Project upGRADS provides workshops, advising, mentoring, fellowships and other services to support Hispanic and other under-represented graduate students. The Project seeks to increase the number of Hispanic and other disadvantaged students who enroll, persist, and complete a graduate degree in a timely manner at CSUF. Project upGRADS (Utilizing & Promoting Graduate Resources & Access for Disadvantaged Students) is funded by a 5-year, $3 million grant from the U.S. Dept. of Education, Title V, PPOHA program and extends to September 30, 2024.

Reprinted From CSUF News: Excelencia in Education, a national nonprofit focused on boosting Latinx student success, recently recognized two Cal State Fullerton programs that have positively impacted and accelerated Latinx student success in higher education.

Project upGRADS (Utilizing and Promoting Graduate Resources and Access for Disadvantaged Students), a five-year, $3 million federal grant that supports the academic achievement of Latinx and other underrepresented graduate students, was selected as one of 20 Examples of Excelencia finalists in the nation for 2022.

According to Excelencia in Education, these 20 programs go beyond merely enrolling students by addressing the strengths and needs of their students, especially their Latinx students. They also provide personalized, timely and holistic support for students’ educational journeys.
"I am humbled and honored that Project upGRADS is being recognized as a finalist," said project director Luis Molina. "I am extremely grateful that we are able to support Latinx students achieving their dream of a graduate education. I am thankful for the funding from the U.S. Department of Education which allows us to do this work, our grant faculty and staff, and everyone else that has collaborated with us. We owe our success to the relationships we have been able to foster around campus."

Four of the 20 finalists will be selected as the 2022 Examples of Excelencia and recognized at the nonprofit’s Celebración de Excelencia event on September 29 in Washington, D.C. “These 20 programs are evidence-based exemplars led by practitioners working directly with students and community that go beyond enrollment to intentionally serve students on their journey to degree completion," said Deborah Santiago, co-founder and CEO of Excelencia in Education.

Excelencia in Education also named Cal State Fullerton’s Ánimo: Latinx Counseling Emphasis as one of 10 Programs to Watch in 2022. These are up-and-coming programs that have identified specific needs of Latinx populations and are designing practices to address them. Launched in 2018, the counseling emphasis is one of two public master’s programs in the U.S. accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. Fewer than 10 master’s, doctoral, public and private programs in the country provide bilingual or bicultural counselor training.

Led by Olga Mejía, associate professor of counseling at Cal State Fullerton, the program consists of five master’s-level counseling courses that prepare graduates to provide bilingual and bicultural counseling for Latinx clients and families. Courses in Ánimo are offered in both English and Spanish to meet students’ needs. “Ánimo is significantly improving Latinx graduate students’ sense of belonging in the classroom, research experiences, mentoring/advising, and advocacy,” said the CSUF Ánimo Latinx Counseling Emphasis’ 2022 Examples of Excelencia application.

MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR
LUIS MOLINA

Welcome back Titans!

It’s so great see the campus full of students again, even if we all dislike trying to find parking! As the semester begins, I would like to take this opportunity to share a little about myself and why I chose a career in higher education. I joined CSUF in 2012, as a graduate student, and in 2015 as a staff member. The odd thing is, I never envisioned myself working in higher education growing up.

Growing up East Los Angeles, I wasn’t even aware of what college was, so of course I did not envision a career higher education. I was an only child with my mother, who was raised in Mexico and only had the privilege of attending school until the 8th grade. She spent the majority of her life working manual labor jobs before having to retire early. Watching her work tirelessly through my youth really made an impact on me. It was when I was in high school that I came to realize that I could not let my mother’s hard work be in vain! I decided that education was going to be my way to securing a better future for her and for me. But my quest for higher education did not come without hard work.

During my educational journey, I was on academic probation/notice at every single step of the way: at Garfield High School, Whittier College, and CSUF. Fortunately, someone was always there to support me in getting back on track. I owe my educational success to faculty and staff who genuinely cared. This is why the work that Project upGRADS does is very near and dear to me. I want Project upGRADS to be that pillar of support for our under-represented students and their dreams of higher education.
SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM FOR NEW UNDER-REPRESENTED GRAD STUDENTS

DR. SARAH HILL

A total of 71 incoming graduate students applied for and were accepted to the Master’s Early Transition and Access summer bridge program, also known as META. The program took place over five Saturdays in July and August, in a hybrid format of in-person and virtual sessions. Each session started with a welcome to introduce an important campus resource such as the Library and the Career Center. Students then broke out into college groups and were led by faculty instructors to focus on graduate-level writing and research methods. The sessions ended with a panel discussion led by Dr. Julián Jefferies (Associate Professor of Literacy and Reading Education) on tips for success in graduate school, ranging from belonging to time management.

