

The Chancellor's Associates Scholars Program: Promoting Support and Community at UC San Diego as an Emerging HSI



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Author Bios



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Introduction

With a 22% Latina/o/e¹ undergraduate student enrollment the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is considered an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution², or EHSI (Department of Education, 2021). Although UCSD has yet to reach the enrollment threshold required to apply for HSI federal designation, for several years UCSD has provided critical programming that aids student success especially to student populations that reflect California's diverse demographics. One such promising program is the Chancellor's Associates Scholarship Program (CASP), a multifaceted student program that provides a combination of academic, social, and financial support to local, low-income, and mostly first-generation students³.

The purpose of this brief is to highlight these efforts, specifically three key components of the program that aim to attract, retain, and graduate Latina/o/e undergraduate students at UCSD: (1) the impact of the financial scholarship award, 2) the longitudinal student support services that help Latina/o/e students transition and persist at the university, and 3) the meaningful connections that CASP fosters among students, staff, and faculty on campus. Together, these components address the important needs of Latina/o/e undergraduate students as they pursue postsecondary degree attainment. The next section provides important contextual information about how the programming began, how it came to serve a critical mass of Latina/o/e students, and how its various components demonstrate servingness for Latina/o/e students at UCSD.

¹ Some people have challenged the use of the word "Latinx" claiming that the term is an anglicization of the word Latino, and creates pronunciation issues amongst Spanish speakers. In response to this criticism, advocates have moved towards the use of "Latine." (Miranda et al, 2023)

² Emerging HSI is a term used to define higher education institutions that enroll between 15-24% Latino/a/e undergraduate students. For more information see: Santiago, D.A., & Andrade, S.J. (2010). *Emerging HSIs: Serving Latino students*. Washington, DC: Excelencia in Education.

³ For more information visit: <https://casp.ucsd.edu>

Background Information About the CASP

CASP was created in 2013 by Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla to provide access through scholarship funding for local, high academic-achieving students with high financial need admitted to UCSD. Initially, the program was created to serve three local partner high schools in the San Diego region with a critical mass of low-income, first-generation students, many of which identified as Latina/o/e. Since then, the program has added more high schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations that serve students from historically underrepresented and working class backgrounds (Zamacona et al, 2020). As a result of these strategic partnerships, Latina/o/e have represented more than half (55%) of the students served by the CASP, with the goal of providing assistance to and through college. This means that while students apply and transition to college, the program provides guidance and support to navigate research intensive higher education institutions such as UCSD.

It is also important to CASP that students receive support beyond college. Upon graduating from UCSD, students are plugged into a growing CASP alumni network, to build a community where resources and opportunities can be shared. There is also what we call the CASP Student Success Series⁴, which connects students to resources in the areas of financial literacy, career building, and graduate studies. Since the beginning, CASP has worked hard to promote college access, retention, and overall student success for underrepresented groups, including Latino/a/e students. Below we detail three fundamental components of the program that demonstrate servingness at UCSD for Latina/o/e students as an EHSI.

La Beca | The Scholarship

The goal of the *la Beca*, known as the Chancellor's Associates Scholarship, is to promote college access by providing scholarships to recently admitted UCSD students who are identified as high-achieving and in need of financial support (Zamacona et al, 2020). Private donor funding coupled with institutional grants secures the funding for the CASP scholarship that has been awarded to over 2,000 students since its establishment. The scholarship award aims to mitigate the financial burden of paying for tuition, fees, room, board, books, and other college living expenses so that students can focus on their personal, academic, and professional goals. By reducing the cost of attendance, the scholarship award helps working-class students and their families avoid student loans. To be eligible for the scholarship, students must (a) gain admission to UCSD, (b) be a

California resident for tuition purposes, and (c) demonstrate financial need through the University of California's Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan, which is established with family incomes of less than \$80,000. Scholarships are renewed each year as long as the student remains in good academic standing (maintains above a 2.0 GPA) and commits to participation in the program. Students who are AB 540 eligible may also receive the CASP scholarship, as well as students who are not covered by DACA. Providing CASP scholarships to students who are not covered by DACA, serves as an additional resource in serving Latina/o/e students who may also be undocumented.

