At West Los Angeles College, approximately 26% of students are enrolled in partially or fully online courses. At some colleges, this would be a source for concern as success rates for online students are often lower than that of students in traditional classes. This tendency is not the case at West.

A recent State Chancellor’s Office Report on distance education showed that in the Fall of 2012 the retention rate for students in online classes at West was equal to the retention rate for students in traditional classes (80%). The statewide average shows a 6% gap. The success rate for West students in online courses is just 3% behind students in traditional classes. By contrast, the statewide average shows a 9% gap. “To put this in context, on average two to three more students are successful in every online class at West because our faculty assiduously pursues pedagogy and tech skills training,” explained West President Nabil Abu-Ghazaleh. “If you are one of those students, your success, semester after semester, is not just a better statistic.”

The on-going faculty training provided through our peer-to-peer education program – Tech Fair – is a major contributor to the high quality of instruction West students receive online. This is complimented by online services for students including tutoring, academic advising, a help desk, an E-Library, E-books, and even a short seminar on how to succeed in online classes.

West offers 30 degrees and certificates which can be completed online and 22 degrees and certificates which can be completed primarily online.

ABOUT TECH FAIR:
Tech Fair conducts as many as 90 workshops per semester for faculty and staff, taught by West faculty and staff. Workshops include using technology to teach and other best practices. This year’s topics include: Educator’s Arsenal (Apps, Plug-ins and Web Resources); Life is Better With a Website Enhanced Classroom; Project-Based Learning Using Virtual Environments; Oovoo, Instagram, Hangout, Texting – Reaching Your Students Where They Are; and Creating an Interactive Electronic Syllabus. View the full schedule at www.wlac.edu/Techfair/.
Running the largest community college district in the entire country is a huge responsibility. The demands of the job are varied, from striving for student success to balancing financial priorities.

Dr. Adriana Barrera, interim chancellor of the Los Angeles Community College District, is uniquely qualified for the role, having spent three decades in higher education. She began her career in 1982 at Austin Community College in Texas, later becoming president of El Paso Community College and, thereafter, president of Los Angeles Mission College.

In 2005, she was named LACCD’s senior vice chancellor, a title later changed to deputy chancellor.

Earlier last summer, the LACCD Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Barrera interim chancellor and she will continue to serve the District in this capacity until a permanent chancellor is named.

Recently, she sat down to talk about her new position, about the challenges and rewards she has experienced and about the innovative changes coming to LACCD over the next two years.

Q: How do you see your role as interim chancellor?
A: I feel a key to being successful in this role is maintaining open channels of communication to ensure that we all have the same goal in mind which is to serve students to the best of our abilities.

Q: As the interim chancellor, do you feel you are bridging the gap between your predecessor and your successor?
A: My appointment is temporary in nature, but the work goes on. We can’t afford to stand still. Whether it’s the internal pressures of governance or the external pressures of accountability, the expectation is that we are going to continue working towards improvement, towards student success.

Q: What’s it like being chancellor?
A: It’s actually more fun than I anticipated. There is something in terms of the status of the position that is very real, a recognition that the holder of this office merits great respect and perhaps a bit of admiration. I understand the awesome responsibility I have been handed. I realize that statements I make today, decisions I make on a day-to-day basis, affect thousands of lives.

Q: Now that you are out in public more, do you find that there is a good understanding of the District, how big it is, how many people it serves?
A: No, most members of the greater Los Angeles community are not aware of the size of the District. They may be able to name one or two of our colleges, but to name all nine, for an outsider, is very daunting. When they hear how many students we serve, how many employees we have, how big our faculty is, it shocks some people. Even internally, people tend to know their respective colleges intimately, but not have as familiar a feeling about the rest of the District. I’m hopeful that, by promoting this new electronic newsletter, we will start to spread the word to our faculty, staff and maybe some of our students about what’s happening with regard to the Student Success Initiative or strategic plan goals across the District, from Wilmington to East L.A. and from Hollywood to Woodland Hills. It’s important to me that we start doing a better job of spreading the word.

Q: Does the improving economy provide new opportunities for the District?
A: It will help us regain some of the funding that we lost and maybe reinstitute programs that we had to put on hold. We are now able to ramp up orientation for first-year students and some of the wraparound services we provide for them. Despite being able to increase our class offerings, we are still trying to return to the funding level we were at in 2008. We are not there yet.

Q: What kind of feedback do you get on the District’s building program and the new look it is bringing to the campuses?
A: When members of the community come out to any of our colleges and see the construction and the new buildings, they marvel at them. “Wow, this has really changed,” is the normal reaction. It’s interesting that a lot of people are not even aware that our building program underwent so much scrutiny. They just see the results. They see the new buildings – the libraries, student services, media arts, etc. – and they see that we are filling them up. Public sentiment is very favorable.
Q&A with Interim Chancellor Adriana Barrera, Ph.D. (continued)

Q: Finally, what’s ahead for the District, the projects you will be focused on in the future?

A: 2015 seems to be a critical year. Our funding for the Student Success Initiative, formerly called Matriculation, will change and we are planning for that. There are a number of processes that have to be altered within student services such as the way we welcome our students, provide them orientation and an assessment, direct them to our counseling service and develop educational plans. So we’ve got much to do between now and the fall of 2015 when the funding formula changes to make sure all nine colleges are consistent and will be reporting data in the same manner.

