Interim Evaluation Report

University of California, Santa Barbara

Early Academic Outreach Program Evaluation

Ventura County Region Focus Group Findings

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<p align="center">**Table of contents**</p>

Executive Summary

Despite the growing importance and pertinence of higher education, students coming from families classified as low-income, first generation, English Language Learners (ELL), or underrepresented remain underprepared for college entrance compared to average. Standards for high school graduation have been raised and policies have been made by states in an attempt to support the neoliberal focus within the U.S., but they fail to uphold these standards for college (St. John, 2018). A student's post-secondary options are heavily dependent on his or her social environment, and school is often the only resource underrepresented students have for basic information on college. This places an emphasis on the need for change in spreading the college mission, as these students hold immeasurable potential for the future generation. Though this bears a heavy burden for a school's counseling program, actionable insight is necessary to facilitate success.

The primary focus of this paper is early intervention on high school students' college preparation and its effects. The Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) at the University of California is designed to provide academic development services for educationally disadvantaged students at partnered schools in the state of California, ultimately aimed to increase the number of underrepresented students enrolling in higher education. More specifically, the paper outlines results within partnered schools in Ventura county, where each school site and its respective cohort was studied individually. First-hand data was collected through conducting interviews, then measured to perform qualitative and comparative analysis through machine learning and topic modeling. The paper is concluded by results and student feedback, on top of evaluation recommendations for the program moving forward.

Introduction

Oxnard Union High School District

Oxnard Union High School District is a public local school district located in Ventura County, serving students grades 9 to 12 in the cities of Camarillo, Port Hueneme, and Oxnard as well as incorporated communities of El Rio, Somis, and Channel Islands Beach. It contains 13 schools, including 6 high schools, 4 alternative or continuation schools, 2 charter schools, and 1 special education school.

Between 2017 and 2021, 13.4% of students in the district were reported to be from families with an income below the poverty level. 17.9% of students were reported to be a part of families that receive food stamps or SNAP benefits. For parents of children who were a part of the school district, the median household income was reported to be $84,038. Education levels of these parents are as follows: 33.1% less than a high school degree, 24.5% high school degree, 23.7% some college or an Associate's degree, and 18.5% Bachelor's degree or higher. For the 2019-2020 academic year, the district had a total of 17,658 students enrolled in their schools, serving 13.05% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics consisted of 1.5% African American, 2% Asian, 3.4% Filipino, 77.5% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 12.7% White, 2.4% two or more races, and 0.2% not reported. Student groups consisted of 12.6% English learners, 0.5% foster youth, 11.5% homeless, 12.5% disabled, and 67.3% socioeconomically disadvantaged. 64.4% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals. The graduation rate was 84.8% with a dropout rate of 7.6%. Only 43.7% of graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements.

For the 2020-2021 academic year, the district had 18,137 students enrolled, consisting of about 13.79% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics consisted of 1.2% African American, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.1% Asian, 3.3% Filipino, 79% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 11.5% White, and 2.6% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 13.9% English learners, 0.4% foster youth, 7.1% homeless, 13.2% disabled, and 68.4% socioeconomically disadvantaged. 65.5% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 23.91. The graduation rate was 82.5% with a dropout rate of 8.8%. Only 40.8% of graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, the district has a total of 18,220 students enrolled, serving about 14.21% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics include 1.2% African American, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% Asian, 3.3% Filipino, 79.9% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 10.7% White, and 2.6% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 14.7% English learners, 0.4% foster youth, 5.1% homeless, 14% disabled, and 66.2% socioeconomically disadvantaged. 62.6% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 23.76. The graduation rate was 89.9% with a dropout rate of 6%. Only 38.3% of graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements.

Channel Islands High School

Channel Islands High School is located within Ventura County, and a part of the Oxnard Union High School District. For the 2019-2020 academic year, student demographic consisted of 87.6% Hispanic/Latinx, 6.2% Filipino, 3.4% White, 1% two or more races, 0.7% African American, 0.3% Asian, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.7% were not reported. The school had a total enrollment of 2,739 students, accounting for 2.02% of Ventura County. Out of the 673 students in the senior class, 118 applied to a CSU, of which 104 were admitted and 37 enrolled. 76 students applied to a UC, of which 47 were admitted and 17 enrolled.

