



# EL CAMINO COLLEGE

## PUENTE NEWSLETTER

### Fall 2015

## Puente 30

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Anthony Montion  
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Brianna Sandoval  
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Keeyan Ventura  
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## Puente 30 climbs toward transfer goals

By Rachel Ketai, Puente English Instructor



Puente 30 students and co-coordinators gather for a group picture on campus. In the fall semester, shared goals help students transition from a group of strangers to *familia*.

The week before the fall 2015 semester began, 34 students met for the first time in the Alondra Room above the El Camino College Bookstore for a required orientation. The 30<sup>th</sup> class of ECC Puente students—nearly all the first in their families to attend college—shared the goal to transfer to a four-year university. They joined the Puente program to receive counseling, English instruction, and mentoring designed to help them achieve their dreams.

Orientation was the first step. Students got to know each other through icebreaker activities, met counselor Griselda Castro and English Instructor Rachel Ketai, and learned about the differences between high school and college. Past Puentistas also joined the group for a campus tour and a question and answer session about strategies to succeed at ECC. The more experienced students offered the new class everything from tips to survive the first week (arrive early to look for parking!) and advice about where to turn for help with financial aid questions.

Next on the agenda were the two fall Puente classes: English A and Human Development 8. In English A, reading and writing assignments focus on Latino literature and culture. Students reflect on their own educational journeys and read memoirs by individuals like Sonia Sotomayor, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Richard Rodriguez who overcame great odds to achieve literary, educational, and professional success. In their final persuasive writing unit, students research problems in their communities and propose solutions. Students are tackling the difficult issues they observe around them—issues like gangs, graffiti, obesity, and littering.

In Human Development 8, completed in the first eight weeks of the semester, students learned about the higher education system and support resources on campus. They also explored their educational goals and created educational plans. The class presented students with the opportunity to reflect on their educational identities and set goals as college students.

ECC is fortunate to have a thriving community of Puente mentors, and in September, students met their mentors at the Mentee-Mentor Mixer. After eating dinner and listening to some *consejos* (advice) from mentors, students began interviewing their mentors about how they succeeded in school. The evening event marked the beginning of a mentoring relationship meant to support students all the way to graduation day.

In October, Puente students set their alarm clocks early to board a bus to the University of California, San Diego for the Puente Southern California Transfer Motivational Conference. This annual event gathered more than 800 Puente students from 26 community colleges in the region. In the morning, students were inspired by a motivational speech from *Homeboy Goes to Harvard* founder Richard Santana. In the afternoon, students attended breakout sessions on topics like transfer requirements, financial aid, leadership, and study abroad.

It's been a busy semester for Puente students as they juggled adjusting to college with the many evening and weekend events required for the Puente program, but it will be worth it in the end. The long history of the Puente program, not only on ECC's campus but also statewide, suggests that this group of students will have a significantly higher chance of transferring and succeeding at a four-year university thanks to the support of the Puente *familia*.



Genesis Espinoza (left) and Jasmin Fernandez bond after a tour of UC San Diego's beautiful campus at the Puente Southern California Transfer Motivational Conference.

## PUENTE DREAMS PROFILE -By Nirvana Mendez, Puente 29

# Jayro Lopez, from the racetrack to the college track

Jayro Lopez, Puente 30, was born and raised in Inglewood. He grew up with three younger brothers and parents from Michoacán, Mexico who are now residents. His dad works as a horse groomer and his mom is a housewife. "My dad only went up to second grade and my mom up to fifth grade," Lopez said.

Lopez graduated from Morningside High School in 2014 and thought that might be the end of his time in the classroom.

"I was accepted to CSUs, but I didn't think I was ready for [college] because I didn't have preparation in high school," Lopez said.

Instead, he worked with his dad full time at the racetrack for a year before ultimately realizing he wanted to pursue a higher education.

