

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:	INSPIRE
PI Name:	Dr. Danvy Le; Dr. Luz Calvo
PI Campus:	CSU East Bay
Grant Start Date (month/YYYY):	June 2022
Grant End Date (month/YYYY):	December 2023
Final Report Submission Date:	March 10, 2024

Major Outcomes

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

The Incoming Student Program for Inclusion, Retention, and Excellence (INSPIRE) aims to increase student retention and close equity gaps by providing an intentional, scaffolded curriculum that engages students through a social justice lens. The program offers faculty, advisors, and peer academic coaches training in anti-racist pedagogy and high-impact practices, and the social justice-themed curriculum is aligned across courses with signature assignments. INSPIRE has two overarching goals: 1. Reduce equity gap and increase frosh retention; 2. Build student community and connection with campus.

The original vision of INSPIRE was to build a two-year program to support students in their GE pathway, particularly the Golden 4 GE courses (A2, B4, A1, and A3) and the General Studies "Foundations of Success" seminars (Area E). These courses have large equity gaps, and our vision was to recruit first-generation, Pell-eligible, or historically underserved students who are deemed as in "support required" or "support suggested" in A2 and/or B4. Our program was piloted in Fall 2022 with 41 students in two cohorts. We trained five instructional faculty, two advisors, and three peer academic coaches that first year. In Fall 2022, students were placed in a cohort where they took Liberal Studies 223: Liberation for Education (Area F), an English course to meet A2, and a General Studies seminar (Area E). In Spring 2023, students remained in their cohort and took Theater 101: Theater for Social Justice (C2), an English course to complete A2, and the second General Studies seminar (Area E). After the one-year INSPIRE program, students fulfilled A2, B4, C2, Area F, 2 units of Area E, and our CSUEB social justice requirement. Students were asked what they liked about the club and what they wanted to see improved.

Our program assessment (detailed below) shows that for AY 23-24, we met our goal and retained 93% of incoming first-year students from Fall to Fall (compared to 79% University-wide). 93% of INSPIRE students completed their A2 requirement, compared to 65% University-wide. These successes were encouraging, and with the support of the University and Equity in Action Grant, we continued to recruit for a second AY 23-24 cohort, with some programmatic changes, explained below.

While the program was successful in integrating A2, due to some institutional challenges detailed below, we were not able to integrate B4 in AY 22-23. However, learning from our first year, we navigated these obstacles and integrated the B4 requirement in AY 23-24. Due to our lack of understanding of course scheduling (detailed below), we expanded our student population to include students regardless of their initial A2 or B4 placement. We continued this practice as we recruited for AY 23-24. Lastly, while our original intention was to provide students with a two-year pathway, the course scheduling and advising structures created hurdles (detailed below), and our leadership team decided to make INSPIRE a one-year program.

We upheld our commitment to the pilot cohort and offered them A1, A3, and American institutions requirement courses during their second year. These courses were optional but encouraged and about half of the students enrolled in these courses.

In addition to supporting students to complete their GE academic pathways, INSPIRE seeks to retain students by cultivating a sense of belonging and building a peer community. INSPIRE builds community as a part of the curriculum, supported by program-wide programming. At the outset of the academic year, we organized an INSPIRE Orientation to introduce students to the program, faculty, and each other. Once a semester, we organize a community event to celebrate student's classroom work, projects, and performances. In the Fall, it is a social gathering where students can intermingle, and during the Spring, students showcase their course projects. The program has also provided students with INSPIRE logoed classroom supplies, such as pens and notebooks, and logoed accessories to provide cohesion and community.

A tremendous asset of the INSPIRE program is the professional development embedded in the program. Faculty spend a semester with the INSPIRE Director of Curriculum and Pedagogy to discuss syllabi development before a two-week summer academy focusing on enhancing critical and anti-racist pedagogy and social justice curriculum development. Faculty are also supported by a Critical Pedagogy Coach to continue to grow in their pedagogy. Throughout the year, faculty are engaged in a Community of Practice to discuss curriculum, student highlights, pedagogical strategies, and how to address particular students' needs. This has built community and trust among faculty and advisors, created open lines of communication, and enabled a holistic approach to students' academic experience. Moving into AY 23-24, our program expanded to train 4 faculty and an additional advisor. Our program now has 11 INSPIRE-trained faculty and 3 INSPIRE-trained advisors. Moreover, we have built continuity by inviting INSPIRE students from the first cohort to be Peer Academic Coaches for the second cohort.

