



STUDENT RESOURCE INITIATIVE ADVOCACY

The S.H.A.R.E. (Student, Health, Advocacy, Resource, and Engagement) Center addresses the challenges students face by providing an on-campus hub for community organizations who provide food, education, clothing, financial literacy, career preparation, health screenings, and referrals to additional support services. The Center's donor-funded emergency aid program also provides one-time grants for students who are at-risk of failure or dropout because of dire financial need.

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Increased enrollment of lower and moderate income students coupled with inadequate employment opportunities and high college prices mean that making ends meet while attending college can be very difficult. In fact, a growing body of evidence suggests that a previously unnoticed challenge has emerged: basic needs insecurity. According to a recent report by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, over half (56%) of students at 70 community colleges across the nation are food insecure, experiencing reductions in the quality or

quantity of their diet. Similarly, half of community college students are insecure in their living arrangements as indicated by housing unaffordability and instability (35%), or outright homelessness (14%). Research suggests that basic needs insecurity negatively impacts academic success at all levels of education.¹ Finally, the cost of attending college is a concern for nearly half (47%) of community college students and a lack of finances is an issue that could cause them to withdraw.²

LOCAL LANDSCAPE AND NEED

In the Spring of 2015, Palo Alto College began its journey with the student resource initiative and focus on advocacy. An Advocacy Task Force was developed and was comprised of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. This task force conducted an environmental scan of the types of advocacy services currently at the institution. In an effort to better understand student perceptions about services needed at Palo Alto College, the Advocacy Center Task Force disseminated a survey to students (2,373 respondents) in the Fall of 2015. Primary results of this survey, utilizing a representative sampling methodology, demonstrated that students had a strong preference for advocacy services such as career preparation, financial assistance/literacy, health care services, and personal counseling.³ Using national research and a framework focused on serving under-resourced students, the S.H.A.R.E. Center opened its' doors in December of 2016.

There are a number of systems-level challenges that our students face while pursuing higher education, including persistent socioeconomic factors. According to the 2018 PAC Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS), many students worry about paying for college. More than half of survey respondents (61%) agreed or

strongly agreed that they worry about having enough money to pay for school, and many students lack a plan for paying for their next semester. Students' finances appear precarious and susceptible to unexpected expenses. More than half of SFWS survey respondents (63%) indicated they would have trouble getting \$500 in cash or credit in case of an emergency, and 47% worry about paying for their current monthly expenses. Very low food security is also quite common among PAC students. Over a third of respondents (36%) showed signs of very low food security according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) methodology. Finally, a third (30%) of survey respondents showed signs of being housing insecure, and 6% indicated homelessness within the last year.⁴

Further, according to the PAC 2018 Healthy Minds Study (HMS), 47% percent of the student respondents deemed their financial situation often or always stressful. More than 70% of students reported mental health affecting their academics and 13.35% of the student respondents had an ideation of suicide.⁵ Besides the mental and emotional toll of financial insecurity, students surviving on narrow margins are far more vulnerable to academic disruptions caused by unexpected expenses.

ADVOCACY AT PALO ALTO COLLEGE

The S.H.A.R.E. Center helps to ensure students can continue making progress toward permanently bettering their lives through higher education when unavoidable life situations arise. The Center is an on-campus student support hub that builds a foundation for student success through engagement, advocacy, and co-curricular activities. In partnership with Goodwill of San Antonio, the San Antonio Food Bank, H-E-B, University Health System, the City South Leadership Academy with the South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, San Antonio Area Foundation, Trellis Company, Healthy Futures of Texas, and Daughters of Charity Services of San Antonio, the S.H.A.R.E. Center provides a welcoming environment that is inclusive of the needs and diversity of PAC students and their families. Center values include service learning and community outreach, leadership, advocacy, health and wellness,

multiculturalism, student engagement, and career readiness. The Center provides basic mental, physical, and social services and referrals for follow up care, including a weekly mobile health clinic; a professional clothes closet, career advising, mock interviews, and resume writing assistance; a food pantry with weekly distributions for students and community members; and the recently established Emergency Aid Program (EAP).

EAP provides limited, short-term financial assistance to students who are struggling with emergency circumstances that jeopardize their chances of finishing a degree. One-time grants of up to \$1,000 help students who are experiencing unforeseen, unplanned, and unavoidable events that require them to secure funds on short notice.⁶ Allowable scenarios include disconnected utilities, late rent, emergency medical and/or dental expense, unforeseen

automobile repairs, or an immediate need for child care. Each student meets with a Financial Literacy Sr. Advisor who assists them with the application and provides case management. Students are referred to additional support resources such as their assigned Certified Advisor, services offered through the S.H.A.R.E. Center, and/or to community-based resources. All applicants must complete a virtual coaching session or attend a workshop that covers topics such as budgeting, money management, credit, and smart borrowing so that students receive individualized education specific to financial literacy in an effort to facilitate long-term financial wellness for the student.

