

AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO ENHANCING DIVERSITY AT CU

Submitted by:

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The Chancellor's first [Strategic Imperative](#), to Shape Tomorrow's Leaders, identifies "understanding, sharing and engaging diverse perspectives" as a cornerstone to meeting this imperative. President Benson has said that, "Diversity is one of our university's core values and stated guiding principles," and that, "[Enhancing diversity at CU is critical](#)." This commitment to advancing diversity at the University will require attention in two areas in which CU has not excelled: 1) retention of underrepresented students and 2) a positive and inclusive campus climate. While the campus does not excel at these things university-wide, it does have pockets of great success in its signature CU LEAD Programs, including the Miramontes Arts and Sciences Program (MASP), which will celebrate its 25th year of serving underrepresented students CU in 2018.

As the campus looks to the future of learning and discovery, enhancing diversity (which must involve addressing underrepresented students' needs as well as the broader campus climate) needs to become much more central in our collective thinking about the University's mission and work. Enhancing diversity is not a project to be relegated to a single office on campus; it must be pervasively addressed in order to change the culture and climate of the university. In the spirit of centering on inclusion of diverse populations as a core value undergirding the work of the university, in this white paper we draw on lessons learned through the work of MASP and advocate for a broader ecosystem approach to enhancing diversity at CU-Boulder.

MASP Insights

MASP serves approximately 150 high-achieving underrepresented students in the College of Arts and Sciences. The program defines "underrepresented" as students who are first generation or from racial/ethnic backgrounds that are demographically underrepresented at CU. In MASP, students are supported through community, scholarships, and academic support. This support, based in successful equity models of academic support for underrepresented students, has helped students persist to graduation, feel a stronger sense of belonging on campus, and participate in evidence-based high impact practices such as research, study abroad, and other scholarly work.

Exit interviews with MASP graduates and surveys of current students have identified many features of the program that impact the program's success. Below is a list of these key features and a brief explanation of their impact.

- **Small program size.** Our small program size allows for both individualized attention to students and community cohesion. Regarding individualized attention, students cite faculty mentoring as one of the most important program features that contributes to their success, as described further below. Regarding community cohesion, students cite their bonds to other students in the program as important for their first-semester transition to the university and their longer-term persistence to graduation. These peer interactions contribute both to a sense of belonging and to academic exploration, learning about the presence and feasibility of opportunities such as research, internships, etc.

- **Summer bridge program (PEAC).** Students cite their experiences in our summer bridge program (Program for Excellence in Academics and Community, PEAC) as crucial to their transition to the university and instrumental to building community and finding a sense of belonging at CU. The two more important features of the bridge program are the relationships students build during the program and the program's orientation to the campus and its academic expectations.
- **Faculty mentoring.** Students cite individualized mentoring by MASP faculty as the part of the program that most contributes to all areas of their success, including their sense of belonging, academic success, and scholarly identity. The quality of faculty mentoring is greatly impacted by the size of the program as mentors must have the time to know and build trust with each student and be available for 'emergency' mentoring.
- **Scholarships.** Our students cite the participation scholarship as a critical element of being in MASP. Many of our students have a high financial need along with a lack of family resources. We see the burden it is to students to balance their studies and financial requirements. Unfortunately, while MASP scholarships used to comprise roughly 33% of in-state tuition, there has been no increase in the scholarship to match tuition increases, leaving the MASP scholarship at currently only 12% of in-state tuition. We believe that a renewal of scholarship commitment to underrepresented students is an important piece of the university communicating its commitment to a diverse student body.
- **Academic diversity.** There are two strong advantages for students being in an academically diverse community that intentionally bridges across the arts and sciences. First, students who are still in search of their career interests have a wide range of peers in different majors to talk to and learn from. Secondly, students gain interdisciplinary perspectives in the pursuit of solutions to the world's problems.

Ecosystem Model

Ideally, MASP would be part of a broader ecosystem of efforts taking place across departments and units towards enhancing diversity and advancing inclusion for all students. To a certain extent this is the case, since MASP is one of a network of CU LEAD programs across colleges and schools that serve underrepresented students. However, these programs are overly siloed away from departments and units that could benefit from collaborative efforts with programs like MASP. In particular, MASP is siloed from departments within the College of Arts and Sciences that are working on addressing inclusion and advancing diversity and could benefit from collaborations with MASP, just as MASP would benefit from such collaborations.

There are many ways that departments and units could work more collaboratively with programs such as MASP to help collectively advance diversity and inclusion on campus, including:

- Identify students in departments/units who could benefit from a community designed for underrepresented students. Coordination between MASP and departments could help departments retain underrepresented students and could help MASP with its recruitment of these students.
- Recruit faculty from departments to teach one-credit courses for MASP (as a course buyout) and to serve as liaisons between MASP and their home department. Such a one-time teaching relationship could entail having the faculty member report back to

their home department about MASP and its programming while offering MASP students opportunities to build relationships with faculty from across departments.

- Build research networks between MASP and departments/units so that faculty looking for undergraduate students can readily reach out for MASP students and MASP students interested in research opportunities can readily reach out to faculty.
- Draw on MASP as a campus resource for inclusion and diversity. Programs such as MASP are communities of practice in addressing inclusion, exclusion and the retention of underrepresented students. The program staff can help both inform other faculty/staff on campus and work collaboratively with them in developing ways to advance diversity and inclusion within their departments. Too often, we overlook the knowledge base we have on campus and think we need to look beyond campus for “experts” when we have practitioners here at CU who could benefit from developing closer relationships with others working on similar issues.

The recent Inclusive Excellence Strategic Planning process engaged departments, units and programs in thinking about how to enhance diversity through the process of making excellence inclusive for all. However, these efforts run the risk of remaining insular to single departments/programs unless we find ways to work together in a common goal of enhancing diversity at CU-Boulder. As a campus, we need to work towards a structural ecosystem in which departments, units and programs do their local work to advance diversity at the University, but do so in coordination with others to maximize efforts and learn from one another. This ecosystem structure will require some coordinated guidance, direction and pressure from outside individual programs. As we re-envision the university and develop it into a truly diverse and inclusive institution, we need to do so in ways that promote collaboration and that draw on existing areas of expertise.