      For the 2020-2021 academic year, the school was composed of 90.7% Hispanic/Latinx, 5.6% Filipino, 2.2% White, 0.7% two or more races, 0.5% African American, 0.2% Asian, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Pacific Islander students. Student groups consisted of 20.4% English learners, 6% homeless, 86.5% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 0.1% foster youth, 2.3% migrant, and 14.2% disabled at Channel Islands. Totaling an enrollment of 2,750 students, the school accounted for 2.09% of Ventura County. Out of the 626 students in the senior class, 103 applied to a CSU, of which 97 were admitted and 33 enrolled. 80 students applied to a UC, of which 53 were admitted and 23 enrolled.

      For the 2021-2022 academic year, the school was composed of 89.1% Hispanic/Latinx, 6.2% Filipino, 3% White, 0.7% two or more races, 0.5% African American, 0.3% Asian, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and .1% Pacific Islander students. Student groups consisted of 21% English learners, 3.5% homeless, 83% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 0.2% foster youth, 1.7% migrant, and 17.7% disabled at Channel Islands. Totaling an enrollment of 2,923 students, the school accounted for 2.28% of Ventura County. Out of the 772 students in the senior class, 143 applied to a CSU, of which 128 were admitted and 43 enrolled. 77 students applied to a UC, of which 55 were admitted and 21 enrolled.

Hueneme High School

Hueneme High School is a public school located in Oxnard, California, and a part of the Oxnard Union High School District. Within the 2019-2020 academic year, there were a total of 2,145 students enrolled, consisting of 1.1% African American, 2.8% Asian, 92.1% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.3% Pacific Islander, 2.5% White, and 1.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 14.6% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 1.2% homeless, 13.8% with disabilities, and 87.7% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Of the 382 senior students, 52 applied to a UC, 31 were admitted, and 17 were enrolled for the 2020 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 90 applied, 82 admitted, and 27 enrolled for the 2020 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 37.7% met UC or CSU course requirements.

      For the 2020-2021 academic year, 2,400 students were enrolled with 0.9% African American, 2.7% Asian, 92.7% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 2.4% White, and 1% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 18.5% English learners, 0.3% foster youth, 5.3% homeless, 14.3% with disabilities, and 87.3% socioeconomically disadvantaged. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 26.45. Of the 492 senior students, 64 applied to a UC, 46 were admitted, and 22 were enrolled for the 2021 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 74 applied, 68 admitted, and 18 enrolled for the 2021 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 32.6% met UC or CSU course requirements.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, 2410 students were enrolled with 0.7% African American, 2.1% Asian, 94% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 2.3% White, and 0.7% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 22% English learners, 0.3% foster youth, 4.2% homeless, 14.2% with disabilities, and 86.3% socioeconomically disadvantaged. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 23.61. Of the 571 senior students, 84 applied to a UC, 46 were admitted, and 12 enrolled by the 2022 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 115 applied, 104 admitted, and 27 enrolled for the 2022 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 32.4% met UC or CSU course requirements.

Pacifica High School

Pacifica High School is a public school in Oxnard, California, located within Ventura County and a part of Oxnard Union High School District. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the school was composed of 93.7% Hispanic/Latinx, 2.1% Filipinx, 1.1% White, 1% Asian, 0.9% African American, 0.6% two or more races, 0.3% Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the 3,051 enrolled students, student groups consisted of 18.7% English learners, 0.4% foster youth, 16.4% homeless, 85.8% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 10.7% students with disabilities. For the Fall 2020 term at CSU campuses, 161 students applied, 145 were admitted, and 53 enrolled. In addition, for the UCs, 82 students applied, 51 were admitted, and 16 enrolled.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, the school was composed of 93.7% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.9% Filipinx, 1.4% White, 1% Asian, 0.9% African American, 0.9% two or more races, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the 3,198 enrolled students, student groups consisted of 18.9% English learners, 0.4% foster youth, 14.4% homeless, 86% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 11.6% students with disabilities. For the Fall 2021 term at CSU campuses, 144 students applied, 133 were admitted, and 57 enrolled. In addition, for the UCs, 96 students applied, 59 were admitted, and 22 enrolled.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, the school was composed of 93.5% Hispanic/Latinx, 2.1% Filipinx, 1.1% White, 1% Asian, 0.9% African American, 0.6% two or more races, 0.3% Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the 3,218 enrolled students, student groups consisted of 19.2% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 10.6% homeless, 83% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 12.9% students with disabilities. For the Fall 2022 term at CSU campuses, 153 students applied, 141 were admitted, and 52 enrolled. In addition, for the UCs, 93 students applied, 53 were admitted, and 20 enrolled.

