

# Cal State receives national grant to drive student success

## WAVE STAFF REPORT

LOS ANGELES — Recognizing the valuable but often overlooked role that community organizations play in partnering with universities to improve student success, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and Coalition of Urban Serving Universities recently announced a grant for Cal State Los Angeles to increase its partnership with East Los Angeles College.

The \$50,000 grant to Cal State L.A. is one of 12 awarded to public institutions across the country to advance university-community partnerships as a means to boost student success. The awards, known as collaborative opportunity grants, support innovative approaches that link student success with an institution's community engagement.

Through the funding, Cal State L.A. will create a peer advocate program to support the timely graduation of transfer students from ELAC. The program will use a non-traditional, student-centric approach in which the concepts of kinship and critical consciousness are central to identifying practices that will foster greater success for transfer students.

"I believe that a sense of kinship — a feeling that allows students to believe that they belong at Cal State L.A. — is important for educational justice and it is at the heart of how our program will engage East Los Angeles Community College students to be well prepared and ready to take on their higher educational goals," said Cal State L.A. Professor Bianca L. Guzman, who will serve as director for the peer advocate program at Cal State



The Cal State L.A. peer advocate program provides mentoring, outreach services and workshops geared toward students' academic success.

Photo by J. Emilio Flores/Cal State L.A.

L.A.

Other Cal State L.A. faculty members involved with the program include faculty advisor Celina Benavides, faculty coordinator Claudia Kouyoumdjian, and peer advocate trainer Kortney Hernandez. The team also includes several undergraduate and graduate students who serve as peer advocates and research assistants.

The peer advocates will be trained to conduct interviews with groups of students from ELAC in order to provide mentoring, outreach services and work-

shops geared toward students' academic success. Those groups will include ELAC students who applied to Cal State L.A. and were admitted and enrolled, ELAC students who were admitted and not enrolled, ELAC students who were denied admission and ELAC students who had incomplete applications.

The program aligns with the GO East LA initiative, which is a collaboration between Cal State L.A., ELAC, and the Los Angeles Unified School District. The initiative supports a college-going culture

in East Los Angeles. Guzman also directs the GO East LA program.

"The public universities receiving these grants have undertaken efforts that represent a sea of change in the way we think about student success," said Shari Garmise, vice president of APLU's Office of Urban Initiatives and executive director of USU. "For decades, institutions have applied a nearly singular focus on addressing academic hurdles students face once they're enrolled.

"These institutions are saying that

isn't enough. We have to work with community partners to ensure students have the required resources to apply, the necessary instruction to be prepared for the rigor of college course work, and the tools they need to thrive in the workforce and drive positive change in their communities."

This month, representatives from Cal State L.A. and the 11 other universities awarded grants will convene in Washington, D.C. to strategize and collaborate on their initiatives. USU and APLU will disseminate key findings from the institutions' work after the collaborative opportunity grant program has concluded to help promote best practices that other public universities can adapt.

In addition to collaborating with an external partner and aligning with investment priorities, Cal State L.A. and the other grantees demonstrated that their programs are using an emerging approach to student success and that their institution has capacity to sustain and scale the effort. Finally, grantees had to outline a quantitative and qualitative assessment plan to track the program's efficacy.

The universities' partners involved in the grants span a wide variety of organizations and institutions including non-profit organizations, local governments, health agencies, and school districts.

The grants must involve one or more of five priority investment areas: engaging faculty; rethinking financial aid; leveraging community assets; engaging employers and workforce organizations; and integrating and strengthening K-16 systems. All grants are supported with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

## County to create 'bill of rights' for youth in foster care

By ELIZABETH MARCELLINO  
City News Service

LOS ANGELES — The county Board of Supervisors voted July 18 to create a "bill of rights" for foster youth that lays out rights, resources and services available to kids and their foster parents.

California has its own such bill, but county officials said it is outdated and doesn't include county programs.

Supervisor Janice Hahn

championed the move.

"The former foster youth who spoke at [the July 18] meeting told us how frustrating it can be maneuvering the foster care system when you do not know your own rights or the resources available to you," Hahn said. "This bill of rights will be a way for both foster youth and foster parents to know every tool, service and program that has been created to support them."

Examples include a policy that allows social workers to act

in lieu of a parent to help a foster child get a driver's license and the fact that foster youth have access to MediCal until age 26.

Six current and former foster youth will join the bill of rights working group. Hahn had originally proposed two representatives but increased the total based on feedback at the board meeting.

The group, to be led by the Department of Children and Family Services, is also expected to include county lawyers,

mental health workers, probation officers, health care professionals and representatives of various community-based organizations.

Advocates said that concerns about navigating the foster care system deter some potential foster parents at a time when the need is great.

Others noted the complexities of the foster care system.

"I'm a 40-something-year-old woman, a lawyer and a mom. I've worked and volunteered in the child welfare system for

over 15 years and I still struggle to keep up with what the laws are," Wende Nichols-Julien told the board. "The people within the system, the people affected by these laws deserve to know what the laws say."

In Nichols-Julien's case, understanding the laws helped a girl she was mentoring avoid moving into a group home while she was working to reunite with her family.

A state effort to reform foster care requires that foster youth have access to specialized men-

tal health treatment, transitional support as they move from foster to permanent home placement, connections with siblings and extended family members and transportation to school.

Roughly 35,000 children and young adults receive child welfare services from the Department of Children and Family Services. A little less than half live outside their homes in a foster care or group home.

A report back is expected in 120 days.

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