After reflecting and assessing the FALL 2022 pilot cohort, we recognized that our students faced personal challenges affecting their academic performance. These challenges included mental health, food and housing insecurity, and feelings of safety. The leadership team recognized supporting students through these challenges required a good deal of additional time and emotional labor from faculty and advisors, beyond what seemed fair to expect from them. To address this, we incorporated a Care Steward for the second cohort. We collaborated with the MSW Social Work Program to work with an MSW intern who serves as a near-peer mentor who is trained to use a holistic, relationship-oriented, and culturally sustaining approach to supporting students. The Care Steward mentors students, connects them to campus and off-campus resources and guides them through identifying and tracking their short and long-term goals.

Our intention has been to build INSPIRE with thoughtfulness and intention. To that end, we are constantly reflecting on and assessing the program. At the end of the Fall 2022 semester, we organized a faculty retreat to discuss and evaluate the program with faculty experience. From this retreat, we developed the following INSPIRE values statement to ground and guide the program:

Love

- We believe in creating and nurturing a loving community for INSPIRE students, staff, and faculty.
- We believe in supporting the holistic, mental, mind, body, and soul wellness of INSPIRE students, staff, and faculty.
- We believe in practicing love as critical analysis, reflection, and action.

Social Justice

- We believe in providing students with opportunities to reflect upon their histories and roles in creating social justice for their communities.
- We believe in examining power relations and how systems may impact our positions in the world.
- We believe in uplifting students' identities through culturally sustaining approaches.

Community

- We believe in nurturing students' and faculty members' authentic selves by centering their own and their communities' experiences.
- We believe in taking a humanizing and relational approach with each member of our INSPIRE community while reimagining the way our university teaches and supports students.
- We believe in fostering collaboration and solidarity within and beyond the classroom.

Another achievement is that we have presented our model in presentations to the Academic Senate, to the Provost, and to numerous campus partners. Further, we are proud of our [website for INSPIRE](#), which showcases our program and increases our presence.

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

As the project unfolded, our team quickly realized we needed to form partnerships across the campus. Through the implementation of our project, we formed collaborations with the Student Equity and Success (SEAS) program. The SEAS programming is designed to retain and graduate low-income, first-generation, historically underrepresented, and underserved student populations. Specific to us, SEAS offers advising to their students separate from the University advising. Thus, we worked with SEAS advisors to ensure they were aware of our program and to recruit SEAS students into our program. Due to the complexity of course scheduling (detailed below), we also had to form collaborations with various academic departments to ensure that INSPIRE students could take their Major courses that didn't conflict with the INSPIRE pathway.

As previously mentioned, we recognized that our students faced challenges affecting their academic performance. During AY 22-23, our team submitted campus Care reports to alert the Care team that a student needed support outside of the classroom (mental health, housing, food pantry, etc.). This demonstrated to members of the Care Team the dedication our program has to students, and the Care Team has since been an advocate for INSPIRE, including supporting our request for a Care Steward. The incorporation of a Care Steward, an MSW student, opened up the opportunity for our team to collaborate with the Department of Social Work. MSW students are required to complete an internship. We worked with the Department of Social Work to formalize the internship within our program to provide the near-peer support our students may need.

Because the Equity in Action grant ended in December 2023, but our program was to continue through Spring 2024, we sought additional funding to provide the course releases for the Leadership Team. Given the success of our first year (detailed below), the Office of the Provost provided us with funding through the Pioneer Pathways initiative. Furthermore, when our team could not secure funding to expand (detailed below), we made preparations to communicate to our campus partners and the INSPIRE community our appreciation of partnerships and that INSPIRE would not be able to continue. However, in late January, the Office of the Provost informed us that they would like to fund an expansion of the program. Since then, we have been working with the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences to expand the program within that college and with their support.

