Using ePortfolio to Improve Retention of Hispanic Students at a Predominantly Black College

Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidenced Based Learning
AEEBL ePortfolio World Summit 2011
February 17, 2012
San Juan, PR

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Presentation Overview

✦ Institutional Profile

✦ Current Uses of ePortfolio

✦ Problem & Project Goals

✦ Project Strategy

✦ Theoretical Foundation

✦ Extension of ePortfolio Project to co-curricular activities: The ALAS student organization

✦ Preliminary findings

Medgar Evers College Profile

* Part of a large university system: City University of New York

* Predominantly Black Institution

* Fall 2009, 5.6% of incoming freshman Hispanic, 92% Black

* Spring 2010, 2.5% of Hispanic Students remained

Why Use ePortfolio?

ePortfolio

* Encourages student-centered teaching and learning

* Demands active participation of students

* Provides students with the opportunity to construct knowledge by engaging in and reflecting upon their own learning experiences

* Increases the use of technology as a learning tool

* Provides a platform for enhancing student learning in an electronic format

* Uses social network tools and taps into students' already advanced capabilities for networking

* Extends students' networking abilities into the academic context

Current use of eP at MEC

✦ Education department: integral part of NCATE accreditation and graduation process, development of professional career portfolios

✦ The Percy Ellis Sutton Search for Education, Elevation & Knowledge (SEEK) Program – Access program: transition from paper-based to ePortfolio

✦ Expansion across the curriculum in Freshman Year Program, Public Administration, Credit for Prior Life Experience, Library and beginning fall 2011 – Environmental Science, English, Social and Behavioral Science

Problem

Young Hispanics are the largest single ethnic group among 16 to 24 year olds in New York City (CSS, 2010, p. 4).

In Spite of this

In the Fall 2009, Latino freshman enrollment at Medgar Evers College was only 5.6 % of the college's total full-time enrollment. What is even more alarming is that of the 5.6% that enrolled in the fall, only 2.5% remained by the spring 2010 semester.

Surprising as black colleges are perceived as a "logical resource" for Latino students due to the fact that they are often "relegated to inner city, inferior, segregated high schools", the drop out rate for male Latino and African American students is similar and they share many common social and economic issues (Calvo, 2004, p. 1 of 2.)

Project Strategy: Improving Retention through Community Building

Project Goals

1) Improve Sense of School Belongingness

2) Encourage Making Connections: Seamless Integrative Learning

3) Enhance Student Growth and Development

4) Facilitate Community Building

Project Strategy

Develop a virtual co-curricular learning community in which students feel comfortable sharing their life-stories with peers and faculty, and feel a stronger sense of connection to the college community.

Theoretical Foundation

1) School Belongingness:

Positively correlated with "student's intrinsic values, expectations for success and academic effort" (Sanchez, Colon & Esparza, 2005, p. 620)

Feelings of not belonging have been found to lead to attrition (Gandara, 2010)

Hispanic students

✦ Sense of school belonging seems to play a greater role than for any other ethnic group (Sanchez, Colon & Esparza, 2005)

✦ Greater tendency to attend *hypersegregate*d schools than African-American students (Gandara, 2010)

✦ Appear to thrive best when members of in-group peer networks, "… co-ethnic friendship networks are positively related to Latino students' achievement … additionally, in-group ties are an important source of maintaining cultural heritage, identity, and a sense of community " for Latino students (Riegle-Crumb & Callahan, 2009, p. 627-628).

Theoretical Foundation con'd

2) Making Connections: Seamless Learning

Seamless learning environments allow students to "make meaning of the academic experience by connecting classroom learning with their own lives outside the classroom" (Kuh, 1996, p. 136).

3) Student Growth and Development

ePortfolio can support lifelong and life-wide learning: "learning that occurs across and between episodes of formal learning…" (Cambridge, 2008, p. 1228).

4) Community Building

In addition to making connections between ideas, ePortfolios also allow students to make connections to each other (Bolliger & Shepherd, 2010).
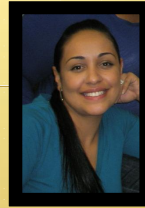
ALAS
Association for Latino American Studies

✦ Extra-curricular student organization formed in Spring 2007 by a small group of Latino students.

✦ According the the founding president, "Latino students felt isolated, ignored and disregarded by both MEC faculty and the administration. We decided to do something about it."

