Learning Communities
At CoA

COLLEGE OF ALAMEDA
555 Ralph Appezzato Memorial Parkway
Alameda, CA 94501

Learning Communities attend Race exhibit at Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley

Most of our students had met each other in the “LC”, our learning communities space in Cougar Village L124C but this was the first time we had the opportunity to attend a joint field trip. Everyone met at the Hall of Science for the exhibit on Race: Are We so Different?

“Today’s visit at the Lawrence Hall of Science was very shocking; I saw many different exhibits. I learned about the sounds of discrimination and I did a survey of different ethnicities and that everyone is of African descent.”

Excerpt from response paper by S. De Claro (APASS)

END OF THE YEAR CELEBRATION IN DISTRICT ATRIUM

College of Alameda hosted their first Annual Learning Communities End of the Year Celebration at the District Office Atrium on May 17, 2010.

Families, administrators, faculty and staff all gathered to acknowledge the hard work our students have demonstrated during our first year at CoA.

Our launchers, Edy Chan (APASS), Christa Ferrero-Casteneda (Adelante) and Debbie Green (Amandla) talked about the journey to establish these programs on campus, the reasons why ethnic-based learning communities have been so successful, and the investment that our students make in their own success. (continued page 4)
students displayed their talents through their writings, poetry, and art work. This was followed by a beautiful keynote speech by the honorable poet, Rafael Jesus Gonzalez, and a demonstration of Salsa and Latin rhythms by instructor Danny Nguyen and student dancers.

The event not only symbolized Mexican pride and unity, but rather, it extended the rich cultural roots of modern and traditional Central and South American lifestyles of our students.

Adelante and Latino Unidos students planned and organized this massive event that included piñatas, a jumper, and face painting as well as a joint raffle to raise money for the club as well as scholarships for learning communities students. Our students worked with the Oakland Fruitvale local community to get donations for our raffles. Donations included Starbuck’s coffee, piñatas, food, water, drinks, watches from a local jewelry store, music and much more.

On behalf of the Learning Communities’ faculty, students and the Latinos Unidos Club, we thank all who attended for giving the students the opportunity to embrace diversity across cultures and the surrounding community.
For many of our students, it was the first time visiting the Hall of Science and many didn’t want to leave; they were so excited that they promised to return with their families.

After the exhibit, our students participated in group discussions led by trained group leaders. Students had to then write a response paper to their experience. Here is a sample of one written in poetic form but Francois Tuazon from the APASS program. He read this at our End of the Year Celebration and received much applause.

Race: Are we so Different?

On the 14th of April, we toured the Lawrence Hall of Science
Where the view is high you would swear you were flying,
But the exhibit was the most important part of the day
For race revolves around everybody’s daily routine.
But race is really nonexistent, invisible to the eye
Race is only determined by the process of your mind.
If you go back roughly 200,000 years,
You’ll see that our ancestors are all from (the same) place
Or so it appears.

But things that seem so true can be often disguised
By an exterior like light skin or green colored eyes
I’ve learned to never judge a book by its cover
If you do that, then you set a road block for what you may discover.
What I will take away is that when I judge an individual,
I’ll judge their personality and their minds mentality
The census is coming up and what box to check,
I don’t know,
Maybe I’ll write “human” and hope one day we will all grow.
Our students don’t just come to school and then leave after class. Being part of a learning community entails committing to the community. This also means that our faculty will dedicate the same time and effort that our students can give. Students post messages on Facebook to their instructors, or text them with questions regarding assignments and their instructors respond. Our students also participate in field trips and extra-curricula activities in preparation for transfer and job opportunities. They work with our One-Stop, participate in student governance, interact with guest speakers, and host student activities on campus.

Our goal is to address our students’ needs not just academically but emotionally and to help them stay focused on their goals. When they leave our community, we want them to be prepared academically and with the confidence, patience, and self-discipline to succeed in college and their careers.
English Instructor, Dawn Sheibani, introducing Rosa Perez, an Adelante student, who talked about what Adelante and the learning communities meant to her.

Amandla Coordinator, Ellen Davis, introduces Carl Oliver who will enter UC Berkeley in fall 2010.

English Instructor, Christine Zilka, introduces Francois Tuazon who read a beautiful poem featured in this newsletter as a response to the field trip to the Lawrence Hall of Science.

English Instructor, Dawn Sheibani, introducing Rosa Perez, an Adelante student, who talked about what Adelante and the learning communities meant to her.
Antoinette Richardson, representing Amandla, read her English paper that highlighted her personal journey and the obstacles she overcame in order to begin her academic career.

“...My grades are getting better as well as my study habits. I really enjoy being in school and meeting new people. It was one of the best decisions I have made thus far!

In conclusion, the road to success is not a straight path. There is a curve called failure, a loop called confusion, speed bumps called friends, red light called enemies, caution lights called family; you will have flats called jabs. But if you have a spare called determination, an engine called perseverance, insurance called faith, a driver named Jesus; you will make it to a place called success. For this I give thanks for my past that has prepared me for my successful future.”
What Is Success To Me?

