

# CHALLENGE PHOENIX

## College Life Made Easy

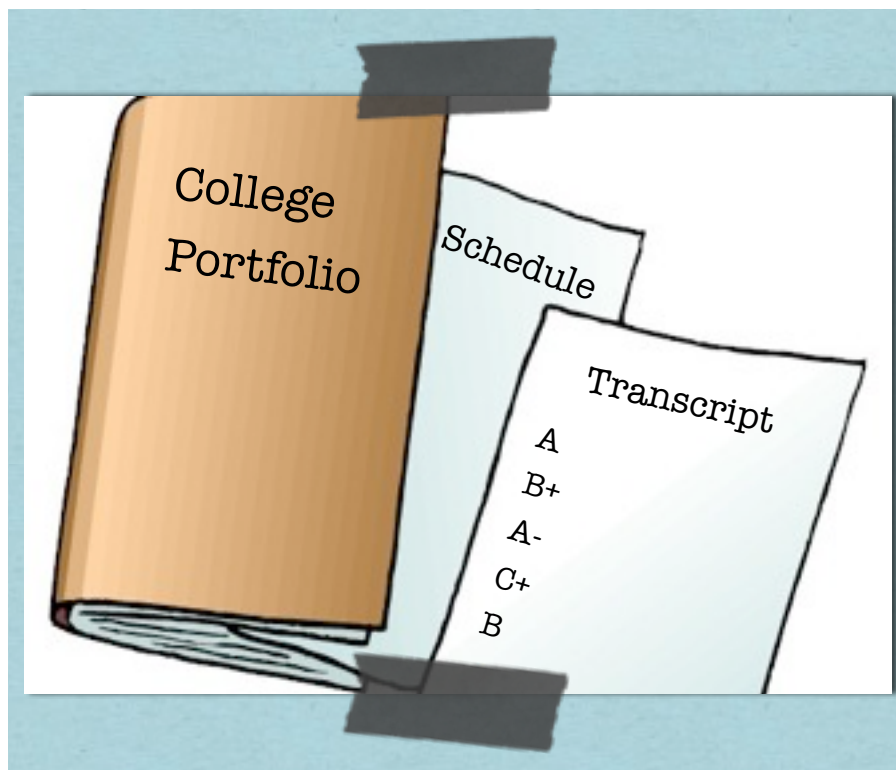
THE COLLEGE PORTFOLIO ACTIVITY DURING STUDENTS' OFF-PERIODS PROMISES TO HELP THEM PREPARE FOR COLLEGE

BY RAQUEL AZCUÉ

As Challenge students returned to school from Winter Break, many were overjoyed to find that in place of their college classes which had yet to start, they would be privileged enough to have one or more off-periods. This excitement was short lived.

As students were ushered to the commons on the first day of the semester to hear Dean Goodman and Dean Covington speak, moans, groans, and complaints permeated the room. The two deans announced that the students' beloved off-periods were to be replaced by a workshop-like activity in which students were to create college portfolios.

The portfolio was to include students' degree plans, transcripts, writing samples and in-depth descriptions of high school achievements and activities. The idea was to set it apart from, as Dean Goodman puts it, a "one-dimensional"



resume, as well as to highlight the student's strengths and bolster their weaknesses in order to help them improve.

The concept for students to build their portfolios was conceived by the CECHS administration as a means for students to reflect on their performance in classes, as well as a way to prepare students more thoroughly for college. "This is what high achieving students have in place," insisted Mrs. Goodman, who believes that the portfolio will greatly help every student. She feels that, "All students, especially at an early college, need to be

trained how to establish their own goals and monitor their progress."

In addition to helping students stay on top of their work, Mrs. Goodman, Dr. Covington, and College Access Coordinator Alma Webber hope that it will also rescue students from the anguish of failing grades. They believe that if students were to document their performance in their portfolios, the act of having to put down a D or F would motivate students to improve upon that specific subject and overall. This is a way for students "To seize

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# Back With A Vengeance

AFTER LAST YEAR'S EXPONENTIAL IMPROVEMENT, THE CHALLENGE BOYS SOCCER TEAM HOPES TO PROVE THEIR TALENT WITH THE 2010 SEASON.

**By Nathaniel Tedros and Michael Wiggins**

Despite the fact that the Challenge boys soccer team has had a less than perfect win record, last season seemed to mark the beginning of a new era. With a win against Milby and ties against Madison, Bellaire, and Milby (in their second match), eyebrows raised as Challenge was having an impressive season.

The question that this poses is: Will Challenge continue to progress as they have, or was last season simply a fluke? While each new year brings new talent to the team, the loss of older, more experienced players is inevitable.

The team will be missing both of its captains from last season,



Andres Salazar of the Challenge Eagles maneuvers the ball away from an approaching opponent in the first game of the season against Milby.

former seniors Antonio Menjivar and Jared Sliter. Antonio was one of the team's leading scorers last season and was twice voted Second Team All-District player, while Jared was voted Third Team All-District Player for his senior year season, so the loss of their leadership will be a significant detriment.

Similarly, one the team's other leading scorers, Dwayne Bolden, will not be eligible to play this year because he is a fifth year senior. Also, Second Team All-District goalie Fernando Piña no longer attends Challenge Early

College High School, and thus no longer plays for the team.