✦ The ALAS mission statement states, "As the Hispanic population at MEC increases, ALAS seeks to fill the knowledge gap, left by the lack of academic courses on the history and culture of Latin America. We promote and support cultural diversity on campus and seek to educate the MEC population regarding the rich cultures of Latin America via cultural and historic events. We also seek to provide a safe welcoming haven for Latino students in the Brooklyn community here at MEC."

Background

Domingo Santana: Founder
and 1st President
Education Major

Myra Badillo
1st Vice President
Education Major

Dr. Diaz: Faculty Advisor
Associate Professor
Education Department

Stephanie Perez
1st Secretary
Education Major

Helen Gonzalez
1st Treasurer
Education Major

The ALAS ePortfolio Project

✦ During the 2010-11 school year, the ePortfolio implementation group integrated eportfolios into the club structure by granting access to all ePortfolio members and providing ePortfolio training to the club president.

✦ Initially the club president used ePortfolio as a "filing cabinet" to document past club activities and events.

✦ In November of 2010, the president added a new section/tab to the club ePortfolio titled, "Why ALAS? Member Testimonials" and asked members to contribute their stories.

✦ The first few members to post their stories were the ALAS alumni, who wanted to share their experiences as Latino students at MEC with the newer members.

✦ Gradually this page expanded to include fifteen member testimonials, which became the basis for our qualitative research study.

https://mec-cuny.digication.com/ALAS/Why_ALAS_-_Member_testimonials/published

Project Goals
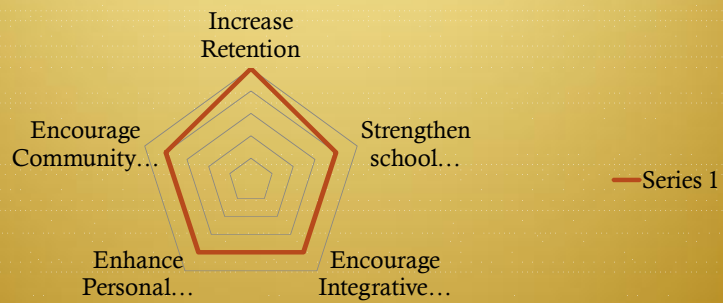
Project Goals/Student Concerns
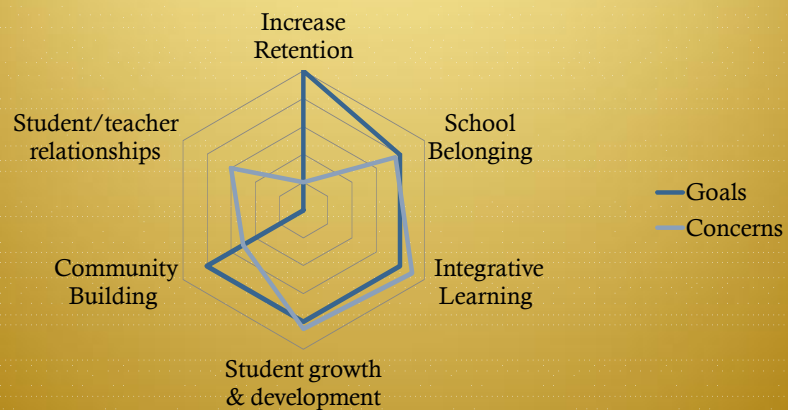
Preliminary Findings

1) **School Belongingness:** ePortfolio provided a means for ALAS students to improve their sense of belongingness

✦ 80% of the students who posted on the ALAS ePortfolio expressed difficulties adjusting and or "belonging" to the MEC community.

✦ 70% indicated that having the opportunity to share their concerns with other Hispanic students via ePortfolio and/or the club did improve their sense of belongingness to the larger college community.

2) **Making Connections**: Seamless Integrative Learning

✦ 90% of participants discussed overlap between academics, co-curricular activities and/or personal lives.

✦ 70% used the Alas ePortfolio as a platform for processing/reflecting on classroom experiences as Latino students.

✦ 25% discussed the impact of personal life struggles/obstacles on academic experiences, in many cases transforming these challenges into strengths.

✦ 55% discussed how participation in a co-curricular activity (ALAS) positively influenced/contributed to their academic /professional success.

Preliminary Findings

3) **Student Growth and Development:**

✦ 77% of our project participants indicated growth and development in one or more of the following areas:

✦ 35% improved their technical expertise are now working as Student Tech Mentors for our ePortfolio implementation program;

✦ 25% indicated growth in the area of personal transformation (ex." I have grown and developed in unforeseen ways," transformative experience," "I am a different person," "boosted my self esteem," "made me a more well-rounded individual," etc.);

✦ 20% indicated professional growth in their career area.

