

Puente Program Review Task Force Final Report; Fall 2020

Charge

Review the Puente budget and structure to determine ways to increase student involvement more efficiently.

Members

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Fall 2019 Meetings

October 2, 2019
November 11, 2019
December 12, 2019

Spring 2020 Meetings

March 3, 2020
April 21, 2020
May 5, 2020

Puente at COM

In Fall 2019, the Puente Project at College of Marin served 114 students -- 27 in the Phase I cohort (first semester), plus 87 continuing students (Phase 3) who were enrolled at the College. Phase 3 students continue working with Luz until they transfer or complete their degrees, and many of them use the Puente room to study in groups, get tutoring, work on their projects, and get support from each other.

Each year, about 25 - 30 new students enroll in the Puente cohort; a few join in Phase 2 (the spring courses) when spaces are available. The vast majority of these students are Latinx students who attended high school in Marin, and many of them are first generation students; some have been born here and some are immigrants; many are children of immigrants. The program is in its 11th year on campus. In addition to the year-long sequence of English courses and Counseling courses, Puente students in Phase 1 and 2 meet with professional mentors during group events and meet regularly with Puente Peer Mentors. They visit three colleges during their first year, attend workshops and social events organized by the peer mentors and the Puente Coordinators. They also receive comprehensive counseling from Luz.

Task Force Discussion

In response to the charge, the task force considered ways Puente could include and reach more Latinx students. This led to a discussion about the diversity within our Latinx population of students and their differing needs and challenges, such as ESL, undocumented, transfer-level, etc. Thus, in the spring, the task force had planned to focus on learning more about our Latinx students to better serve and support them. While we intended to have our Latinx students complete a survey, this was disrupted by COVID.

Recommendations with Minimal Additional Costs

1. Puente Advisory Council

A Puente Advisory Council made up of COM staff, faculty, administrators, and students would provide greater capacity and breadth of ideas to support Puente expansion, events, and increased awareness of the Puente program.

2. Puente Club

A Puente Club is often a component of Puente programs. For example, Napa Valley College has a Puente Club that plans activities and events for its Puente students. Puente Clubs engage all Puente students, from Phase 1 through Phase 3, in activities and events that strengthen students' connection to the Puente community. A Puente Advisory Council could support efforts to launch a Puente Club at COM.

3. Puente-trained Content Instructors: Engaging faculty from other areas

The statewide Puente Project is in the planning phase to pilot trainings for faculty in other disciplines at campuses that are interested. This would involve a training in Puente pedagogy in the summer, and then follow up annual events. Most of the cost of the training would be covered by Puente, while the College would need to cover the cost of lodging and a modest registration fee. Training 2 - 3 faculty in other disciplines in some of Puente's approach to fostering strong, equitable learning environments would enable College of Marin to engage students more broadly, ideally supporting the learning and retention of Latinx students of color across the curriculum and building synergy among the Puente-trained faculty.

Recommendations Requiring Significant Additional Funds

1. Second Cohort Starting with ENGL 120

Many of our Latinx students come in at the ENGL 120 or ENGL 150 + 150C level, and it would be helpful for students to have two options -- the current ENGL 150 + 150C cohort for those who want to raise their skills in a semester, and an ENGL 120 cohort for those who want or need more time to get to ENGL 150-level skills. This would also enable Puente to connect more with those coming out of ENGL 98 and ENGL 98SL since they could take English 120 along with the ESL 88 editing course. A good number of Latinx students currently take the ENGL 120AC course but would benefit from the community of Puente. Also, ENGL 120AC is not ideal for English language learners given its content rich material. Lastly, having a second cohort on campus would build much more visibility and energy in the program by doubling it and creating more synergy between cohorts.

2. New Latinx learning community connected and partnering with Puente

A new learning community/support system would be open to all Latinx students, but its activities and efforts would be designed to support students who are pre-transfer level, such as basic skills, credit ESL, and noncredit ESL students. Over the last few years, we

have noticed a growing number of students just out of high school who want a degree but need several semesters of ESL. These students are particularly in need of support considering they have the additional challenge of language acquisition. With AB 705, we have also noticed the need to help students acquire “soft skills,” such as time management, study habits, etc. Thus, this learning community would support these students through peer mentoring, connecting them with campus resources, workshops, and counseling. In addition, this learning community would partner and connect with Puente for events and activities to establish a pipeline to transfer.

Remaining Issues and Concerns

While the above recommendations would enrich our Puente Learning Community, they do not fully address the diversity among our Latinx students. A second Puente cohort starting at ENGL 120 would help, but it will not meet the needs of our Latinx noncredit ESL students. A new Latinx Learning Community would broaden support, but is this enough or the best way to support our Latinx noncredit ESL students? Puente is designed and structured to support transfer-level Latinx students and it successfully supports the students who are able to participate, but it is not designed to expand beyond that scope. Considering the scope and structure of Puente, the work of addressing and supporting the diverse groups of Latinx students should be addressed outside of Puente.