In addition to the rearrangement of the roster that must occur, the team as a whole will need to get back to the shape that they were in last year, and regenerate the momentum that propelled them to their most productive season to date. Captain Josh Sanchez believes that they, "Need to catch back up to the physical state [they] were in late last season." He also feels that they

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# The Classroom... Of the Future



HISD'S ROLL-OUT OF VIRTUAL SCHOOL LABS HAS MADE ITS WAY TO CHALLENGE, ALLOWING STUDENTS TO EARN AND RECOVER GRADUATION-REQUIRED CREDITS THROUGH A COMPUTER-BASED CLASSROOM.

by **Michael Wiggins**

As a man falls backward in his chair, a young woman astutely glides to center stage to describe his erroneous judgement as a 'tragic flaw', the element of Greek tragedies describing a fatal error leading to the downfall of a tragic hero. "Or was it fate that the chair

fell backwards?" she asks. "Freewill?"

This sort of skit marks the introduction to a typical English lesson in Virtual School, the new computerized classroom setting which has been instated at Challenge in order to give students an additional option for attaining required credits.

According to Principal Justin Fuentes, the addition of the Virtual School lab, "was an HISD-wide decision," entailing a rolling out of "desktop labs at larger schools and laptop setups at smaller schools like Challenge."

HISD's goal, according to Fuentes, is to increase graduation percentages by allowing students a "second chance" to earn credits by

giving them a more self-paced learning method.

Of course, students will not be left entirely independent in their studies; Chemistry teacher Dr. Ericka Lawson has been given the task of overseeing the students' progression and development in their courses.

As per HISD requirements, Dr. Lawson has been trained in every aspect of the Virtual School program, and is able to do everything from tracking student's progress through their lessons to monitoring the amount of time they actually spend working. "I get to play Big Brother," she jests.

Rather than unilaterally logging the amount of hours that a student is logged in, the system tracks exactly what activities students are engaged in. In this way, Virtual School instructors such as Dr. Lawson are able to ensure that no student slips through the cracks and fails to finish their coursework.

Dr. Lawson believes the Virtual School program is a leap forward in teaching students with difficulty learning by typical means. "We teach for an auditory learner; the teacher talks at you, you write it down." The problem, as she sees it, is that "Our regular system doesn't differentiate between the various types of learners."

According to senior Cory Weatherly, who is recovering an English 4 credit through Virtual School, "It's a pretty good alternative to the regular classroom course."

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## Portfolio

control of their future,” stated Ms. Goodman.

The portfolio further supports students’ growth by being a key factor in whether or not they may take an extra college course. The decision would be made by either of the deans or Ms. Webber based on the contents of the portfolio, the idea being that the portfolio would reflect the student’s work ethic and ability to handle an extra course.

The portfolio will be not only an asset for the present but for the future as well. As students graduate from CECHS and leave for college, many have trouble developing contacts and connections with professors, which leaves them with few letters of recommendation to use for jobs or internships. The portfolio mends this fault on the track to a successful college career by allowing students to have recommendation letters on file, making their lives easier.

Perhaps the portfolio assignment isn’t merely “busy-work”, as some disgruntled and impassioned students are inclined to called it. Clearly the administrators are trying to help us, just as they have since day one at Challenge. While creating a college portfolio may consume the off periods that

upperclassmen have grown accustomed to, it is an indispensable asset to any student who wishes to be prepared for life after high school. As Dean Covington explains, “It’s not about getting into college; It’s about having a successful college career, and you can’t be successful if you don’t know where you’ve been and where you’re going.”

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## Soccer

“Need to have more drive and intensity and also team coordination.”

These challenges will force the remaining players from last season to step up in order to recapture the unprecedented success they had last year. Coach Elizondo believes that last year’s tour de force has left a positive impression on the team that will improve their team chemistry. He feels that “A lot of our players have now made the transition from middle school to high school.”

Whether or not the team will continue to flourish as it did last year now that it is under the leadership of captains Joshua Sanchez and Pablo Delgado is uncertain, and whether or not the team will finally see a winning season is even less foreseeable. Nevertheless, Coach Elizondo seems optimistic: “I expect nothing but playoffs.”

## VSchool

Most importantly, the students seem to be responding to this setup well. According to Dr. Lawson, one of her Virtual School Students has logged in over fifty hours in their first two weeks using the program.

What makes this method of a learning so palatable to a demographic of students who often, in the experience of Dr. Lawson, “tend to have a short attention span”? Cory feels it is because “there are so many videos.” “I mean *a lot* of videos,” he emphasizes.

While this surely helps students achieve the feeling of having a teacher present, as Cory puts it, “There’s really no alternative to having a teacher there to answer all of your questions when you need them to.”

Perhaps this system is actually more favorable than the traditional classroom setting to an unrecognized demographic of learners at Challenge and the rest of HISD. Surely it appeals to students in that it provides them with a means to recover credits other than through summer school; however, Virtual School is addressing an issue of far greater importance than mere convenience. Students across HISD now have a means to learn other than that which clearly does not suit them, and that in itself is an instant sign of success.