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

The success of our first year gave the team confidence to apply for a Department of Education Postsecondary Success Grant. Our team worked tirelessly to submit this grant and received letters of support from University administrators and local politicians. Because this was a federal grant, our team also required support from the Office of Research Projects (OSRP), who assigned us a Grant Fellow to support us. Unfortunately, we did not receive the grant; however, our team views this as an unexpected win--none of us had submitted a grant of this magnitude previously, and we were just a few points shy of the cutoff for funding. The reviewer comments with positive. While the decision was disappointing, our efforts demonstrated to OSRP that our program is a worthwhile investment. OSRP has since worked with us to secure us a grant consultant, alerted us to other appropriate grants, and we have made plans to apply for the next application cycle. Additionally, our efforts with the grant showcased our dedication and commitment to INSPIRE and our students and contributed to the unexpected funding to expand the program for AY 24-25 (see above).

While we view the program as successful, throughout the process, we have had unanticipated challenges that we have had to address:

- **Advising:** There was a lot of confusion and conflicting information about first-year advising, how advisors would be assigned to first-year students, and how students would be selected and enrolled in INSPIRE. At the outset, we had envisioned having only two advisors for our cohort, allowing us to have “point people” to address students’ needs. To this end, we selected and trained two advisors in the Anti-Racist Summer Institute. The PIs had recruited and identified the appropriate students for the program and passed those names along to the Lead Advisor Manager who then identified where that student had already been placed. Due to caseload equity, the students could not be moved to the two advisors we identified. This resulted in our first cohort being spread throughout 6-8 advisors, many of whom mis-enrolled students and didn’t fully understand the INSPIRE program’s mission. Due to this, non-INSPIRE students were enrolled in INSPIRE courses, and INSPIRE students were enrolled in non-INSPIRE courses. The PIs were able to rectify these errors by monitoring rosters and going through the appropriate channels to make corrections; however, this required an inordinate amount of labor. Throughout the semester, the PIs were diligent about ensuring that students received the support they needed, meaning that the PIs had to proactively reach out to the various advisors, asking for them to contact and provide support for specific issues.

From this experience, during AY 23-24, we began recruitment much earlier and communicated with the advisors regarding the course enrollments. The Lead Advising Manager identified students appropriate for the INSPIRE and assigned them to the INSPIRE advisors. Because it was done earlier and the Lead Advising Manager was taking part in recruitment, it avoided shuffling students while maintaining an equitable caseload. Additionally, we communicated with advisors in SEAS due to the advising structure. We trained a SEAS advisor through our Summer Institute to ensure that the SEAS students could also be enrolled in the program.

- **Course Scheduling:** When we began, we did not fully grasp that some majors, mostly in the Sciences, had first-year block scheduling. Thus, when we created our INSPIRE course schedule, we could not accommodate some majors because the schedule we created conflicted with their major courses. Our recruitment strategy had to change once we learned which majors would best fit our INSPIRE course schedule. This led to some of the advising and enrollment miscommunications referenced above. Additionally, one of the core courses in CSUEB’s First- Year Experience is GS 101: Foundations of Success (Area E). This is a 100-minute course, whereas most courses on campus are 75 minutes long. In building an INSPIRE course schedule, we became intimately aware of the difficulty of creating a course schedule for our incoming first-year students.

From this experience, during AY 23-24, we identified Major courses that could be coordinated within the INSPIRE model. We took into consideration major roadmaps, required first-year courses, required labs, and flexibility in GE electives. We then presented our project to these department chairs before course schedules were built and requested chairs offer required major courses on days that did not conflict with the INSPIRE courses. Additionally, our team worked with the General Studies department (GS) to offer a 75-minute GS 101 course, which better accommodate our students. The department chairs we met were enthusiastic about INSPIRE and coordinated with us.

- **Categorical Placements:** Incoming frosh are placed into categories depending on their Writing and Quantitative proficiency--these categories are Ready (cat 2), Ready Support (cat 3), or Support (cat 4). These categories determine which courses students will take to meet their A2 and B4 requirements. Additionally, depending on the student's major, the B4 class varied.

