

## Pasadena City College partnership helps community college students transfer - and beyond

By Emma Gallegos, Staff Writer

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Pasadena City College students in the Rising Stars program listen to a PCC graduate turned USC student, give advice during a Rising Stars meeting Friday, October 9, 2009 at PCC in Pasadena. (SGVN/Staff Photo by Sarah Reinqewirtz)

Henry Ammar hadn't thought of himself as Ivy League material before.

He put off college while he worked in the music industry and coached a cheerleading squad, and even when he started at Pasadena City College a few years ago he only took classes sporadically.

But the 29-year-old didn't take school seriously until last year, when he applied to be a "rising star" in Resources for Educational and Employment Opportunities (REEO) at PCC. Now he is on track to transfer to the Marshall School of Business at USC, and he's even confident that he has a shot at an Ivy, Harvard Business School.

"Now I'm going full force with my education," Ammar said.

REEO targets students like Ammar, who have serious plans to transfer to a 4-year university, but need an extra push.

"It's easy to kind of get lost in the system," Ammar said. "If you don't fully understand the transfer process and have someone mentoring and pushing you along, it's easy to get discouraged."

REEO founder Scott Stimpfel knows that firsthand. Before he worked as an investment banker on Wall Street, he was a transfer student from PCC who says had trouble making the jump to USC.

Transfer students aren't being pushed in their early college years to apply for internships, and corporations aren't making a hard push to recruit students at community colleges the same way they might at USC or UCLA.

Even now, Stimpfel says he has trouble convincing some corporations that they should

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look to the community college students in his program.

"These people will tell you that they don't recruit people from community college," Stimpfel said.

The stigma against community college students is strong, and some employers don't think they work as hard or are as smart as students at 4-year colleges. Many community colleges students end up internalizing that stigma, he said.

But Stimpfel has had luck working with companies where he could find community

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college alumni, like KPMG and Bank of America. He has tapped into these people to help him build up the programming in REEO.

Most of the students are already doing well academically but need help building confidence and figuring out the nitty-gritty details of trying to make it outside the classroom.

Thea Hughes, a transfer student at UC Riverside, said that even though she's extroverted, the program helped her boost her confidence and polish the business skills that will help her succeed at UC Riverside and beyond.

Employees from KPMG and Bank of America come in and talk to students about networking, putting together a resume and going on job interviews. These companies help students build up their resume, too, by offering internships.

The draw for the program, students say, is the network of other students who join the program.

Hughes said even the business fraternities have nothing on the friends that she made and helped support her through the REEO program.

The program started at PCC, but it's grown to four other local college campuses, including Glendale and East Los Angeles community colleges, Stimpfel said.

And he's hoping to grow even more. He's starting a pilot program in Brooklyn at Kingsborough College.

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