

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TIMES



Community college and REEO alumna Kaitlin Terpstra-Sweeney now attends the University of Michigan.

Providing students the resources to succeed
REEO offers community colleges students networking opportunities with four-year institutions, businesses

BY CARISA CHAPPELL,
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Scott Stimpfel is on a mission to change the mindset of students, universities and businesses when it comes to community colleges.

As a former student at **Pasadena City College** (California) who experienced firsthand the challenges of transferring to a university, Stimpfel in 2007 co-founded the nonprofit **Resources for Educational and Employment Opportunities** (REEO), a “one-stop shop” program for community college students to help them in part prepare to transfer and succeed at a four-year college, find job internships and work in their career fields.

The organization has grown from operating at his alma mater to currently serving nine community colleges in the Los Angeles and New York area. Stimpfel, who left his full-time job in finance last year to focus on REEO, plans to operate at more than 20 community colleges in 2010.

Often, community college students are not ready for college-level academic work or don't have the connections as their peers at four-year institutions to develop critical networks to help them advance in college or work, Stimpfel said. REEO's mission is to provide those critical connections to level the playing field.

“REEO does not throw money at community college students, close our eyes and hope they will transfer and be successful at a university,” Stimpfel said. “Whether it is having a professional resume, networking, mock interview or internships, REEO provides students with all of these things plus more.”

Comfortable on campus

Many two-year college students already have the academic aptitude for

success. Marian Mikhail, a student from **Glendale Community College** who participates in REEO, recently found out that she is one of 34 undergraduate students selected to participate in a Public Policy Leadership Conference at Harvard University. Stimpfel shared information to the participants about the leadership conference months ago and encouraged them to apply.

But some community college students are intimidated by the prospect of attending large universities, such as University of California Los Angeles and the University of Southern California (USC), which are REEO partners. To help them become acquainted and comfortable with universities, REEO holds many of its workshops for transferring students on university campuses, and it encourages participants to meet with university professors.

One community college student sat in on a class at USC and the professor later talked with her about her aspirations and invited her back the following week to hear a guest speaker.

As a result of such interactions, students in the program begin to see themselves as university students, which helps to break down a mental barrier to transferring that many students have, Stimpfel said.

To date, 95 percent of students in the REEO program who have applied to a four-year university have transferred. The news of that kind of success spreads quickly. At PCC, more than 600 students applied for the program, but REEO—which receives funding from corporations, individual and family foundations—could only accept about 80 students because of financial constraints.

Dressing the part

Preparing for post-graduate success is also a goal for REEO. As a transfer student at USC, Stimpfel said he noticed that many of his peers were making plans for internships and careers. Community college students often don't have access to any type of professional development training to help them secure similar work experience, he said.

"Many of these students don't have family members who are in white-collar jobs, they don't see that in the community and they don't see their dads with business suits or business cards," Stimpfel said.

While changing the way students think about professionalism is one hurdle, getting them to look the part is another. Stimpfel requires students in the program to carry business cards and wear professional business attire to workshops, transfer programs and other events.

At first, some students think that the requirement is silly, Stimpfel said. But they soon understand the importance of looking the part once they meet with university and business representatives, he said.

For students in the program who can't afford to buy a suit, REEO has partnered with the nonprofit **Dress for Success** to help women in the program dress the part. (REEO is looking for a partnership that will assist men in the program with

business attire.)

Exposure on both sides

REEO is also helping to open corporations to quality community college students, Stimpfel said. There are an increasing number of companies looking at two-year college students that haven't typically recruited from community colleges, such as **Bank of America** and accounting firm **KPMG**. Both companies are REEO partners and hiring community college students for internships.

Dale Pattugalan, a former PCC student who now attends the University of San Diego, earned an internship with KPMG through REEO and was recently offered a full-time job in the audit division upon her graduation this spring.

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