On my own at thirteen, the streets were my home; No one to guide me I was out there alone. Surviving was my first priority, then followed Dedication and Loyalty. I did what I had to do, no matter if it meant rob or steal. I did what I had to do to get money for my next meal. I'm not proud of what I did, so the secrets of my life I hid until now. Fourteen years old I lost half of my heart, my 10 year old brother died because his heart was too BIG, but that was because my mom did drugs when she was pregnant something I couldn't understand; but guess what when he died she wasn't even there to hold my hand or his. That reality I couldn't handle so I had to find something to do, wanted to forget all the pain I was in. Wouldn't you? An hour later I was in the night club; all the alcohol wasn't good for me especially with the drugs. So into I got a fight that was an effect on the rest of my life. I got cut in the face very close to my eye; the other girl got cut too so much she could have died. Got arrested and lied told them my age was 25 To county jail I was on my way, I wasn't trippen I'd get O.R in a few days. Four days later there was something that I didn't expect, old drama from the streets came back to bite me in the neck. Jamie the girl I didn't see, but I guess I didn't have to because she saw me. She turned me in told them I was only fourteen, seeing the streets again for me became a dream. Got to juvenile hall took three days to get to call home. I remember it so clear when I got the news I dropped the phone, that was something else I didn't expect my step father was gone. He got shot; another man took his life. What about his kids? What could think about was how much I wanted to cry, but wouldn't let those people see that, no I had too much pride. Six months later got released into my aunts' care, but I had to hit the streets because I didn't like it there. So I'm back on my own making money in the streets, I remember going for days and couldn't eat. I had to make a choice eat or pay rent, for like a year I lived in the motel 6. Living my life on the run I was living in fear, wondered what if they caught me I wasn't going back in there. Living my life in the streets wasn't safe either, what if I didn't survive this life; I know firsthand it can get you killed. Then I wouldn't have to worry about being locked up, or being here or there. I'd be six feet under so I wouldn't be anywhere.”
up, or being here or there.

**I’d be six feet under so I wouldn’t be anywhere.**

I was fifteen he was 27 he told me he loved me and wanted the best for me,

he also lived a double life and that was enough for me.

When I left him I lost everything I had, my clothes my shoes no money for a cab.
You know there are women who walk the streets, and sleep with men for money people
call those prostitutes.
I slept with a man because he often gave me money.
I never walked the streets so I wasn’t like them, does that sound funny?
Sixteen was a blur, but there were a few things I remember like getting shot at being
robbed being beaten up by someone who said they loved me.
You know there was one more memory one that was crystal clear,
I finally met a guy that I didn’t have to fear.
He loved me and when I needed him he was always there, and when he said he
loved me you could tell he was sincere.
He showed me a new way to live,
one where I didn’t have to do the things I did
Could I beat the odds was this possible for me?
I guess we just have to wait and see.
At seventeen I got pregnant with my son and, that’s when I knew officially I was done.
No more street life, no more night life, I had to get it right.
Don’t become another statistic don’t die living that kind of life,
Show my kid other ways to live other ways to fight.
So I was eight months pregnant I called my probation officer to turn myself in;
To live a better life a life in which I could win.
The judge and the D.A where not happy to see my face, upset that my P.O. recommended that
they throw out the whole case.
The judge told me it wasn’t over this was not the end,
Give me a few more years they would see my face again.
But guess what I did I got out and didn’t look back.
Now I’m a mother of two bright beautiful kids, married and we had our own place to live.
Just finishing up my first semester in college, a place I once thought I’d never see
I’m at a place in my life I thought I’d never be.
Peace and happiness I have the Lord in my life and now I’m complete.
So what am I? What have I done?
I am successful and I have beaten the odds. Life kept on throwing lemons at me, but eventually I
stopped getting hit by them; instead I caught them and made lemon aide.
This is the story of how I went from being a mess to becoming a success!
In an effort to foster student success and retention, all of the Learning Communities on campus have decided to share resources including joint field trips and campus activities. Additionally, we are implementing a mentor/mentee program. We are asking ALL faculty and staff to volunteer as student mentors. We will assign a student to you and they will be required to contact you once a week and share what’s going on in their lives. In their counseling classes, they will be required to document their experiences in their journals.

Some of you had contacted us stating that you really want to work with a former foster care student or that you want to work with a specific gender. We will work hard to accommodate your wishes.

This is a huge undertaking but in the spirit of “It takes a village to raise a child”, this is a college effort to help our students succeed especially during these most difficult times.

Back Page Story Headline

Kassi Tieu May 10, 2010
One of the rules of being Asian is that as a child we learn pretty quickly that we are never allowed to talk back to our parents, a translation: ‘we are not allowed to question our elders.’ In APASS the teacher is trying to break that spell and make us, the students, ask plenty of questions on what we do not understand. … I think I have contributed to the success and growth of the Learning Community and the community-at-large by attending most of the Learning Community gatherings, Adelante and Amandla, although I’m mostly in the background, I still show my support. I started volunteering at the Alameda Free Library because I had to do it for a class; I valued having the experience, so I plan to continue the work I do there. …