Given the challenges above, we decided to exclude B4 from the INSPIRE course schedule (for the FALL 22 cohort). Also, our original vision was to serve Cat 4 students; however, when we had to adjust our recruitment strategies (see advising and course scheduling), we were not able to identify enough Cat 4 students who fit the new parameters and thus shifted to include Cat 2 and Cat 3 in our cohort. Note that our Cat 4 students were still overrepresented in our cohort compared to the overall first-year class. Further complicating matters, there are course caps on the A2 and Area E courses but not the other INSPIRE courses. Given the difficulties in course scheduling, we opted to lower the caps in the other INSPIRE courses. An unintended consequence of this model was that we had begun to “track” our students: they were in cohorts based on their A2 placement. In short, one cohort was required to take “Stretch” English while the other cohort took “Accelerated” English.

We adjusted our model for the FALL 2023 cohort to avoid this kind of tracking. We placed students in “mixed-category” cohorts for non-A2/B4 courses. This allowed us to respect course caps in A2 and diversify students in cohorted classes so as not to “track” them. Additionally, since we had identified majors that would work best with INSPIRE scheduling, we could work with the Math and Statistics department to coordinate course scheduling so that B4 could be integrated into the INSPIRE pathway. While we could not provide “INSPIRE-only” B4 courses, we could reserve seats in specific sections so that students who knew each other could find support, and we could work with the instructors of those courses to track students' progress and provide needed support.

- **Changing student needs:** While our first cohort was affected by the pandemic, INSPIRE's second cohort had a significant portion of their high school experience in the midst of the pandemic. This resulted in challenging interpersonal interactions as students had not experienced much high school socialization and seemed unsure of how to interact with one another. INSPIRE faculty integrated more hands-on community building in the classroom to address this. Additionally, INSPIRE invited a speaker to discuss restorative justice as a social justice approach to interpersonal conflict. We also recognized an increased need for social support. This perceived increased need may have stemmed from the integration of a Care Steward who provided a space for students to express their needs. Our team is reflecting on these experiences to strategize how best to give students agency and accountability in their educational journey while providing institutional and pedagogical support and care.
- **Institutional budget adjustments:** As with many CSU campuses, during AY 23-24, CSUEB experienced decreased enrollment, resulting in budget adjustments. In Fall 2023, the administration announced unexpected, severe course cuts for Spring 24, significantly impacting our lecturer faculty. INSPIRE's Theater 101 was one course that was canceled, and the trained INSPIRE faculty (a very effective lecturer) was not entitled to another course. To continue to serve INSPIRE students, the co-PIs worked with the Theater and Dance Department to offer a course to fulfill a GE requirement with an instructor aligned with INSPIRE values. Thus, at the last minute, we substituted Dance 102: Diversity in Dance for our planned Theater class. We were lucky to know of an instructor who could embody INSPIRE values, though not INSPIRE trained. Since this course was not a part of the INSPIRE pathway, many students were hesitant to take it as they were intimidated by the thought of a dance course. To lower their anxieties, we invited the instructor to a community activity, and he led the class in an exercise to introduce them to his pedagogical approach. Our team recognizes that as INSPIRE expands, we must consider University budgetary constraints and be more strategic in our course offerings and faculty training.
- **Legislative Mandates:** In 2021, the California legislature passed AB 928: Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act to create a unified GE pathway for transfer students. On our campus, this legislation created many unknowns, including the fate of Area E, which is an integral part of the first-year experience. While there has been no system-wide plan for these changes, INSPIRE's co-PI created a course to ensure INSPIRE students would receive a first-year success course as part of their pathway. This course will be offered during the expansion of INSPIRE.

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 look forward to graduating our first INSPIRE cohort by May 2026 and being able to measure the results of our programming not only on Fall-to-Fall retention but also on graduation rates. Through INSPIRE, we hope students have created bonds and confidence to carry with them throughout their academic careers on our campus. Additionally, by Fall 2024, the INSPIRE program will be expanded, and in the long-term, we will advocate to integrate INSPIRE intentionally across the University.