Rio Mesa High School

Rio Mesa High School is a public school within the Oxnard Union High School District in a large suburban area. Within the 2019-2020 academic year, there were a total of 2,269 students enrolled with 5.77% Asian, 2.73% African American, 81% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.35% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 7.93% White, and 2.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 14.6% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 1.2% homeless, 13.8% with disabilities, and 87.7% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Of the 503 senior students that year, 55 of them applied to a UC, 34 were admitted, and 15 enrolled for the 2020 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 81 applied, 81 were admitted and 31 were enrolled for the 2020 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 42% met UC or CSU course requirements.

For the 2020-2021 academic year, 2,381 students were enrolled, with 15.6% Asian, 2.3% African American, 83.1% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2.6% two

or more races, and 6.2% White. Student groups consisted of 17.2% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 9.4% homeless, 66.7% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 16.2% disabled. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 24.3. Of the 562 senior students that year, 65 applied to a UC, 40 were admitted, and 17 were enrolled by the 2021 fall term. For CSU campuses, 78 applied, 71 were admitted, and 25 were enrolled for the 2021 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 37.1% met UC or CSU course requirements.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, 2,333 students were enrolled, with 4.2% Asian, 1.8% African American, 85.6% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2.5% two or more races, and 5.5% White. Student groups consisted of 16.5% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 5.9% homeless, 64.2% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 12.9% disabled. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 23.61. Of the 560 senior students that year, 97 applied to a UC, 61 were admitted, and 25 were enrolled by the 2022 fall term. For CSU campuses, 109 applied, 105 were admitted, and 29 were enrolled for the 2021 Fall term. Of the graduating students, 35.8% met UC or CSU course requirements.

Santa Paula Unified School District

Santa Paula Unified School District is a regular local school district located in Ventura County, serving students from Kindergarten to grade 12 in the Santa Paula city area. It contains 9 schools, including 6 elementary schools, 1 middle school, 1 high school, and 1 continuation school.

Between 2017 and 2021, 23.4% of students in the district were reported to be from families with an income below the poverty level. 27.9% of students were reported to be a part of families that receive food stamps or SNAP benefits. For parents of children who were a part of the school district, the median household income was reported to be $65,234. 50.7% of parents were reported to have the highest education level of less than a high school graduate, 24.8% reached a high school graduate level, 19% reached some college or an Associate's Degree, and 5.5% reached a Bachelor's Degree or Higher.

For the 2019-2020 academic year, the district had a total of 5,153 students enrolled across all of their schools, serving 3.8% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics consisted of 0.1% African American, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% Asian, 96.1% Hispanic/Latinx, 3.2% White, and 0.2% two or more races. Student groups included 32.9% English learners, 0.2% foster youth, 10.5% homeless, 14.1% disabled, and 86.8% socioeconomically disadvantaged. The graduation rate was 89.9% with a 2.7% dropout rate. Only 46% of all graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements. 84.5% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

For the 2020-2021 academic year, the district has a total of 5,081 students, serving 3.86% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics consisted of 1.2% African American, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% Asian, 0.1% Filipino, 95.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 3.4% White, and 0.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 32% English learners, 0.3% foster youth, 12.4% homeless, 15% disabled, and 84.9% socioeconomically disadvantaged. The graduation rate was 89.2% with a dropout rate of 2.5%. Only 33.4% of all graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 22.31. 83% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, the district has a total of 4,988 students, serving 3.89% of all students in Ventura County. Student demographics consisted of 0.1% African American, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% Asian, 0.2% Filipino, 96.2% Hispanic/Latinx,

0.1% Pacific Islander, 2.9% White, and 0.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 34.8% English learners, 0.3% foster youth, 7% homeless, 16.4% disabled, and 83.7% socioeconomically disadvantaged. The graduation rate was 89.8% with a dropout rate of 2.8%. Only 42.2% of all graduating students met UC/CSU course requirements. There was a student-to-teacher ratio of 21.79. 80.9% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Santa Paula High School

Santa Paula High School is a public school within the Santa Paula Unified District, a small suburban town. For the 2019-2020 academic year, there was a total of 1,670 students enrolled with 0.0% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% African American, 0.1% Filipino, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.2% Asian, 4.0% White, 95.4% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0.3% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 15.1% English learners, 0.0% foster youth, 8.3% homeless, 12.4% with disabilities, and 81.9% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Of the 331 seniors enrolled that year, 109 students applied to a UC, 77 students were admitted, and 19 were enrolled for the 2020 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 128 students applied, 120 students were admitted, and 39 students were enrolled for the 2020 Fall term.

