

PARTNERSHIP WITH BVSD: Supporting and Mentoring Students of Color

ABSTRACT

The Diversity Subcommittee of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate (ASFS) proposes a partnership between CU Boulder and the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) to address the disparity between the percentage of Latino students on campus and students of color more generally and the population of Colorado, which was highlighted in a recent [article](#) in the national media. This partnership will create two outreach programs, supporting underprivileged high-school students with necessary technological equipment and tutoring as well as a faculty-student mentoring program. Through these programs, we hope to (1) adequately prepare students of color for admission to CU Boulder; (2) change their reported perception of CU Boulder as a White institution, (3) increase diversity among the student body on campus; (4) deepen the community engagement.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Members

1. The Diversity Sub-committee of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate: Aun H Ali (Religious Studies), Stephanie Su (Art and Art History), Cecilia J Pang (Theater and Dance), William Wei (History), Celine Dauverd (History), Kieran Marcellin Murphy (French and Italian Comparative Literature), Enrique Sepulveda (Ethnic Studies), Marissa Ehringer (Integrative Physiology), and Benjamin Brown (Astrophysical & Planetary Sciences)
2. Boulder Valley School District (BVSD), Equity and Community Engagement: Amy Nelson and Nichole Villa

Project Description

The Diversity Subcommittee of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate (ASFS) proposes a partnership between CU Boulder and BVSD to address the disparity between the percentage of Latino students on campus and students of color more generally in Boulder County. This partnership will create two outreach programs: (1) direct support for the in-income students with necessary resources, and (2) a faculty-student mentoring program.

Need for adequate preparation

It has been widely [reported](#) that, as a result of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, math and reading scores have declined across the nation. As usual, students whose families do not have the resources to seek assistance are the ones most adversely affected. We have established a connection with BVSD's Director of Equity and Community Engagement, Dr. Amy Nelson, and the coordinator of this division, Dr. Nichole Villa, who reported a substantial increase in the number of students in BVSD who failed classes. Drs. Nelson and Villa identified three areas where additional support could assist these students.

Support for summer credit recovery: These students must pay to attend credit recovery courses over the summer. In addition to the expense, the quality of instruction over the summer is inadequate.

Access to Tutoring: While middle-class students can afford to hire tutors to improve their academic performance, it is not feasible for low-income students who, in BVSD, are largely Latino. Further, Nelson and Villa also revealed that BVSD offers limited support to students who have already completed required classes (e.g., Algebra and Geometry) even though these requirements are not sufficient for admission to college. Low-income students who enroll in advanced placement (AP) classes often withdraw due to a lack of support. If these students were provided with the tutoring support they need to succeed in AP classes, it would put them on a pathway toward college. In this regard, the highest priorities are Math, Science, and Language Arts.

Access to Technology: One acute problem that Dr. Nelson and Villa identified is the high cost of graphing calculators (\$120). Low-income students can borrow these devices, but this may not permit them to gain the familiarity necessary to excel on timed examinations. Providing these devices to low-income students would be an easy solution to a basic problem. BVSD has the infrastructure in place to address these three interconnected problems, but it lacks funding. Therefore, to maximize our impact, we propose allocating partial funds directly to BVSD's division for Equity and Community Engagement, which could identify and distribute these devices to low-income students and students of color.

Together with tutoring and technology support, we aim to address the economic inequity issue and stress the symbolic importance of the device. Academic success in math and other subjects opens up the possibility of a quality college education that prepares them with the necessary skills for a fast-changing society in the post-pandemic era.

Perception of CU Boulder as a White institution

Latino students cite their perception of CU Boulder as a White and expensive institution as part of the reason for their reluctance to attend the university; therefore, even though they are qualified to apply for CU Boulder, many choose not to. To address this issue, we propose the creation of a mentorship program, pairing students with the faculty of CU Boulder.

As part of its Grad+ program, BVSD has appointed Teachers on Special Assignments (TOSA) in select classrooms. Because of their close relationships with students, these teachers are ideally situated to identify students who would benefit from a relationship with a faculty mentor. These students may include but not limited to talented students of color from low-income families. On our end, CU Boulder would invite 10 faculty members to participate in a pilot program and maintain a public list of potential mentors. To incentivize participation and compensate faculty members' time, we propose offering faculty members a \$750 honorarium per semester (deposited in their research accounts). We especially encourage faculty of first-generation college students or faculty of color to participate in this mentoring program, who can serve as inspiring role models for those students. We will work with our partners in BVSD, the division for Equity and Community Engagement, to pair students with faculty members. In order to encourage minoritized students to think of CU Boulder as a place where they might belong, these pairings should reflect shared interests and backgrounds whenever possible.

This is a 12-month project, from June 2023 to May 2024. We will hold an initial information session in May/ June 2023 that brings together the 10 faculty mentors and their mentees and explain the goal of the program. To make it feasible for faculty to join the mentoring program, we will divide the program into two types of lengths: summer or semester, so faculty has the option to decide what works for their schedule. To maximize the effect of the

program, we encourage faculty and students to meet monthly to discuss topics important for the students' success, such as academic requirements, preparing college applications, visiting CU Boulder, how to reach out to departments of interest, potential career paths, etc. BVSD teachers and counselors can be invited to attend and lend their expertise. Alongside these meetings, mentors will be available via e-mail to answer questions. If possible, mentors may invite students to attend a class as a guest or facilitate this opportunity with another faculty member in an appropriate department. The Diversity Committee and BVSD Equity and Community Engagement will check in with faculty and students every other month to ensure the program is running smoothly. At the conclusion of the project, we will evaluate the effect of this program by interviewing individual participants.

We are hopeful this pilot program may lay the foundation for future funding and expansion to include more faculty and mentees and to eventually incorporate current junior and/or senior CU students as additional peer mentors. If successful, there is the potential for mentees in the program to become future ambassadors who give back to it.

Expected Outcome

By showing students that we are personally invested in their success (and the success of their families and communities), we believe this mentorship program can help CU Boulder recruit more low-income students of color who, in BVSD, are largely Latino. This will result in increasing the diversity of the student body on campus and deepen CU Boulder's engagement with the community in a long term.

PROJECT BUDGET

We are requesting \$33,500. Partial funding will be allocated to BVSD's division for Equity and Community Engagement to support low-income high school students of color. The funds may be used to support students' learning in Math, Science, and Language Arts. The remaining fund will be used to remunerate faculty mentors.

Items	Unit amount	Total amount
Faculty mentor support	\$750 per semester	10 (mentors) x 750 (per person/ per semester) x2 (semesters) = \$15,000
High school teachers who help identify and follow up with students in need	\$100	100 x 10 (teachers) = 1,000
BVSD Equity and Community Engagement Committee administration	\$2,000 per semester	2,000 x 2 (semesters) = 4,000
Graphing calculators	\$120	120 x 50 (calculators) = 6,000
Tutoring	\$40 per hour	40 x 125 (hours) = 5,000
Credit recovery fees	\$50	50 x 50 (students) = 2,500
Grand total		\$33,500