

The UC Irvine Inclusive Excellence Certificate Program

Creating Opportunities to Center Racial Equity at a
Hispanic-Serving Research Institution



By Joseph Morales



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Introduction

In 2017, the University of California, Irvine (UCI) became the fifth University of California (UC) campus and second member of the Association of American Universities (AAU) to establish eligibility as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).⁰¹ Anticipating this, UCI engaged in a self-study focused on three questions: **1) Who are Latinx undergraduates at UCI?**; **2) Is the campus serving them well?**; and **3) How can we improve (Haynes, 2016)?** The findings from this study informed UCI's implementation of a series of STEM-focused HSI grants administered through the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED).⁰² Additionally, by raising questions about graduate education and the pipeline to the professoriate, it positioned the campus to begin to explore what it means to be a research-intensive, doctoral-granting HSI—what has been described as an Hispanic-Serving Research Institution (HSRI) (Marin & Pereschica 2017).

Current research strives to define what it means to be an HSI. García et al. (2019) examine the meaning of “servingness” vis-à-vis HSIs and Latinx students, while Paredes et al. (2021) extend this to HSRI and, specifically, the role of UC HSRI.⁰³ In this brief, I discuss the creation and implementation of the UCI Inclusive Excellence Certificate Program (IECP) as an example of the campus’ multidimensional concept of servingness. The IECP explores what it means for UCI to be an HSRI. At the same time, this program builds on the campus’ dual designation as an HSI and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). In a self-study of the campus’ AANAPISI designation, analyses of disaggregated data show Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) student success at UCI is variable, with some ethnic groups presenting equity gaps similar to Black, Latinx, and Native undergraduates (Morales, 2018). UCI has held HSI and AANAPISI grants simultaneously as part of an enterprise-wide effort to put racial equity at the center of the campus’ mission.⁰⁴ In the IECP, members of the campus community—undergraduate and graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni—have an opportunity to develop a



critical consciousness, by co-exploring what it means for UCI to work towards becoming a research-intensive, doctoral-granting Minority-Serving Institution (R1 MSI).⁰⁵

Building Capacity for “Servingness”

The IECP builds on the success of the Diversity Development Program (DDP), an asset-based professional development course for UCI staff and faculty that prioritized diversity and inclusion in the workplace.⁰⁶ Offered through the UCI Office of Inclusive Excellence (OIE),⁰⁷ the IECP aligns with the campus’ 2016 strategic plan (which identifies transforming UCI into an MSI as a strategic goal),⁰⁸ the UC Regents’ “Statement of Principles Against Intolerance,”⁰⁹ and OIE’s Confronting Extremism initiative.¹⁰ Its mission is to advance UCI’s commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and free speech, by equipping the campus community—at both the main campus and medical center—to appreciate UCI from the vantage point of different constituencies.

The IECP thematic structure—focusing on Thriving, Wellness, and Community—extends a year-long process of crowd-sourcing input from the campus community for the

01 The AAU is comprised of 66 leading research universities – 64 in the US and 2 in Canada.

02 E.g., see NSF Award # 1748570—HSI Conference: Pathways for Hispanic Students in STEM; ED Award # P031S180094—UCI Teacher Preparation Expansion and Enhancement for Developing Effective and Equity-focused Educators; NSF Award # 1928554—Improving the Transition of Community College Students into University STEM Programs Through Cross-Enrollment; and NSF Award # 2122942—Improving STEM Degree Completion with Professional Development to Support Inclusive and Equitable Classroom Practices.

03 Aside from these important interventions, Núñez (2021) identifies “intentionality” and “intersectionality” as “lenses to understand the social construct of HSI.”

04 See ED Award # P382B160040—Diverse Education Community and Doctoral Experience (DECADE): Partnership in Leadership for Undergraduate Success (PLUS). For an explanation of how an institution of higher education can hold HSI and AANAPISI grants simultaneously, see <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/faq.html#q10>.

05 A list of MSIs as defined by ED is available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html>.

06 DDP was based in the UCI Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity. See <http://www.oeod.uci.edu/programs/ddp.php>

07 See <https://inclusion.uci.edu/inclusive-excellence-certificate-program/>

08 See Pillar 2: Goal 2.5 at <https://strategicplan.uci.edu>

09 See <https://inclusion.uci.edu/2016/08/05/principles-2/>

10 See <https://inclusion.uci.edu/confronting-extremism/>

OIE Action Plan.¹¹ The Thriving pillar elevates UCI's status as an MSI and focuses on fostering opportunities for everyone to maximize their potential at UCI (e.g., recognizing and advancing equity-mindedness as a competency); Wellness focuses on promoting health and welfare of the campus, alumni, and visitors; and Community focuses on ensuring that everyone, regardless of function, contributes to a thriving and healthy campus environment. Though participation is voluntary, the IECP offers incentives. For faculty, its mission aligns with APM-210 (e.g., contributions to diversity);¹² for staff, it can be built into a performance management system;¹³ for graduate students, it can be incorporated into a diversity statement or statement of teaching philosophy; and for undergraduates, it's an opportunity to refine the career readiness competencies of teamwork, communication, and intercultural fluency.¹⁴

