get together. Everything (meaning all the components of the program). There are a lot of people that think that we aren’t being discriminated against but we [are], because there’s people that don’t believe in us. I have a lot of people [that did] not believe [in me]. A lot of the staff and even my counselor, my high school counselor thought I was not going to graduate because she said that percentage is low. [I asked her] “Am I on track to graduate from high school?” and she’s like, “Well you do have a child and not a lot of people like you guys who come from Richmond…. it’s not so good there” She didn’t give me the full support that I needed so I had to look for outside help.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION: AN ANSWER TO MATTERING

Transfer students participating in this one-year cohort noticeably have experienced successful changes that resulted in higher grade point averages at the end of Winter quarter with 24 out of 32 maintaining a 3.0 GPA and 3 finishing with a 3.75. The transfer success seminar, intrusive counseling and mentoring all made a difference as evidenced from their comments collected in the Focus Groups and their actions, which resulted in the turn around of students who were on probation at the beginning of Fall quarter (3) and ending the Winter quarter with 0 on probation.

Students had difficult times with scheduling classes and finding the financial resources to keep them in school. However, the familial bond they formed helped them make more informed choices and work harder to continue their studies. After the first quarter their confidence level rose and most students who came in feeling that they did not belong acquired the confidence to ask questions in class, join group activities outside of their own comfort zone, and use the resources they were given to the fullest.
Schwartz & Holliday (2012) explain this phenomena as intellectual mattering.

A student who experiences authentic intellectual mattering with a professor may not only receive a boost of energy and self-worth in that moment but may become more engaged in the larger learning journey. Students reported that these moments increased their confidence, motivated them to want to produce higher quality work, and helped them see that they could engage in deep conversation with faculty and explore their ideas through original research.

Student comments during the focus group sessions spoke about the importance of someone believing in them. “…yes I could do it, yes. You know I have other people believing in me so that’s all I need. Just someone to believe in me to boost up my confidence in school.” This student maintained a 4.0 during the Fall quarter. She traveled two hours to get to school and before starting her homework, she helped her son with his.

**The Heart of the Educational Process: Culturally Responsive Teaching**

“*Caring is one of those things that most educators agree is important in working effectively with students, but they are hard pressed to characterize it in actual practice.*” (Gay 2010)

To translate the word Ganas in Spanish, requires creativity in thought. It can mean pushing yourself to want. It denotes an inner feeling of want that comes from the spirit or the gut. Bringing out that inner push makes all the difference in a person’s accomplishments but when the individual does not want to do something, it is hard to motivate them. For many of the students attending the university for the first time, and their family having little understanding of the school system in the United States, GANAS will definitely make a difference. However, Geneva Gay in her writings on caring passes some of the responsibility of the student’s educational success to what she calls culturally responsive teaching.
She states,

Caring is one of those things that most educators agree is important in working effectively with students, but they are hard-pressed to characterize it in actual practice, or to put a functional face on it that goes beyond feelings of empathy and emotional attachment. Feelings are important, but cultural responsive caring as an essential part of the educational process is much more. It focuses on caring for instead of about the personal well-being and academic success of ethnically diverse students with a clear understanding that the two are interrelated. (48)

Gay continues by explicitly defining cultural responsive teaching, which involves teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ human value, intellectual capability and performance responsibility. In simple terms, “It’s not what you say, but how you say it.” When educators or others working with students model moral behaviors and values for students to emulate, “[Students] rise to the occasion by producing high levels of performance…”

GANAS success in creating a model that works for student retention and academic success can continue to replicate its achievements by continuing to expand across disciplines. Other departments have worked on similar models but because of budgetary constraints ended their programs.

When comparing annual cost of educating versus incarcerating confining one youth in California grew from $45,000 to $252,000.83 based on the figures from the California Youth Authority. By comparison, the cost of tuition and fees at a public four-year university in 2013 rose to $9,037. (refer to: <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/tuition-and-fees-sector-and-state-over-time>)

One area that The Programmatic Excellence and Innovation in Learning (PEIL) grant and GANAS continues working to find innovative avenues to provide students with the funding they need to stay in school. Figures show that those students who left were not for academic standing
but financial stress. That is the next step that is a continuing challenge for universities across the state. Rocío, a GANAS student in accepting a scholarship from the Chicano Latino Staff and Faculty Association at CSUEB say’s it best:

"I’d like to close by saying that tonight I will most likely get the best sleep since I’ve began my journey here at CSUEB, and it’ll be thanks to you and the Chicano/Latino Staff and Faculty Association. Having the newfound peace of mind in knowing that I can now work less hours and invest those in my studies. Rocío"
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