

THE PULSE

A student newsletter in touch with the heartbeat of the community

Volume XIII, Issue 1

Palo Alto College, San Antonio, Texas

October 2010

Banner brings students, faculty and staff together

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Palo Alto College is more like a family than ever before because of Banner.

Banner is the new system used by the Alamo Colleges to maintain all student, financial and human resources records. All five colleges are now unified into one system with one database, so students now have a Banner ID number and can register for classes at multiple colleges.

Despite the rough first weeks of the Fall 2010 semester and the many obstacles faced by students in the aftermath of the new system's implementation, students, faculty and staff strengthened the sense of community on campus, coming together as one family to say in confidence: "We survived Banner."

The Student Government Association put together a survey for students to give their feedback on registration and their Banner experiences. They hope that "this voice will bring awareness, maybe to the president or to the board... and will let the students know that they're not alone," said Patricia Lopez, vice president of SGA.

The SGA held a T-shirt and paleta giveaway on September 15 outside the Palomino Center for students while they answered the survey documenting their experiences. On the T-shirts were the words "We Survived Banner." Students also signed a thank you letter to all the staff at Palo Alto College.

Of the more than 700 students surveyed, close to 60 percent said they encountered problems when registering for fall classes. However, 74 percent said their issues were resolved satisfactorily.

"We understand that Banner is not going to go, but we just want the board to know what Palo Alto went through ... how

Palo Alto students feel," said Lopez.

Many students, like freshman Nicole Balderas who majors in Communication faced numerous difficulties with this new system, including registering at the wrong college and dropped classes.

"I had checked my classes a day before I started school and had noticed that they had dropped one of my classes, so the next

students had to wait in long, time-consuming lines.

Although there were many students who encountered many problems with the beginning of Fall 2010 semester, there were also many students, like Christopher Cardenas, a sophomore at Palo Alto, who did not.

"I haven't had any problems with the new Banner system. Everything is perfect with my classes," Cardenas said.

According to Elizabeth Aguilar-Villarreal, interim director of Enrollment Services, Banner is a learning process for students as well as faculty and staff. Students must know their Banner ID number, which replaced their Social Security Number, to access their records. Aguilar-Villarreal explained that students must keep their personal information, especially their phone numbers and e-mails up-to-date within ACES. Students must check their ACES e-mail daily after registering in case their classes have been canceled.

"If the phone number is wrong, we cannot get a hold of you. Then you do not know about your class changes," said Aguilar-Villarreal.

Dr. Thomas Cleary, vice chancellor for Planning, Performance and Information Systems, wrote that Banner improved security, registered more students than ever before, streamlined six portals into one, increased system availability and enforced academic policies (e.g., prerequisites) of the Alamo Colleges for the first time ever. Also, students may now get their transcripts from any one of the Alamo Colleges, regardless of where they earned the credits.

"At the end of the day," said Cleary, "it is people (not software or processes) that make the real difference. Rather than criticize or complain, our college family came together to serve and support students. Adversity is the breeding ground for leadership, and we clearly have many 'leaders'... among us."



Students write thank you notes to Palo Alto's staff after surviving registration. Photo courtesy the Student Government Association.

day I had to figure out what went wrong," she said.

Balderas never was notified about being dropped and all of her contact information was correct. A staff member from the English Department resolved her situation.

One of the major problems with registration was mainly a result of having more than one Banner ID per student.

When students applied to the Alamo Colleges, they were unaware that they had been accepted, so they kept reapplying. Each time a student reapplied, they received a new Banner ID.

Because students had more than one Banner ID, staff had to look through all the IDs of that name and match them with their correct ID. This process was not fast, since there are many common last names, so stu-