✦ 40% indicated an increase in self knowledge/discovery, primarily cultural identity.

Preliminary Findings

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4) Community Building

The ePortfolio community provided a support system and platform where individuals felt comfortable sharing self-reflections, personal histories, and educational and career goals. Allowing students to participate in the ALAS club online, brought the benefits of club membership and participation to a larger group of non-traditional students who have full-time jobs and families and don't have the time to participate in traditional extra-curricular activities.

 ✦ During the project year, 2010-2011, there was a four-fold increase in the number of ALAS participants, via electronic media format (on-line).

 ✦ 75% of participants discussed the importance of community/group building for enhancing the academic experience ("makes college experience better and more exciting", allows for enlightenment and progression in our community", "strengthened my feeling of belonging to college community", etc).

School Belongingness: Student Voices

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Lack of school belongingness

 ✦ **Mya:** As a Latina woman I never had any issues concerned with race in all my years living in New York. After my first year as a college student at MEC I could write pages answering that question... I was the only Hispanic person in all of my classes for my first year in college. I felt as if I didn't belong.

 ✦ **Johnny**: When I first got to Medgar Evers, I felt like an outsider. I could not relate with my peers or professors, which in my mind was strange because most of my classmates come from the Caribbean, so one would think that I would feel at home.

 ✦ **Wilma:** Coming from a predominantly Dominican high school, it took a long time for me to adjust to the culture of MEC. At first, I did consider transferring to City College because many of my high school friends attended there. Many of the Latino friends that I made my first semester had transferred as well and I believed it was only a matter of time before I would make the decision as well.

Making Connections: Student Voices

✦ **Wilma:** I believe that everything fell into place when I was feeling out of place. While Medgar students felt pride in belonging to a country or the history of Medgar, and ALAS students were being connected to illuminating Latin American history, here I was disconnected from the two. Because of the combination of both of these worlds I have experienced, I have now set out in search for my cultural lineage. I have now set out on discovering not only myself, but my people as a whole, and ALAS has helped make this possible for me.

✦ **Mya:** As the former Vice President of ALAS, I can proudly say that having a voice and being part of something that represents you as a student makes the college experience all the more better and exciting. During my time at ALAS, we had events that spoke upon issues prevalent in the Latin culture, celebrated and recognized the different groups within the Latin people, and simply supported each other in so many ways.

Growth and Development: Student Voices

✦ **Josie:** Having felt so powerless for the majority of my life due to having to conform to so many rules, I felt lucky to be part of a group that shared one voice, one mission, and one dream. No ideas are turned away without fully exploring the possibilities, which is why everyone feels that they can freely express themselves. Overall, being both a member and [officer] of the ALAS club has been for me a transformative experience that has helped me to grow and develop in unforeseen ways. I am a vastly different person today than I was just two short years ago and I owe the majority of this change to ALAS.

✦ **Stacey:** I believe during my last year, ALAS could not have come about at a better time. This **organization helped me in learning more about my heritage as a Latina**, as well as other Latino heritages, in order **to help me become more aware of the issues surrounding our people in this country and around the world**. Also, I believe it **helped me become, by the time I graduated, a much more well-rounded individual**. By participating in this club, **I learned more about myself, and, as a teacher, understand Latinos in the classroom and become more aware of being a culturally responsive teacher in helping them and all of my students achieve academic success.**

Community Building: Student Voices

✦ **Vickie**: In fall 2010, I found ALAS or they found me. Joining them has strengthened my feeling of belonging in the MEC family. ALAS provided that support and extra encouragement I needed as a Latino in a campus community that has a high percentage of African American and Caribbean students. I feel fortunate that I was able to join such a positive and energetic group of people that can express and encourage diversity in an already diverse community…I can honestly say that my future as an early childhood education educator would be because of the strong support I have received.

Future Plans

✦ Since ePortfolio provides a means of connecting to broader audiences (Cambridge, 2008), we anticipate that the broader Medgar Evers College community will also expand its connection to the Hispanic student population as they are exposed to the ALAS student club ePortfolio.

✦ Collaboration with Enrollment Management: Provide information and access to ALAS ePortfolio for newly admitted Hispanic students to introduce them to the eP Latino Community upon admission to MEC.

✦ Establishment of "Latino Resources Warehouse" section/tab on ALAS ePortfolio with links to Latino music and art, literature, relevant research, cultural websites and on-line resources and journals.

ALAS
Association for Latino American Studies

2010-2011

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