It is challenging to state anticipated achievement dates; however, a longer-term outcome is for institutions to recognize the importance of community and a sense of belonging for student success and actively support data-driven, innovative programs that aim to achieve these goals. We hope that INSPIRE creates transformative change to highlight the institutional failings to student achievement and to reframe their approach to better support students in a truly holistic, culturally relevant, and compassionate manner.

Assessment and Communication

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

To ensure the success of the program, the PIs understood the necessity of needing to get buy-in from various stakeholders and thus, presented INSPIRE to different groups around campus. As we were building our vision, we sought feedback from the Office of Diversity and campus allies (i.e. college deans, program directors, faculty) aligned with supporting students of color. This allowed us to receive feedback on gaps in our model and continue to intentionally shape the program in a collaborative manner. Prior to the launch of the pilot program, we gave presentations to Academic Affairs, Freshman and Sophomore Success Team, SEAS programs, University Recruitment, and selected department chairs. These efforts were to obtain support in recruiting students, correctly enrolling students, and building course schedules. Additionally, we presented our Summer Institute efforts at the annual start of the academic year campus conference, Back to the Bay. This presentation focused on the liberatory pedagogy training of our program and the value of building community among faculty as well.

The preliminary results (as reported in the Midterm Report) suggested that INSPIRE had promise. Our team reported our project and preliminary outcomes across campus: 1. We formally presented to the Academic Senate and fielded questions 2. We provided regular updates to the Provost 3. We made a presentation to the Dean and Associate Deans in the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences 4. We met with the Office of Advancement 5. We met the Director of ORSP 6. We developed a beautiful [INSPIRE website](#) and provide a link in all our communications.

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

We have worked with the Institution Effectiveness and Research to obtain quantitative data for INSPIRE's AY 22-23 cohort. One of INSPIRE's goals was to reduce equity gaps and increase frosh retention. Table 1 shows the completion of A2 and Fall-to-Fall retention of INSPIRE students compared to the overall CSUEB Fall 2022 class (n=896). INSPIRE students were more likely to return to CSUEB in Fall 2023 and more likely to complete their A2 requirement by a significant rate. Table 2 illustrates the retention rate among INSPIRE racial/ethnic groups compared to the CSUEB Fall 2022 class. The high retention rates, especially among Black and Latinx students, underscore the program's impact tailored to meet the social, cultural, and educational needs of students of color. Taken together, these results suggest that the INSPIRE approach is successful in supporting students through their first year. We recognize that the size of our cohort is small; however, we do not feel that this detracts from our overall potential. We recognize that scaling up will produce more challenges, and we will continue to advocate for a thoughtful and intentional approach that will allow us to test, assess, and modify our efforts as we grow.