The final META Saturday was a time of celebration as the program wrapped up with an inspirational message from Dr. Alexandro Gradilla, (Associate Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies). The META Scholars were then encouraged to take a next step toward graduate school success when Dr. Matt Englar-Carlson (Professor of Counseling) told them about the Faculty/Graduate Student Mentoring Program. At the final Saturday, students shared that they felt connected with other students and Cal State Fullerton, and they were eager to start the fall semester. We are excited about the great opportunities ahead for our META Scholars, and we wish them every success in graduate school!
META SCHOLAR TESTIMONIALS

MARIAN NAVARRO, HISTORY M.A

"I enjoyed my experience with the META program. META gave me many connections to faculty, staff, mentors, and fellow peers. I felt like I belonged there and that’s what they emphasize, you belong here! They provided many workshops and resources that I will definitely use throughout my educational career here at CSUF. The writing workshops helped prepare me for graduate writing. The research workshop prepared for research and had me thinking about my project. I especially liked how the faculty and workshops were geared towards my major so I can use those exact methods and skills in my work. We talked with each other about time management skills and tips to being successful, happy, and healthy in graduate school. Thank you META!"

TALIA FERNANDEZ, SOCIOLOGY M.A

"As a first-generation college student and an underrepresented minority, I was excited to be part of the META program. I found community with fellow META scholars in my college and department and have since remained in contact with them. This program gave me the confidence of entering my Master’s program in Sociology with the sense that I belong. I am grateful for the faculty and staff who organized this program because they are all so genuinely supportive and invested in helping us succeed. While I appreciated every aspect of the META program, I especially valued the extended support that faculty provide even after the program was completed."

BELONGING IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

DR. JULIÁN JEFFERIES

The META Scholars also participated in an Introduction to Graduate School section, coordinated by Dr. Julián Jefferies, during which students had the opportunity to discuss important topics related to navigating graduate school. These topics included:

- Building community as first-generation students
- Fostering a sense of belonging on campus
- Navigating the “impostor syndrome”
- Time Management
- Networking and creating community

Discussions went deep into combatting isolation and a lack of belonging by creating a peer group, connecting with faculty, and, most importantly, making sure to maintain our family and community as partners in the graduate school experience.

One of the highlights of these workshops was seeing participants build connections, share contact information with each other, and plan to support each other through this experience, all behaviors shown to improve the graduation rate of first-generation graduate students.
2022 META SCHOLARS

COLLEGE OF NATURAL SCIENCES & MATHEMATICS

Juan Cabrera
Lael Cardinal
Adrian Castro
Yunjie Deng
Saatzika Deshpande
Grant Dolmat
Joseph Fuentes
Alec Hunt
Angel Magaña
Kirsten McManus
Cristian Perez
Marisol Sanchez
Esnart Zulu

Mathematics
Chemistry
Chemistry
Statistics
Biology
Physics
Biology
Biology
Chemistry
Chemistry
Biology

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (SOCIAL SCIENCES)

Taylor Alcaraz
Julia Arce
Natalia Arroyo
Claudia Bobadilla
Krystal Felix
Talia Fernandez
Terry Goodman
Jenny Mai
Kayla Nakayama
Erin O’Crowley
Brennon Palmer
Andres Preciado
Oscar Ramirez
Lorne Reed
Catherine Rivera Hernandez

Psychology
Political Science
Sociology
Psychology
Sociology
Sociology
Sociology
Sociology
Psychology
Psychology
Psychology
Public Administration
Public Administration
Public Administration
Sociology

COLLEGE OF HEALTH & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

DiAnna Alvarez
Leslie Alvarez
Alma Aviles
Michael Delgado
Stephanie Escobar
Moises Franco
Noemy Gallegos
Hilcia Guerra
Lizette Landa
Jessica Lopez
Karen Lopez
Elizabeth Mendez
Hugo Montes
Irina Ngo
Martin Orozco
Anais Ortiz
Emmanuel Rodriguez
Iridian Ruiz
Kimberly Ruiz
Kristine Sanchez
Malia Silva
Claudia Solis
Lucero Sosa
Patrice Starks
Arlynn Toscano-Sanjuan
Maria Zamarripa

Social Work
Counseling
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Counseling
Nursing
Kinesiology
Nursing
Public Health
Public Health
Social Work
Social Work
Social Work
Kinesiology
Nursing
Public Health
Social Work
Nursing
Counseling
Counseling

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HUMANITIES)

Brisa Abarca Alvarez
Nadine Docter
Yong Choi
Ayanna Cuevas
Kristopher Dominguez
Xiomara Maldonado
Marian Navarro
Jacob Nikolson
Sarah Queneau
Andrew Rodriguez
Juan Rojas
Angelica Smith
Ashley Valenzuela
Tori Venegas
Yajaira Vilchis Alvarez

Spanish
American Studies
History
Linguistics
English
Anthropology
History
History
Anthropology
American Studies
History
History
Spanish
English
Anthropology

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT META?
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