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# National group honors first-year transition program

**By: Roy Lenn**

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A national organization for higher education advocacy has honored PCC's transition program for first-year students.

PCC's .XL Summer Bridge/First-Year Experience Program was named a finalist at the Associate level for its efforts at increasing success for Latino students by Excelencia in Education, a nonprofit research and policy organization that aims to increase Latino student achievement in higher education.

The .XL program is run through PCC's Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), and focuses on helping students make a successful transition from high school to college.

Javier Carbajal-Ramos is a prime example of a student who made that transition, and he credits .XL with his achievement.

"The program provided me with a leg up on college success," said Carbajal-Ramos.

"It helped me find my spot in college."

Last week, Carbajal-Ramos had the opportunity to make his first trip to Washington, D.C. to accept the Excelencia in Education honor for the school.

He started as an .XL student at PCC in 2003, and later transferred to UC Riverside, where he graduated last spring with a degree in psychology.

Through this time Carbajal-Ramos stayed involved with .XL.

After finishing the program, he worked as a tutor and coordinator. He's now employed with TLC as a caseload manager overseeing student success.

Carbajal-Ramos acknowledges that things may have turned out differently had it not been for the .XL program.

He started the program with two friends, both of whom later dropped out.

"Now I'm the only one who got a degree and has a stable job," said Carbajal-Ramos. "It depends on the personality of the person, but [the .XL program] opens doors for you and helps you walk through them."

Students apply to .XL before their first year, and start the program with a six-week summer

component, which involves on-campus activities and field trips, acquiring skills in leadership, academics, and technology, and building a support group with classmates and instructors.

Through their first year, .XL students build on those skills by taking English, math, and general education courses together and through counseling and tutoring at the Teaching and Learning Center.

Brock Klein, director of the TLC, says that .XL students benefit from having a physical space on campus to work, be safe, and seek help.

"The access to our space is a critical component to our success," said Klein.

"It grounds students on campus and gives them a home."

.XL student David De La Mancha credits the tutoring resources available with helping him through his first year.

"They walk you step by step and help you get used to the college environment," he said. De La Mancha's older brother Abran Esparza is an alumnus of the program, and now attends Cal State LA.

The .XL program, which has about 120 students enrolled this year, was created with a federal grant in 2000 to focus on the needs of under-prepared students.

.XL students have been more successful than their peers at PCC. From 2005-2007, .XL students had a class success rate of 78.5 percent, compared to 65.9 percent for PCC students in all classes, and 59.4 percent of those in basic skills classes.

TLC director Klein said he believes that the department can "scale up" its offerings to help more PCC students.

"I would love to create programs that every first-year student can take part in," he said.

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