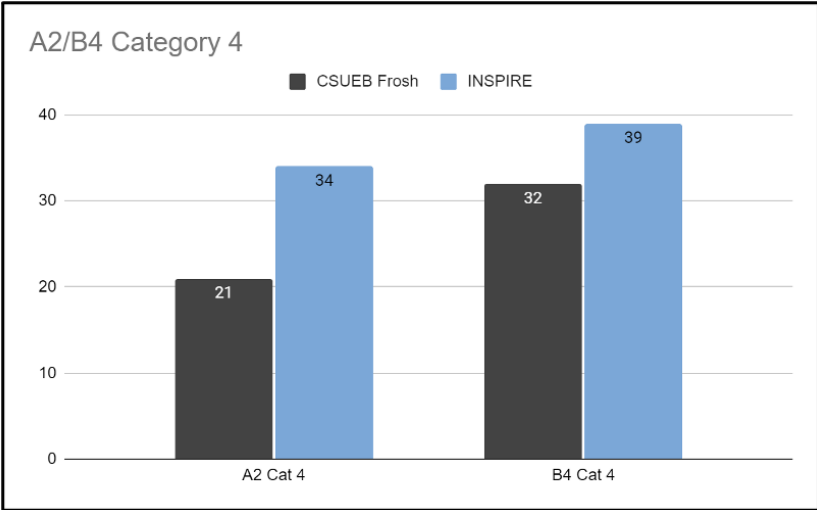
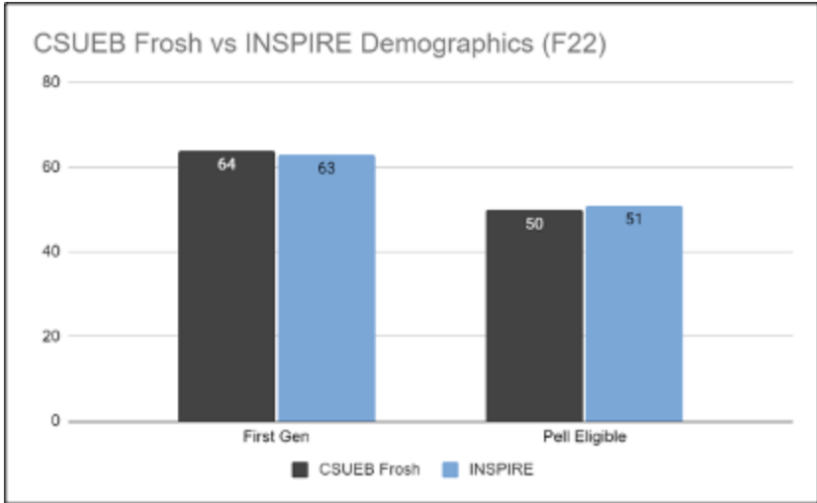
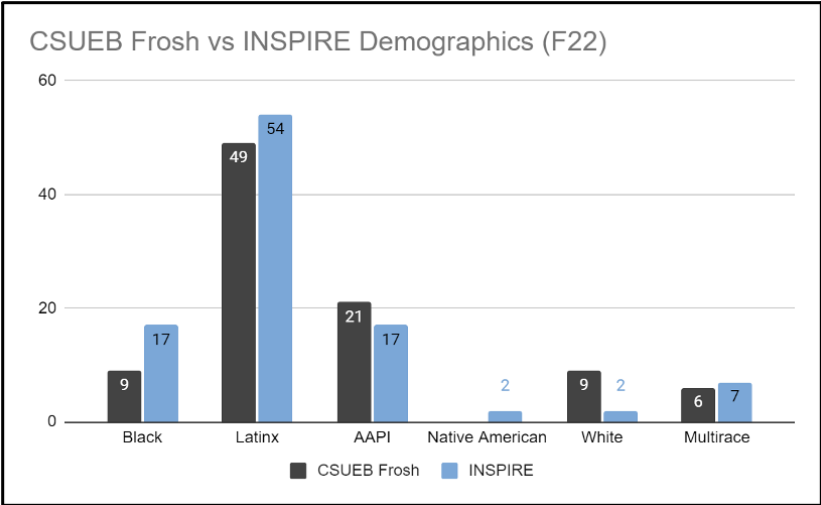
Table 1: Comparison of success markers after Fall 2022, INSPIRE to all CSUEB Freshmen

Success Marker	INSPIRE	CSUEB Freshmen
Fall '22 - Fall '23 retention	93%	65%
A2 Completion	93%	79%

Table 2: Racial/Ethnic Fall-to-Fall retention comparison of INSPIRE and Overall CSUEB Frosh

Race/Ethnicity	INSPIRE	CSUEB Freshmen
White	100% (1/1)	74%
Black	100% (7/7)	68%
Latinx	90% (18/20)	77%
Asian	86% (6/7)	87%
Native American	100% (1/1)	100%
Multirace	100% (3/3)	76%

Our INSPIRE F22 cohort demographics compared to the overall First-year class (by percent) demonstrate that students that might be expected to not be retained by race and category were overrepresented in our cohort; while our cohort was statistically a match when it came to First-Gen and PELL-eligible status:



In addition to supporting students in completing GE academic pathways, INSPIRE's second goal seeks to retain students by cultivating a sense of belonging and building a peer community. INSPIRE builds community as a part of the curriculum by sharing autoethnographies and biographical poems, theatrical performances, and team activities. Outside the classroom, INSPIRE organizes a welcome orientation and a community social gathering once each semester.