"I wanted to be the first in my family to go to college because no one in my family has ever attended college. It felt good being the first to graduate high school, so I want to continue my education," Lopez said.

He decided to enroll at ECC and joined the Puente program to pursue a career as a police officer and eventually an FBI agent.

"Griselda Castro was the first counselor I met coming into college. She explained to me what the Puente program was and told me how Puente would help me with my goals, and I loved every single thing she said about the program. What she said about the program made me feel like I was going to have a second family helping me achieve my goals, and I was right," Lopez said.

So far, both of the Puente classes—English A and Human Development 8—have helped him navigate his path.

"In my [Human Development 8 class] I have learned the requirements for colleges I didn't know before. And my English [A] class has taught me how to organize an essay and how to integrate quotes. Both classes are preparing me for when I transfer to a four-year-university," Lopez said.

He has adjusted very quickly to ECC and hopes to receive his associates degree before transferring as a sociology major.

He has met amazing teachers who are willing to help him more than he expected.

"In high school, I never asked questions because my teachers would just give me attitude and not help at all. But being in Puente is different. They actually help and encourage me to do what I have to do to achieve my goals," Lopez said. "My experience in Puente has been amazing so far, and it's just starting. I believe it's going to get better."



Jayro Lopez receives feedback on his writing during a visit to office hours with Puente English Instructor, Rachel Ketai.

## PUENTE TRANSFER PROFILE -By Nirvana Mendez, Puente 29

# Marimar Arango thanks Puente for Berkeley success

Marimar Arango, Puente 27, may attend University of California, Berkeley now, but just a few years ago, she thought she would never be able to attend a university. "In high school, I didn't really try hard. I knew I was going to a community college because I was undocumented," Arango said.

Despite her obstacles as a high school student, Arango's family always emphasized the value of education. "Since I was little, my dad really pushed education into my life," she said. "[He] made me see how important it is to get an education, not only to better my economic situation, but to help others, learn about who I am, and become someone in life."

In the Puente program, she found the push she needed to set higher goals and make her family's educational values a reality.

Arango credits much of her success to her Puente counselor, Maribel Hernandez. "Having easy access to a counselor definitely made my college experience easier, especially since I created a close bond with Maribel. I never felt lost and always felt supported through my ECC experience thanks to my counselor. Whenever I had a problem or questioned, I always dropped by, and they were so welcoming in that office," Arango said.

At Berkeley, Arango now majors in Latin American studies with a minor in gender and women studies. Hernandez was pivotal in helping Arango first develop an interest in sociology. "In my human development class, I took various personality tests that helped me learn that I love working with people. [Hernandez] advised me to take a sociology course, and I fell in love with the subject," Arango said.



UC Berkeley student Marimar Arango still relies on the lessons she learned about college success in ECC's Puente program.

Puente's emphasis on Latino literature and culture in the English classes taught by Rachel Ketai also helped her find her way in school.

"All the material Dr. Ketai had us read in her English class was so inspiring, especially since I came from the same low-income, undocumented background that some of the characters from the stories we read came from," Arango said. "The readings that Dr. Ketai gave to the students made it easier to connect."

Through Puente, Arango also discovered that she was able to attend the Northern California College Tour through the Transfer Center. She

took advantage of the opportunity and visited several University of California campuses. Once she stepped foot on UC Berkeley's campus, she knew it was her dream school.

When it finally came time to apply, she was rewarded for her three years of dedication. "I was accepted to UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC San Diego, and UCLA with the help of Puente," Arango said.

Her transition to Berkeley has been challenging, but it is just one more obstacle that she is determined to overcome. "Starting over and creating a new community and new friends is not easy," Arango said. "I've been utilizing all of the skills and knowledge I acquired from Puente and ECC to navigate the system."

# Jaime Gallegos: Once the mentee, now a mentor

Stop by the First Year Experience Program at ECC, and you are likely to catch Jaime Gallegos, Puente 21, giving hands-on help to students. Whether they need academic advising or just to use a computer, Gallegos is there ready to assist.