We also have ahead of us the completion of our Student Information System (SIS), the modernization project that we have been working on since 2008. I was involved in the early planning stages as an executive sponsor and remain fully supportive of the new system. Students will be able to pull up their transcripts on their own, verify their educational plans online and streamline so much of the reporting. We hope to pilot SIS next year, then fully launch in 2015.

It looks like 2015 will also be the year that we have one accreditation cycle for all nine colleges and the educational services center; so, we have to set everything in motion right now for that eventuality.

Finally, we’ve got a fiber optics project moving forward. Our goal is to provide the latest and the best technology. Once that project is completed, it will make our academic labs, our smart classrooms and all of our administrative processes much less cumbersome. We will be able to meet the needs of the District for at least the next 30 years.

All of these major projects will transform the way we do business in the District. I feel very fortunate to be sitting where I’m sitting today, in a position to make crucial decisions that will have a long-lasting impact. Two years from now, when that impact is fully realized, I’ll get to see some of the fruits of today’s labor. So, I’m excited about being able to shepherd these projects through to completion.

Los Angeles Harbor College Set to Launch New Approach to Student Success

Under a newly established Student Success Umbrella committee, Los Angeles Harbor College is redefining how it will ensure that incoming students have a successful first year of college. Under the “umbrella,” five work groups are preparing new ways to address student needs, focusing on incoming high school and continuing students with 10 units or less. The work groups—Personal Connection, Transition to College, Programs of Study, Early Alert, and Professional Development—have set goals and are developing action items and outcomes that will provide the following: a prescribed, full-time schedule of classes, including math, English, personal development, and an elective in the student’s declared major; core matriculation services as identified in SB 1456, the Student Success Act of 2012; and retention and intervention strategies.

This new Harbor approach to student success, set to start in Fall 2014, is based on research that indicates that students are more likely to succeed under certain circumstances which include: being able to make a significant connection to the college; completing assessment, orientation, and an education plan; being placed into a program of study from day one; and being monitored throughout the first year, while receiving support from faculty, staff, and administrators who benefit from targeted professional development opportunities.
Lively debates and informative Q&A sessions are the earmarks of Pierce College’s Day of Politics, a continuing series from the Department of Political Science that brings speakers, candidates and experts to the stage to explore and debate topical issues.

About 300 guests attended the Oct. 24th event, organized by Professor Denise Robb, which opened with actress and disability rights activist Nancy Becker Kennedy. She talked about the history of the disability rights movement and the current battle to keep disabled people from forcibly being placed in nursing homes. Injured in a diving accident at age 20, Kennedy went on to complete her master’s degree in communications and become a public television news producer, published playwright, and an award-winning writer.

The next session featured Matt Dababneh (Democrat) and Susan Shelley (Republican) in a debate to see who would best serve Assembly District 45, which includes Pierce College. Some surprise comments included Dababneh’s support and wait-and-see approach to the two-tiered funding of community colleges and both candidates’ support for the decriminalization of marijuana. Clear differences of opinion involved raising the minimum wage and the recently passed Proposition 30, Temporary Taxes to Fund Education, both of which Shelley opposes.

The afternoon ended with an educational presentation about the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) by Adriana Canales, who works with a non-profit youth collective to help young people sign up for health insurance. Clashing perspectives emerged from the audience and a spirited Q&A ensued.

Student co-sponsors from the Alpha Gamma Sigma Honor Society, the Associated Students Organization, and the National Society for Leadership and Success spoke briefly and introduced the guest speakers. The next highly anticipated Day of Politics is coming in spring 2014.
Wilshire Grand Project Creates New Hospitality Education Path for Los Angeles Trade Tech Students

Project Developer & Architectural Team Presents $150,000 to Los Angeles Trade Tech College for Use in Hospitality Training Programs

A new career pathway is being created at Los Angeles Trade Technical College with the help of some community partners. The Wilshire Grand project team presented a $150,000 check to Trade Tech to help fund hospitality training pathways for students. The funds will not only enhance training in culinary arts but also will assist in developing curricula in several hospitality areas.

Chris Martin, who is the CEO of AC Martin Partners and Martin Project Management, presented the check to LATTC President Larry Frank at a news conference in front of the campus learning center. Martin stated that the new Wilshire Grand hotel complex will attract many of its employees from LATTC. The new Wilshire Grand hotel complex, currently under construction, will be the tallest building in Los Angeles. It will offer 900 4-star plus hotel rooms as well as an array of fine dining options. Martin learned about a personal link to Trade Tech when he took a look at the original designs of Trade Tech’s oldest buildings and discovered that his grandfather, whom his company is named after, was the architectural engineer for those buildings in the 1920s.

Los Angeles Trade-Technical College has the oldest continuous college-based culinary arts program in the country and continues to produce highly trained students who are hired throughout the region. Culinary Arts Department chair Steve Kasmar was on hand to thank the Wilshire Grand team for having confidence in the College and its programs. Culinary Arts student Xochitl Baca, speaking on behalf of her classmates, said that she was excited about the opportunities soon to be offered by the Wilshire Grand. She noted that it will be the most spectacular hotel experience in the western U.S. with the most spectacular employees, due to their training at Trade Tech.