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ANIMO ROAD SHOW ENGAGES STUDENTS, BUILDS NEW RELATIONSHIPS

by on Oct 7, 2017

A rallying cry, an acronym and a new vision. ANIMO guides Gavilan College basic skills students to successful completion in three semesters or less.

ANIMO touches the lives of more than 25% of Gavilan's students each semester. The program is one component of a multifaceted, three-year grant, Basic Skills Outcomes Transformation. The team of Daniel Fuentes and Vania Parakati partner with faculty, college student services, peer mentors and Supplemental Instruction leaders to support students attending basic skills classes.

"ANIMO is the new name for the Basic Skills program, designed to emphasize the program's positive movement forward," said Fran Lozano, Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences and administrator of the grant.

Gavilan College mission: serving first-generation college students

Gavilan offers more than 80 basic skills classes in math, English and ESL each semester. But these units do not count toward certifications, degrees or transfer degrees. If motivation slips, students can grow discouraged, question their progress and stop attending. The college data reflect a retention rate of approximately 55% in the overall student population after two semesters, with a lower retention rate for basic skills students.

To reverse the pattern, ANIMO – Access, Network, Inspiration, Motivation, Outreach – offers multiple student support strategies.

Fuentes, Retention Specialist, and Parakati, Basic Skills/ANIMO Counselor, visited the basic skills classes across the district's campuses. During this road show they explained how the new program supports students. Fuentes returns to present in-class techniques promoting community and increased student engagement. He examines current and historical student data and recommends resources promoting student success.

"ANIMO connects and motivates the students, introduces them to all the resources on campus," Fuentes said. From the Food Pantry and Tutoring Center to the Learning Commons and Career & Transfer Center

coordinating field trips to four-year colleges, students learn about every program available to them. Sometimes the students don't know what or who to ask. ANIMO helps fill the gaps.



Students show their purpose after hearing a presentation from Daniel Fuentes (8th from right).

"This is a fresh opportunity for students to build relationships with a dedicated counselor," Parakati said. During the first counseling meeting, together they create a personalized educational plan, then add the extra things needed like boot camps. "The students are introduced to both of us, so when they get follow-up calls, they know who we are." Students express feeling more secure asking questions and voicing concerns as they navigate the college experience.

Students need more help understanding what is required of them and why, learning how to communicate with teachers, counselors, the college and financial aid. They also need reminders about the services available to them. "When the students recognize they have someone on their side supporting them, they feel more comfortable being held accountable," said Parakati.

For now, the work is focused on student engagement, and outreach is in full swing.

"We know this is working because we have been so busy with students coming in to build their ed plans," said Parakati. All appointment slots have been filled. Next the team will contact basic skills students without ed plans to book additional appointments.

Two students, two paths to Gavilan

At the Briggs Building on the Hollister campus, students talked about their goals.

"After being out of school for more than 40 years, this is like being in a new country."

Rosa Aguirre returned to Gavilan in Fall 2017, her first semester at Gavilan College. Recovering from two cancer diagnoses, six surgeries, chemo and radiation, she wanted options for her career. A degree would help her change professions. Previously she worked in mortgage and real estate, both high stress industries. She plans to work toward an AA in business and transition to human resources.

"The first two weeks were super hard, I was on overwhelm and ready to quit," she said. One friend convinced her it would get easier. Another helped her navigate the first math homework assignments. Then Fuentes visited her English 250/260 class.

"Just give it a chance, get into a routine. Don't give up at the first sign of frustration," Aguirre said. If things aren't clicking, learn from your peers, build a study group. "Peers can explain things in a way that is different from the instructor or the text," she said.

She said developing a routine, adapting to the workload, and splitting up the different class deliverables help her get through each week.

"Attending classes in Hollister was actually my first time ever in Hollister," said Jermaine Benting. "I had to do a recon."

He said he was shocked, in a good way. "I expected portables all over the city I would have to drive to." He did not expect a large building downtown, with free parking.

His classes are scheduled with a break in between. He uses the gap time to do homework which helps him avoid procrastination. "At home, it would be really distracting to get started, and to finish."

Listening to Fuentes' presentation, Benting learned about the university campus tours through the college Career & Transfer Center, and he plans to visit the four-year schools.

Fuentes encouraged students to network and form study groups. "Students have the same issues and problems, but we don't ask for help. We will actually let ourselves down instead of asking for help," Benting said.

"His work in the class helped break the ice," Benting said. "I met two more people, know their names and have their contact information now." He noted the social skills needed to approach people, not be judged, and ways to help each other out.

A graduate of North Salinas High School and a U.S. Army veteran, Benting had used the services of Gavilan's Veterans Resources Center. He plans to study business and economics with a career goal of trading as a stock broker on the floor of Wall Street. "I'm young and I have the time and the willingness to take risks now. My biggest mistakes are always my best lessons," he said.

And that rallying cry?

Animo is a Latin term used in law meaning with intention, disposition, design, will; with purpose.

Gavilan staff and newly designed programs rally students to intentionally and purposefully improve their success. Fuentes, ANIMO retention specialist, can be reached at dfuentes@gavilan.edu and Parakati, ANIMO counselor, can be reached at vparakati@gavilan.edu.

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