To assess the effectiveness of these activities, our team collected qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions on student surveys. Students have appreciated the value of community stating:

"I absolutely adore INSPIRE. I am autistic, and have trouble making friends, but being around people who I know also would like to make friends, people who I can goof around with and simultaneously work with, that is very beneficial to me...I have so many memories of goofing off in writing, or goofing off in theater. Specifically, playing improv games was very fun in theater."

"Community, guiding, and comfort. I feel like the people I see in these classes, we're all like a community, including the professors and other staff involved. The professors in the program are also very helpful, will advise us, and guide us to help with our work, classes, or anything else. I keep learning and have fun with it everyday. Comfort because these classes, I've never been so comfortable in a classroom, these INSPIRE classes make me feel like I belong and make me feel like I can be myself."

"It feels like a family. Everyone is open and even in the quieter classes we make way to have a good time. I've learned a lot and the program has given so many opportunities to it's students."

"Community, I feel like everyone in the class has become friends with each other and we're very comfortable. It feels like a community and we all can be ourselves and belong. Open, it's been a very open learning environment for all the classes so far. All of the teachers welcome student input and also help with different ways of understanding. It's an open environment in general as well, very inviting."

"Being in the INSPIRE program definitely helped me through my first year here at East Bay. The program feels like a pillar of support for me, as I have had nothing but supportive interactions with all the professors especially through times when I was struggling with my academics."

INSPIRE recognizes that to support students in building communities and their academics; faculty must be in community with each other. We found that students may gravitate towards one faculty over another; additionally, faculty hold group office hours where students can drop in and meet with multiple instructors in one place. We believe that the INSPIRE Faculty Communities of Practice serve as a model community building for students. Students have recognized the role that seeing communities has provided a layer of support and comfort to them:

“The professors are in communication with each other which makes it easier when it comes to working on assignments, and also having office hours all the same day. You could go see two professors at once which is nice.”

“The program seemed to make a genuine effort to take care of the students by providing instructors to them that care about both students and education. They also provided snacks.”

“I get a lot of help when needed, each teacher engages with students individually when needed, a very safe environment easy to get comfortable in.”

“Office hours every week and opportunities to meet with each teacher when necessary is as much support that I needed.”

“Teachers, the professors in the INSPIRE program have all been amazing and it's always exciting to come to class and see them. I genuinely enjoy being there and having a connection. All of the professors have made a positive impact on me and my classmates as we talk about how much we love them outside of class.”

“Thank you all for being my professors and for helping me grow to who I am today. I appreciate all you have done for us as your first INSPIRE cohort and honestly making our first year of college easier for us.”

“I'm so glad I joined this program, it's helped me discover who I am and create many relationships with students and professors. I was nervous at the beginning, but I have no regrets, and I talk often about these classes with my brother because I love them so much.”

From the instructor perspective, instructors also appreciate the community of educators whom they can seek advice and support from, as well as the ongoing pedagogical professional development:

“Being part of a community of educators that advocates for an engaged, inclusive, and student-centered approach to teaching was extremely galvanizing. Ultimately, as a lecturer who has felt isolated (especially during shelter-in), I have re-gained a sense of hope and belonging.”

“Teaching INSPIRE students and working with INSPIRE faculty has given me hope in addressing the equity gaps at CSUEB. I appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on my curriculum and teaching with the Critical Pedagogy coach.”

Additionally, our analyses of the integration of the Care Steward in AY 23-24 suggest that students appreciate the additional social support and near-peer mentor to identify and achieve their goals:

“They asked me how I’m doing academically and personally. They had me write down certain goals and asked me how I’m trying to reach it. Very supportive and understandable.”

“He helped me with my mental health really; he was there when I needed him and he helped me through the end of it.”

