New College, New Model (Excerpts of news story)
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Not much is truly unique in higher education. But the new Ameritas College sure sounds different.

Ameritas, launched last week, has a singular focus on Latinos who are working adults. It is part of Brandman University, a private, nonprofit institution with 26 campuses in California and Washington. Co-located at four campuses in Southern California’s Inland Empire, Ameritas will offer relatively low-cost, accelerated associate and bachelor degree tracks. Its curriculum is designed to “crack the code” of helping Latinos get to graduation.

When it opens its doors this fall, courses at the college will be structured around the busy work schedules of students. The college wide standard will be a three-hour, in-person class each week, with roughly 2.5 hours of additional online classwork. All courses will feature English immersion with “dual language” support from bilingual faculty and staff. Most of the teaching will be in English but Spanish will also be a tool.

Tuition at Ameritas will be $360 per credit at the associate level and $470 per credit for bachelor programs, which works out to about $22,000 for a 60-credit associate degree and $56,000 for a 120-credit bachelor degree.

But Ameritas, like Brandman, is shooting for higher completion rates than public colleges have, said Gary Brahm, Brandman’s chancellor. Brandman has a 68 percent six-year graduation rate for bachelor degree-seeking students, he said. The university also has a 2.3 percent loan default rate, he said, despite enrolling large numbers of lower-income students -- 47 percent of undergraduates receive Pell Grants.

Like historically black colleges, [t]his university can do things public colleges can’t, by gearing its approach specifically to the needs of Latino students rather than just “dabbling around the edges.” Ameritas used research to design its curriculum, including focus groups with Latino adults. In addition to the English immersion approach, the college features several completion-oriented practices that college leaders identified as particularly promising with Latinos.

For example, remediation is embedded in credit-bearing courses with extra support for students with remedial needs. All students must take initial courses designed to teach them how to be successful. And degree paths will feature an “upside-down curriculum” where students will take courses early on that are relevant to their areas of concentration and future jobs, which is an attempt to “pique and sustain their interest,” college officials said.

The college is also following the Degree Qualifications Profile, a Lumina Foundation project that attempts to set standards for what degree recipients should know.

… [T]he college's academic programs are accelerated. Students will be able to take nine courses per year, including six eight-week courses and three 16-week courses.

“They move through as a cohort,” said Bullock.