Design

The IECP explores UCI's journey from a predominately white institution (PWI) to an R1 MSI with an increasingly diverse profile. For example, the Latinx student enrollment more than doubled, an increase by 149.5%, from 2009 to 2019 (Paredes et al, 2021, p. 13). Participants enroll in the core course titled, UCI as a Minority Thriving University, plus at least one elective, either Wellness or Community. The core course plus one elective amounts to twenty 60-minute sections. These courses seek to equip participants to:

- > **Recognize** how diversity, equity, inclusion, and free speech intersect.
- > **Appreciate** the experiences and perspectives of diverse constituencies.
- > **Compare and contrast** the experience of different campus communities.
- > **Apply** strategies to advance the success of diverse campus constituencies.
- > **Operationalize** UCI's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and free speech.

Participants who complete the program can also apply to an IECP alumni fund to develop programming that models inclusive excellence.

Delivery

OIE coordinates delivery. Participants initiate registration by logging a response to the question, what do you hope to gain by participating in the IECP? Sections meet weekly (e.g., Mondays, 10:00am–11:00am) following a quarter-system schedule, and mode-of-delivery determines enrollment



(under 20 participants in-person or 100+ online). Syllabi are co-created with a team of faculty, staff, and student instructors (e.g., 37 instructors contributed in AY 2019–2020); the course homepage and materials are accessible via Canvas, a web-based learning management system. As a matter of policy, the IECP does not record meetings to safeguard a brave space where participants are able to make mistakes and grow.

The core course introduces participants to UCI's dual designation as an HSI and AANAPISI. Participants also explore enterprise-wide initiatives for inclusive excellence, Title IX+, free speech, and disability vis-à-vis Black, transgender and nonbinary, undocumented, and Jewish and Muslim communities. In Wellness, participants consider the prospect of UCI becoming a health-promoting MSI, by exploring alternative concepts of a wellness wheel that include basic needs, sustainability and equity, violence prevention and active bystander intervention, mental health, mindfulness and anti-racism, and campus climate. In Community, participants develop a more expansive, equity-minded approach to campus culture, by considering the implementation of a land acknowledgment, followed by an exploration of shifting concepts of community in relation to university archives, linguistic diversity and bias, international students and scholars, diversification of UCI's alumni base, the digital sphere during COVID-19, and the challenge of measuring campus climate at an MSI. To complete the program, participants submit a capstone project that represents their understanding of what supports well-being or community at an R1 MSI.¹⁵

¹¹ See <https://inclusion.uci.edu/action-plan/>

¹² See https://www.ucop.edu/academic-personnel-programs/_files/apm/apm-210.pdf

¹³ See <https://hr.uci.edu/partnership/achieveonline/>

¹⁴ See https://career.uci.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Infographic_CareerReadiness.pdf

¹⁵ E.g., see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esiOsMYIujU&list=PLcEhI86mtDi4Gm6OcTfPpkEycyHw24wX&index=1&t=2s>

Conclusion

In 2019–2020, a total of 117 participants completed the IECP. A majority were staff (51.3%), followed by faculty (21.4%), graduate students, (14.5%) and undergraduates (12.8%). In 2020–2021, another 250 participants completed the program. To date, 367 participants have graduated, totaling nearly 7,500 cumulative hours of community learning focused on UCI’s transition to an MSI. The IECP represents an important step in building capacity for a campus culture where being equity-minded is everybody’s responsibility (McNair et al, 2020). As Paredes et al. (2021) have shown, there is a need to define and understand “servingness” at HSRIs. In this endeavor, it’s essential to conduct a self-study that identifies needs, cultivates partnerships, and invokes useful campus strategic goals. This entails “a multidimensional conceptual framework” that calls-in the entire campus community—especially where students, staff, faculty, and alumni are uneven in experi-

ence or demographic representation (García et al. 2019). This also includes leveraging institutional mission to include MSI designation as a strategic priority, followed by enterprise-wide initiatives that affirm campus dual designation as an HSI-AANAPISI and partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), among others. Finally, this involves finding synergy in a campus’ role as an AAU and MSI. The mission of the IECP is to create a university within the university—an inclusive space where the campus community co-explores UCI’s journey from a PWI to an MSI to build capacity for equity-mindedness.

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