

## Grant Final Report Form

Principal Investigators (PIs) are required to submit final reports within **60 days** of their EIA grant end date. A delinquent report may jeopardize or delay future Network funding. The information you provide helps us improve and justify the continuation of this grant program. The Network may also contact PIs for longer-term impact reporting and may request permission to use elements of these reports in Network activities (Conference sessions, Academy sessions, etc.) and communication both within the CSU system and to external stake-holders.

Summary Grant Information	
Grant Title:	The Empowering Autistic Scholars (EAS) Mentoring and Research Training program
PI Name:	Luna Nombrano Larsen
PI Campus:	Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
Grant Start Date (month/YYYY):	June 2022
Grant End Date (month/YYYY):	December 2023
Final Report Submission Date:	October 3, 2024

## Major Outcomes

1. Summarize your project's outcomes against the original goals proposed for advancing equitable student learning, engagement, progression, and completion.

All the students participating in EAS either graduated or have continued their studies and are in good academic standing. Their sense of belonging on campus has improved and they have strong relationships with their mentors. At least half of students have continued in the program after the first year and 90% completed research training. We did not get as much research done as I had originally planned but we were able to gain some valuable results that I shared with other individuals and groups on campus (please see below).

We have learned so much over the past two years that it has really helped us strengthen the program. We are hoping to share what we have learned with other schools so that they can use what we have created as a template for starting programs on their campus (there is such a high need!), and we are almost to the point that we can do this. We have many high school juniors and seniors contacting us prior to applying to Cal Poly SLO as well as before they say yes to enrolling. I am working with the EAS students and mentors this year to design a summer bridge/college transition program and hoping to launch it next summer.

All of the EAS students have multiply-marginalized social identities, which has resulted in me focusing more on how intersectionality affects them, and working to design programming and provide resources that support them in all the ways they need.

2. Comment on additional outcomes not directly associated with the project (partnerships formed, additional funding support gained)

EAS has developed a partnership with Kennedy Library and the Foundational Learning Librarian has volunteered her time to become the EAS Program's personal librarian and is assisting our students with research and information literacy. She is also co-facilitating a virtual book club for our students as well as co-teaching zine classes. This librarian (Mercedes) and I have also obtained a grant to conduct a PAR study to improve access and inclusion of neurodivergent students in library instruction.

We are working with Career services to develop more inclusive job fairs and design tailored career pathways for our EAS students.

I have been working with counseling faculty to help develop a virtual support group for autistic students, which launches next week.

### 3. Specify any unanticipated project developments (i.e. unanticipated barriers or unexpected wins)

I discovered that conducting research with our EAS students takes longer than anticipated. Students do not have the time to devote to research on a consistent basis, despite having an

interest. We completed training and the students were able to conduct some interviews and fill out questionnaires as well as provide suggestions for program improvement and compile a list of suggestions for ways faculty and staff can improve access and inclusion for autistic students in their classes, research spaces, and office hours. I have changed the program to focus on improving the transition to college and community development for the first 1-2 years students are involved and moving to professional development and research in years 3 and 4. Students are welcome to participate in research sooner if they have the time and bandwidth but it is not required.

Many of our students are returning for multiple years, and some have transitioned from mentees to mentors. We have increased the number of students we support, from 8 to 11 and have been asked to accept graduate students into our program, which we will be doing this year.

More and more people and groups on campus are learning about our program and reaching out to get advice on how they can better support autistic and otherwise neurodivergent students. We will continue to educate campus stakeholders and work with them to develop more accessible and inclusive programming.

### 4. If applicable comment on any longer-term outcomes, you anticipate from your Equity in Action Grant funded project. Also, please estimate anticipated achievement dates (month and year.)

We have continued developing partnerships with on-campus and off-campus stakeholders and are becoming more established as a program. We hope to gain institutional support in the next 12-18 months and potentially donor support.

## Assessment and Communication

### 5. Describe efforts to communicate and disseminate project outcomes with your campus.

We have shared project outcomes / research results with faculty and administrators and have used it to when facilitating the Advancing Inclusive Mentoring Program on the Cal Poly SLO campus. I have also shared results with Kennedy librarians, Career Services, Counseling Services, the Mustang Success Center advisors, and the new Associate Provost for Student Success.

6. Provide a summary of your assessment activities and results, where available.

We conducted surveys after events and semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the academic year. We received valuable feedback on events and supports, including that students appreciated having activities and supports available to them, but they often did not have the time to attend consistently due to overwhelm and chronic exhaustion. Students found the mentoring most valuable of all the available supports and the feeling of community. The research aspect they were interested in but later in their school career.

### **Lesson Learned**

7. As you reflect on the strategies and activities implemented during this grant, which were successful?

Maximizing the amount of time students had to spend with mentors worked well. They each had their individual mentor that they met with weekly, and each mentor also facilitated an activity (e.g., exercise meetup, study hall, social event) so that they had the opportunity to get to know the rest of the students in the program. This enabled the wider EAS community to grow, rather than just the one-on-one mentoring relationships. Developing partnerships with the Kennedy librarians, the counseling center, and Career Services has been beneficial. It provides students with additional supports and resources and enables them to increase their social capital by connecting them with more people on campus that can assist them academically and professionally. Being able to pay mentors and EAS students for the work they did not only provide them with valuable experience but also allowed them to do work they were passionate about and found fulfilling. I also gave students more opportunities to get involved in the community-building aspects of the program by creating a social events committee and having them plan and implement the activities instead of doing it myself. They had more buy-in and had a good time getting to know each other as they worked together.

8. By comparison, what strategies did you find were unsuccessful?

Attempting to have first- and even second-year students train and then conduct research was too much. Many were interested and attended the research training sessions but actually committing to weekly research meetings or data collections and analysis sessions was too much.

9. Given your experience with the Equity in Action Grant Program, what changes would you recommend to better support you toward your goals?

It would have been nice to meet oftener with the other awardees and create community and enjoy mutual support.

10. What can the CSU Student Success Network do to help our campus in its efforts to identify, understand and disrupt inequities in our system?

Help convince university administrators that programs and services outside of Student Services have value and deserve university support.

I want to thank all of you involved in this grant and the process for everything you have done to help our amazing students. They have come from a place of great vulnerability and have found community and developed important skills, and vital confidence thanks to our program, which would not have been able to survive without your generous support. I also want to share that this work has helped me see how much representation really matters, and that I am someone that can help create meaningful change. This June I became a member of the 13th cohort of Cal Poly Pomona's doctoral program in educational leadership and I am so excited to use what I learn to improve the lives of students at Cal Poly SLO and beyond.