Offering scholarships is a critical component of CASP, as research suggests that Latina/o/e college students are less likely to take out loans to finance their college education than their non-Latina/o/e counterparts (Elengold et al., 2020). Studies have shown that Latina/o/e students report experiencing financial distress while attending college, which may explain why they tend to work more hours than their peers to offset the cost of their education (Elengold et al, 2020; Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and are more likely to enroll in college part-time (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The comprehensive CASP scholarship has the potential to alleviate these financial barriers and place Latina/o/e students in a favorable position to attend college and graduate debt-free. It is also well documented that financial aid is a significant factor that Latina/o/e students consider when making their college choice decisions (Muñoz & Rincon, 2015) and a generous financial award like the CASP scholarship is designed to solidify UCSD as a final college choice destination. Several Latina/o/e students in the program have expressed that the financial scholarship enables them to attend a highly-ranked research university close to home while avoiding being a financial burden to their families.

Beneficios y Servicio de Apoyo | Student Support Services & Benefits

To accompany the scholarship, CASP also provides longitudinal support services throughout students' undergraduate career. First-year, first-time students and first-year transfer students are grouped into cohorts according to the year that they begin their undergraduate studies at UCSD. Heavy support happens in the first-year transition, tapers off in the second and third year (for first-year students), and wraps back around as students are getting ready to graduate. In their first-year, students are paired with an undergraduate peer mentor in the same academic discipline, and are required to check in with an assigned

4 For more information, please see: <https://sites.google.com/ucsd.edu/winterspring2022/home>

academic advisor once per quarter. During their first quarter, students enroll in a credit-bearing university seminar course where they build community with their peers and receive information about the academic and social supports available to them at the university. In their second and third quarter, they participate in a non-credit bearing university seminar led by professional staff and student facilitators. The seminars are designed to continue to help students acclimate to their new environment by helping students identify resources on campus, understand the expectations of a new academic environment, and build community with their peers. Topics such as: 1) recovering after academic disappointment, 2) building an academic support network, and 3) the realities of imposter syndrome are covered in these seminars.

Based on previous research that found institutional agents are often missing in Latina/o/e students' undergraduate experience (e.g., Dowd et al, 2013), CASP scholars are provided access to a group of dedicated professional staff from the moment they set foot on campus and are available beyond their first-year at UCSD. In the central office, CASP staff conduct quarterly academic progress reports to identify students in need of additional support. When students do not meet the minimum GPA or unit requirements to maintain good academic standing for financial aid purposes, they are asked to be a part of a "Back on Track" workshop led by the retention specialists. The workshop covers strategies to recover after academic disappointment, how to decipher academic notices, the definition of the different academic standings, goal-setting and reflection exercises, and connects students to specific counselors and resources to get back on track. CASP scholars also have access to staff in the financial aid office and housing office who specialize in working with CASP students to help them navigate complex financial aid and housing situations. Lastly, program participants receive a number of non-scholarship benefits that include: early priority registration to enroll in courses, guaranteed on-campus housing, and extended library privileges. Latina/o/e CASP scholars have expressed how benefits like guaranteed housing and early registration alleviate some of the stressors associated with the transition to a large research-intensive university like UCSD.

Creando Comunidad | Creating Community

Lastly, to establish a culture of trust and community, CASP welcomes students through a summer transition program called CASP 101. CASP 101 began as a residential overnight program, and recently transitioned to a hybrid delivery model in response to COVID 19. The program takes place over a week, with a combination of virtual and in-person opportunities for students to connect with university departments, CASP program staff, and their peers. Students are paired with a peer mentor throughout CASP 101, and participate in small group activities designed to build community among participants. The activities are tailored to the unique needs of first-year students and transfer students, which include student panels, workshops from university partners, and peer-led community building activities.

Once on campus, CASP students have access to a physical space on campus where scholarship recipients can go to build *comunidad* (community). The space not only houses all CASP professional staff, but also includes a study lounge with access to computers, free printing, a refrigerator, microwave, and other tools that students, especially students who commute to campus, have been found helpful while on-campus. This dedicated space on campus provides a common place where Latina/o/e students can engage in academic and social integration (Andrade, 2018).

Implications of Practice

As UCSD and other EHSIs strive for HSI designation and begin to define "servingness" at their institution, CASP serves as a promising practice of servingness towards Latina/o/e students within and beyond academic outcomes and experiences (Garcia et al, 2019). For institutions that desire to move from simply enrolling Latina/o/e students to serving them, CASP's longitudinal programming and comprehensive financial support represents the highest level of investment and commitment to serve Latina/o/x scholars through graduation. The key components of CASP discussed in this brief were intentionally designed and rooted in evidence-based approaches. These important aspects of the CASP program address some of the major challenges facing Latina/o/e undergraduate students.

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