OUTCOMES

Since opening two years ago, the S.H.A.R.E. Center has provided more than 5,500 services to over 2,500 students, with the health services used most often; followed by the food pantry, personal counseling, and financial wellness education/emergency aid. In the Spring of 2018, an Advocacy Dashboard was created to provide an overview and assessment of how students who access services offered by the institution related to advocacy perform in terms of academics and persistence, part of the College's Key Performance Indicators. Preliminary data from the dashboard demonstrates that students who use S.H.A.R.E. Center services are more likely to pass their courses and persist than those who do not.

RECOGNITION & PRESENTATIONS

- Media coverage for Advocacy Symposium by San Antonio Express-News (2018)
- Palo Alto College Advocacy Symposium (2018)
- Community partner spotlight for the San Antonio Food Bank (2018)
- Developed a Community Partner Advisory Board utilizing the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Framework (2018)
- Highlighted in VOICE of Hispanic Education magazine for importance of advocacy at Hispanic Serving Institutions funded by U.S. Department of Education Title V grants (2018)
- Presentation at the annual National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Conference (2017) and ASHOKA U (2017)
- Highlighted in the San Antonio Rivard Report (2016)
- Media coverage in San Antonio Express-News for grand opening and advocacy services (2016)
- Presentation at the annual Minority-Serving Institutions Convening at the U.S. Department of Education (2016)
- College and University Food Bank Alliance Member (2016)

MOVING FORWARD

Advocacy efforts support PAC's core values and mission to inspire, empower, and educate our community for leadership and success. The next steps for the College include participation in the Wisconsin Hope Lab's National Basic Needs Survey to re-assess the student population and identify additional needs. During September 2018, PAC hosted an inaugural Advocacy Symposium with Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab from The Hope Center to disseminate information about the impact of wrap-around student support on student success in college.

In addition, the S.H.A.R.E. Center leads PAC's holistic financial wellness curriculum that reaches students at multiple touchpoints throughout their educational journey. All students learn about personal budgeting and receive assistance with logging into iGrad, an interactive website with money management resources, before their first semester during New Student Orientation (NSO), followed by additional information on personal budgeting and understanding credit in college orientation courses that are required for all new students. All federal and/or private student loan recipients must attend four workshops throughout their educational journey where they learn about responsible borrowing, repayment options, impact of default, and types of loans. Students are connected with the Financial Literacy Sr. Advisor, Peer Advisors, and a Trellis Financial Coach all of whom help students review their financial aid package and further understand their student loans.

To date, 70% of the 33 PAC students who have benefitted from the EAP are the first in their families to attend college, 60% have dependents, and 98% are members of ethnicities that are underrepresented in higher education. Their average income is just \$8,800 per year. Utility payments have been the No. 1 use of EAP grants to date, followed by housing, automotive expenses, and child care. Over 90% of the PAC students who have received emergency aid are still enrolled in college or have graduated, maintaining progress toward achieving their full potential.

An assessment plan for 2018-2020 has been developed specific to Financial Wellness and is focused on measuring student knowledge gains around budgeting, responsible borrowing, and credit. Finally, PAC is strengthening its Advocacy Dashboard by including metrics specific to each service offered, an analysis by threshold of services received, and development of a comparative cohort of students who do not access services offered by the Center.

ENDNOTES

¹Goldrick-Rab, S., & Cady, C. (2018, April). Wisconsin Hope Lab. Retrieved from Wisconsin Hope Lab Publications: Still Hungry and Homeless in College: <http://wihopelab.com/publications/Wisconsin-HOPE-Lab-Still-Hungry-and-Homeless.pdf>

²Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2017). Making ends meet: The role of community colleges in student financial health. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, College of Education, Department of Educational Administration, Program in Higher Education Leadership.

³Palo Alto College: Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness. (2018, July 30). Retrieved from Advocacy Center Student Survey Results: http://www.alamo.edu/uploadedFiles/PAC/FS_Temp/Departments/Institutional_Research/Advocacy-Survey-Collateral-Proposal.pdf

⁴Klepfer, K. (2018). Student Financial Wellness Survey: Palo Alto College Spring Semester Report. Round Rock: Trellis Company.

⁵Healthy Minds Network. (2018). Healthy Minds Study at Palo Alto College. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan School of Public Health, Health Management and Policy.

⁶Kruger, K., Parnell, A., & Wesaw, A. (2016). Landscape Analysis of Emergency Aid Programs. Retrieved from NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education: https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Emergency_Aid_Report.pdf