

Funding for UCSD's Early Academic Outreach Program: The Key to Increased Cultural Diversity on Campus

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Kim Sykes

One of EAOP's core services: college students provide academic tutoring and mentoring to middle school and high school students.

In the November 30th issue of *The Guardian*, Hadley Mendoza reports in her article "An Invisible Wall," that institutional barriers and limited outreach efforts may be the culprits of stagnant Latino enrollment figures. The article indicates that UCSD's Latino undergraduate student admissions remain consistently low, while Latinos now make up more than 35 percent of California's total population.

The article cites an elitist atmosphere, racism and lack of outreach as the primary reasons for the low figures at UCSD. Hurdles such as the fact that "many Latino students who visit UCSD do not feel welcome on our campus, which makes them opt for other universities; and students from poorer districts, mainly minority students, don't receive the same college preparation, and are critically impaired when formulating their college applications" are fettering diversity on the UCSD campus according to Associated Students Commissioner of Diversity Affairs, Marco Murillo.

"A telling statistic is the fact that only one in five Latino students admitted to UCSD actually enrolls" Mendoza wrote. In light of this fact, it is important to note that there is a program on campus, the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), whose primary mission is to reverse this trend. EAOP hires and trains professional staff and UCSD college students to work in the local community as tutors and mentors to help under-represented students prepare and apply for college. One significant part of this college preparation is taking the required "a-g" classes to be eligible for college admission.

According to the University of California Office of the President (UCOP), "the effectiveness of this partnership is borne out in data about 'a-g' completion and college-going rates for EAOP students. For example, EAOP students are more than twice as likely to complete the 'a-g' requirements as non-EAOP students attending the same schools, 74% for EAOP students compared to 34% for all students statewide."

Agreeing with the premise of "An Invisible Wall", it is true, unfortunately, that outreach programs designed to crumble that wall with a bulldozer are only funded enough to chip away at it with a toothpick. EAOP is constantly under threat of budget cuts and, even worse, complete elimination. The number of Latino students and other under-represented groups admitted could be increased if more fiscal support was given to University programs dedicated to improving diversity through academic preparation.

Instead, the programs increasing diversity, not only on the UCSD campus, but also in the greater collegiate atmosphere locally and nationally, are forever struggling for survival. "Where there's a lack of outreach, high school students may not realize that when they're accepted to UCSD, they can get financial aid and they think they can't afford to attend. When I tell them my experience and how I get money for books, tuition and living expenses, they realize they can do it too" said EAOP mentor and Warren College Senior Engineering Student, Juan Lopez.

It is clear that the lack of diversity in the UC system is a topic of controversy under scrutiny at the moment. *The Orange County Register* ran the article "A Gap Widens" in October this year stating "more of California's high school graduating seniors are Black and Hispanic, but fewer can be found at the University of California." One possible reason for this is the way state funds for educational outreach are allocated.

UCSD's EAOP is state funded. It relies, first, on state allocation of budget for educational outreach, second, on the UC to divide those funds among the various system-wide University outreach programs, then, third, on UCSD to decide how much money to give each of the various campus entities. With the current system of allocating funding, there are many places along the way for EAOP's piece of the pie to dwindle.

Under the pressure of a shrinking budget, EAOP continues to provide the necessary direct link to diversity at UCSD by increasing the college preparedness of first generation and traditionally under-represented and under-served students. The program achieves this by identifying a young cohort of students in as early as the seventh grade and working with them through their senior year of high school toward the goal of college admission.

The program includes: one-on-one academic tutoring and mentoring in the community schools and housing sites by college student tutors, including making sure the students are on track with a-g course requirements; training for standardized tests, including preparation for college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT; guidance on college and financial aid applications, including assistance with personal statements, and organization of parent involvement events like the annual "College Expo" and "UC PREP," where parents are invited to learn about the college application process and financial aid available for their children. EAOP is also partnering in offering high school students online tutoring and online AP and honors classes to expand its reach. New initiatives like holding scholarship workshops and training sessions to get the most out of college fairs are underway, but are in need of funding to maximize the scope and impact.

During the "Campus Tour Event" every spring, EAOP welcomes all eighth graders in the program to UCSD. During the spring tour, student groups from San Diego and Imperial Counties interact with students and faculty, learn about campus activities and student organizations and have the chance to get answers to questions about the University first hand, thereby taking away the intimidation of the University environment.

"The successes of the high school-EAOP partnership go even further than 'a-g' completion. EAOP students took the required exams at more than twice the rate of non EAOP students in schools with an API of 1 and 2. For the entire cohort of EAOP seniors in the class of 2005, the overall college-going rate was 72%. A full 34% of EAOP students were UC eligible, two and half times higher than the statewide eligibility rate. Moreover, the persistence rates of EAOP students who attend UC are equal to or better than their campus counterparts" stated a recent news release by UCOP.

While EAOP is serving these students, Murillo's comments shouldn't fall on deaf ears. "Our education system is failing to prepare all students to be UC-eligible" he said. Despite the work EAOP is doing toward this end, this statement is still true, unfortunately. During the 2003-2004, academic year, EAOP's budget was cut almost in half from the previous year. The staff went from more than 20 full time employees, to now only five. This has an obvious direct impact on the student population in question as the number of schools the program services has been cut drastically. The situation begs the question, "How then, is the program expected to continue helping enrollment of Latino and other under-represented groups, when the number of students it is able to service diminishes in direct proportion to the number of staff able to run the program?"

Not only is EAOP playing a vital role in community outreach, but also the program is one of the largest employers of Latino and other under-represented ethnic groups on campus. "We look for college students who feel comfortable working with this demographic out in the community. Many of our student workers come from similar backgrounds to the high school students they tutor, so they are more effective role models for young, aspiring high school students" said EAOP Assistant Director, Brett Wellington.

The obvious solution to embarrassing low enrollment figures of Latino and other under-represented student populations is to start REALLY valuing diversity by putting funds towards outreach programs that are currently

creating the little diversity that exists. In essence, it is logical to conclude that outreach is not only a needed means to an end of greater ethnic diversity at UCSD, but also that EAOP and programs like it need further funding to increase the positive outcomes toward this end.

Finally, does UCSD truly want to be a University of diversity? If so, focusing on programs like EAOP is the beginning of a solution. More budget and backing of EAOP is the start to improving enrollment figures of Latino and other under-served populations. Only when enrollment improves will UCSD truly achieve a diverse atmosphere on campus and an image as an institution that promotes equal opportunity and ethnic diversity.

Media Contact: Kim Sykes, 858-534-4250

