

## ON COURSE FOR SUCCESS AT KSU/STARK

*By Adele Gelb – Program Officer, Stark Education Partnership*

The school newspaper article carried the headline “The whereabouts of the mysterious Mr. G.” Students at Canton South High wanted to know where Ryan Gracia, their school based OCAN college access advisor, was disappearing to on a regular basis. It turns out that he was still “taking care” of Canton South students – only he has been supporting them on the campus of Kent State University Stark Campus. Ryan has been working at Canton South as part of the Stark Education Partnership’s school based OCAN advisory project. Funded by a OCAN Success grant, Ryan Gracia has been providing transition support to Canton South college freshmen at Kent. The results have been encouraging.

“We’re seeing higher retention rates for Canton South’s graduates,” Mary Southards reported after first semester, “and that’s an important accomplishment. We know we offer important support to all our students but it’s not always easy to create the connections.”

Ryan’s office in Kent Stark’s student center places him right in the middle of the academic support system – next door to the director of the Academic Success Center; the tutoring center; and the student disability center. Helping students to make connections involves tracking their progress, talking over their challenges, suggesting support and walking

them down the hall to introduce them. The campus center also houses a snack bar and restaurant. Ryan made himself available and accessible, often sharing a soft drink with students to talk about their successes and progress.

“My job has been made easier by the terrific staff and services available to students here at Kent.” Ryan explained. “I began by contacting students to attend ‘Welcome Back Saturday’ to familiarize them with my new office and services.” Students met with Ryan throughout the year to talk about schedules, study skills, midterm grades and financial aid. He connected students with tutoring services, testing accommodation services, financial aid and academic advising.

Student response has been very positive. Ryan’s knows his work is successful when a student says to him, “G, I don’t need you anymore. I know how to do this now.”

“This pilot project lays the groundwork for further understanding what works for first generation student success,” Adele Gelb, OCAN Project Director for the Stark Education Partnership, explained. “We look forward to the final data from Kent to determine the impact for 2006/7. We believe it will demonstrate further that students who are comfortable on campus will seek the support they need to be successful.”