When Gallegos is not busy as an adviser for the First Year Experience program, he's also a mentor for the Puente program. It is a role he knows well as a former Puente student himself.

Gallegos, the oldest of five, grew up with many responsibilities because his parents worked long shifts to support the family.

"My parents migrated to California from Mexico and had to support their families at a young age, so work opportunities were more difficult for them. This also meant that they often worked long hours and relied on me to take care of my siblings," Gallegos said.

He knew he wanted to go to college after high school, but wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

"I was the first in the family to graduate high school, so I knew I had to further my education to set the bar higher for my siblings instead of working a minimum wage job," Gallegos said.

Gallegos first attended Los Angeles Harbor College (LAHC), but eventually transferred to ECC.

"I didn't have any support [at LAHC], and I found myself really struggling with staying focused. I left and came to ECC where I found a flier for Puente, and went to the office to find more information," Gallegos said.

When he first arrived to the Puente English class in 2006, he was shy to talk to other students and excluded himself. The program pushed him to open up.

"The small Puente families we had in English and human development helped me feel comfortable," Gallegos said.

He felt as though he was not prepared for college courses because he

had always struggled, especially writing essays, because Spanish was his first language, but the Puente English class helped him.

"I always felt left out in school because my English was not strong," Gallegos said.

When Gallegos met his Puente mentor, Ramon Huizar, at the Puente Student-Mentor Mixer, he built a close bond with him.

"I wanted to work on campus, and Ramon showed me around the counseling office and the Transfer Center. That's how I worked for counselor Griselda Castro, the Transfer Center, and eventually here at the First Year Experience office," Gallegos said.

Later in the Puente program, he discovered University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) from transfer counselor Rene Lozano and counselor Maribel Hernandez.

"They encouraged me to think beyond just the CSU system and pushed me to explore options such as the UC system," Gallegos said.

After receiving his acceptance to UCSC, he was torn between making his family happy and making himself happy. "My family wanted me to go to UCLA to stay close to them. Once they found out I was attending UCSC they were mad, but eventually got over it," Gallegos said.

Gallegos graduated in 2012 with his bachelor's degree in sociology and Latin American studies. He knew he wanted to give back as a Puente mentor after returning to his hometown. "My mentor Ramon Huizar inspired me to want to be a mentor and help out students," Gallegos said.

He is currently working toward his master's degree in social work at California State University, Dominguez Hills and hopes to become a counselor to help future students succeed.

"Without the guidance, networking, and support I received, I honestly don't know how I could have accomplished what I have so far. It's been one of the greatest experiences in my life," Gallegos said.



Jaime Gallegos (right) met fellow Puente 21 graduate Jessica Quezada in a Puente class. The support system they found in the program and each other helped them both achieve their goals to transfer to and graduate from UC Santa Cruz. Both Gallegos and Quezada now give back as Puente mentors.

## Special Thanks to Our 2015-2016 Puente Mentors

Each Puente student is matched with a mentor from the business or professional community. Mentors share with students their personal, academic, and career experiences, and provide a window into "real life" work environments. The network of trained Puente mentors provides many resources for Puente students, their families, colleges, and the community.

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|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Martha Arias            | Barbara Jaffe      | Blanca Prado        |
| Ibeth Arriaga           | Janice Jefferis    | Jesica Quezada      |
| Maria Barrio de Mendoza | Elizabeth Jennison | Martha Quezada      |
| Linda Beam              | Maria Jimenez      | Elayne Rodriguez    |
| Erica Brenes            | Rene Lozano        | Lizet Salazar       |
| Carlos Castro           | Vanessa Martinez   | Mayra Sandoval      |
| Guillermo Castro        | Victoria Martinez  | Erika Solorzano     |
| Rigo Castro             | Jeff McMahan       | John Vargas         |
| Matt Cheung             | Myrna Mendoza      | Claudia Velazquez   |
| Claudio Cordova         | Stephanie Merz     | Kristell Villacorta |
| Jaime Gallegos          | Kathleen Motoike   | Elizabeth Williams  |
| Cristina Garcia         | Jo Moore           | Rachel Williams     |
| Maribel Hernandez       | Yury Najarro       | Brittany Wilson     |