“Provided me someone to talk to when i had nobody else”

“The love and care a person wants to receive from someone, the understanding, there are more, but just being there and listening was something I [needed]”

“Certain goals I wasn’t able to reach because of personal reasons but it was nice to know my care steward wanted me to succeed and did everything they can for me to be able to”

In summary, while our quantitative results suggest that INSPIRE has effectively supported and retained students academically, the qualitative data indicate that students need a community of peers, compassionate educators, and social support to succeed academically. INSPIRE’s model calls for leaders in higher education to offer a transformative change in the pedagogical support of students that offers them connections to one another, a culturally relevant curriculum, and social support.

Lessons Learned

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

After reflection, our team has found that community-building in the classroom and across the program is the most critical strategy for creating a sense of belonging and, ultimately, academic success. INSPIRE begins building community among students at the outset through an orientation that allows students to meet one another, meet their faculty, and engage in team-building activities. In the classroom, students are involved in intentional discussions and team assignments that encourage them to take risks and bring their authentic selves into the classroom. INSPIRE community social gatherings allow students to connect further and showcase their course projects. Supplying students with INSPIRE sweatshirts, beanies, stickers, and other accouterments creates a sense of pride among students and serves as a reminder of this community. The community should extend beyond students and include the instructional faculty community. The faculty “Community of Practice” meetings enable faculty to check in with one another regarding specific students and discuss ways to support that student. We have found that each student tends to gravitate towards a different faculty member and that faculty member can act as a liaison for other faculty. Additionally, faculty development toward liberatory pedagogy has also been successful in INSPIRE. Engaging faculty in a model that empowers students (and themselves) rather than viewing students through a deficit model allows faculty to meet students where they are. It gives students a sense of agency in their education. Students are responsive to a social justice-themed curriculum that validates their lived experiences.

Another effective strategy is integrating a Care Steward who offers social support for students. Many students are experiencing challenges, including housing and food insecurity, domestic concerns, imposter syndrome, and transportation issues. The Care Steward connects students to on and off-campus resources but, more importantly, gives them a place to share and process their emotions, articulate their problems, and demonstrate to them that someone cares enough about them to do a wellness check.

Through INSPIRE, we have learned that there are several stakeholders to support student success. Often, as the campus undertakes initiatives, not all stakeholders are consulted and this causes delays and inefficiencies in the bureaucracy. While the co-PIs have not done so perfectly, a strategy we have found to be especially effective is understanding the larger bureaucratic structure and transparency in the communication of the program. The co-PIs spend substantial time forming and maintaining cross-campus collaboration to ensure the student is not adversely affected by the large bureaucratic structure. We approach our discussions with stakeholders with humility, understanding that there is much for us to learn, and appreciate the work others do to support our students.

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

The times when INSPIRE has experienced the most challenges have been when quick decisions were needed and co-PIs were not able to discuss and weigh the consequences INSPIRE has often faced pressure to progress the program in a manner that is not intentional. We firmly believe that building a program slowly and intentionally will benefit the students and the university in the long term. We have also learned that for a social gathering to be successful, there must be intentionality behind the activities and structure of the gatherings. Students should be able to showcase their course projects and mingle with people outside their cliques, and faculty should be active participants. In short, unsuccessful strategies are a lack of organization and intentionality in program building.

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

We are grateful to the CSU Student Success Network for supporting the community-building activities for our program. The EIA Grant Program has been a valuable resource to build intercampus communities, discuss projects with colleagues, and answer informational questions. We deeply appreciate the opportunity CSU Student Success Network has given us to develop our program. Another opportunity would be to share knowledge about other grant opportunities to expand our program to sustain and institutionalize the INSPIRE and, if possible, match us with a mentor to help us in those endeavors.

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

If there is a mechanism CSU Student Success Network can employ to inform campuses to recognize a culturally relevant, student-centered approach to academic success and to shift the conversation away from student deficits, that would be tremendous. To disrupt inequities in our system, institutions should be open to incremental changes to disrupt the status quo. It is frustrating that institutions seem to be performative about DEI initiatives and are (understandably) focused on enrollment numbers and graduation rates. While these are important to sustain our institutions, these metrics should not overshadow the fact that our students, faculty, and staff are human beings and need more empathy and compassion.