# WHAT IS PUENTE?

The Puente Project is an academic preparation program for educationally disadvantaged students that is co-sponsored by the University of California at Berkeley and the California Community College Chancellors' Office. The goals of the Puente Project are for students to transfer to a four-year university, earn a college degree, and return to their communities as mentors and leaders.

Puente students commit to a full-year program, which consists of English instruction (English A in the fall and 1A in the spring), counseling (Human Development 8 in the fall and 5 in the spring), and mentorship. The English instruction focuses on culturally relevant writing and Latino and multicultural literature. The counseling element guides students into becoming successful college scholars by heightening their awareness of college resources, study skills, and career exploration. Finally, the mentoring component supports and motivates students along their academic journeys, providing inspirational stories of success.

The Puente Project has been helping educationally disadvantaged students in California transfer to four-year universities for more than 30 years. It is currently implemented in 33 high school and 59 community college sites throughout the state. Puente is open to all students.

## PUENTE HISTORY

Co-directors, Felix Galaviz and Patricia McGrath of Chabot College in Hayward, founded Puente in 1981. The program mission was to increase the number of Mexican American/Latino students transferring to four-year colleges and universities. Since then, Puente has expanded to 59 community colleges throughout the state. As an outgrowth of its success as a community college program, Puente high school programs were added throughout the state in 1993.

Currently in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, the Puente Program at El Camino College is a model program for other community colleges across the state of California. The ECC program was established in 1985, just four years after the Puente Program was founded statewide.

## PUENTE RESULTS IN STUDENT SUCCESS AT ECC

### Strong Persistence Record:

- 93% of Puente's first-time freshmen students from Fall 2009 enrolled in a second year of classes in Fall 2010 compared to 76% of ECC students generally.

### Strong Transfer Rates:

- 46% of Puente students who enrolled in 2002-2003 transferred by 2007-2008, compared to 26% of ECC's Hispanic students generally.
- Between 2000 and 2009 176 Puente students transferred. 22% to UC, 56% to CSU, and 21% to private or out-of-state institutions.

## PUENTE BOASTS STATEWIDE IMPACT

- More than 5,500 students have enrolled in the Puente community college program.
- More than 2,000 professionals donate more than 18,000 hours annually to Puente students.
- An estimated 200,000 non-Puente students have benefited from Puente's staff development programs.
- Community colleges with Puente programs transfer 44 percent more Latino students to the University of California than colleges without a Puente program.

## PUENTE RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

- In 1998, Puente was one of 10 programs selected from a national pool of more than 1,400 to win the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award, a program of the Ford Foundation, the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and the Council for Excellence in Government.
- In 2004, Puente was chosen as one of six model programs nationwide to help guide policymakers to improve college access and success by the Pathways to College Network, a national consortium of educational institutions, foundations and non-profit organizations.
- In 2008, Hispanic Lifestyle selected Puente to receive its Non-profit Organization of the Year Hispanic Image Award in recognition of its work and success in promoting positive images of the Latino Community.
- Puente has been studied by numerous academic researchers, and was the focus of the entire September 2002 issue of the *Journal Educational Policy*. El Camino College's Puente Program was used in Rendon's (2002) study "Community College Puente: A Validating Model of Education."
- Puente Program has now expanded to three community college districts in Texas: El Paso, McAllen and San Antonio.



The El Camino Community College District is committed to providing equal opportunity in which no person is subjected to discrimination on the basis of national origin, religion, age, sex (including sexual harassment), race, color, gender, physical or mental disability, or retaliation.

### For More Information, Please Contact:

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