For the 2020-2021 academic year, 1,749 students were enrolled, with 0.0% Filipino, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.1% African American, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% Asian, 4.0% White, 95.3% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 18.1% English learners, 0.0% foster youth, 11% homeless, 83.2% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 15.2% disabled. Of the 378 senior students that year, 105 applied to a UC, 71 were admitted, and 19 were enrolled by the 2021 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 101 students applied, 97 students were admitted, and 31 students enrolled for the 2021 Fall term.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, 1763 were enrolled, with 0.1% Filipino, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% African American, 0.2% Asian, 2.6% White, 96.8% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0.2% two or more races. Student groups consisted of 20.7% English learners, 0.0% foster youth, 4.8% homeless, 17.1% with disabilities, and 84.7% socioeconomically disadvantaged. Of the 409 seniors enrolled that year, 113 applied to a UC, 88 were admitted, and 27 were enrolled by the 2022 Fall term. For CSU campuses, 136 students applied, 130 students were admitted, and 36 students were enrolled for the 2022 Fall term.

Program theory

Activities

Objectives for students participating in the EAOP cohort consist of gaining additional enrichment alongside the whole school services already provided by EAOP. This cohort model ensures focused support for the cohort of students in each grade level in the high schools. While EAOP's approach holds a standardized set of activities for participants across all sites, each school possesses unique characteristics that may influence return on implementation. Limitations set by individual college sites will be noted throughout the findings and the final comparison of each cohort.

The selection process for cohort members across all school sites is standardized and conducted by EAOP college site coordinators. At the start of Spring, students are recruited in

their freshman year of high school. Prospective students' transcripts and A-G track status are considered and evaluated for eligibility. For as long as the eligibility requirements are met, students continue their participation in EAOP's cohort targeted services. The logic model outlines activities such as monthly cohort meetings, grade-specific workshops/presentations, and student academic advising. Meetings and presentations aim to enrich college access and community building, while the academic advising focuses on guidance for the students in their respective grade levels. Advising sessions are tailored to each student; college site coordinators provide counseling specific to a student's needs that are influenced by personal identity, school environment, and community dynamics. Of the various topics covered in academic advising, some examples include student transcript evaluation, A-G status advising, community college dual enrollment, extracurricular activities, and financial aid/scholarship advising.

Participants of the EAOP cohort also have opportunities to attend university tours and the EAOP-sponsored Education Leadership & Careers Conference. Additionally, college site coordinators provide assistance for students who decide to attend external summer enrichment programs by establishing partnerships and promoting alternative programs. These activities are influenced by the school and its community contexts, which can both constrain and enhance the implementation of this program in reality. Yet, these activities have been meticulously designed based on professional experience and have demonstrated efficacy through previous evaluations on EAOP at UC Santa Barbara. The outcomes of this program, with emphasis on the cohort participants, are outlined in the logic model and described in the subsequent section. Findings are reported with respect to both short-term and long-term outcomes.

Outputs

The University of California Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships (SAPEP) portfolio significantly impacts EAOP's goals and outcomes. These objectives directly resonate with the UC's mission to expand accessibility to higher education, specifically for underrepresented groups in postsecondary degree programs. Target audiences for the program consist of low-income, first generation, English language learners (ELL), and other underrepresented students. While addressing the critical issues in higher education across California, these goals also align with school site capabilities and priorities for students in order to enhance access and enrollment in higher education statewide. The outputs of this logic model for this program outlines cohort, whole school, and parent services in facilitating student success. EAOP serves as one component within the larger SAPEP portfolio at UCSB, extending to the larger UC portfolio.

Long-term outcomes

EAOP cohort activities align with the long-term goals outlined in the logic model, measuring progress through short-term outputs. The program's objectives for participants center around increasing access to higher education and increasing the percentage of targeted student populations. Specifically, EAOP aims to aid a student's need to complete "A-G" requirements by high school graduation, fulfilling the eligibility criteria for California State Universities and Universities of California, CSU and UC applications and enrollments, and financial aid applications - such as Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the Dream Act, or Cal grants.

These services that are implemented across program sites align with the SAPEP portfolio's mission - to increase access and diversity in higher education. In fulfilling the broader mission of the SAPEP portfolio, EAOP at UCSB offers both cohort-based and whole school services across multiple college sites. At this time of evaluation, the UCSB Early Academic Outreach Program delivers a wide range of services across nine school sites spanning Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Kern counties, all of which consist of high schools. Historically, EAOP at UCSB has also extended its services to middle school levels.

Methodology

Comparative case studies

Methods utilized to gain insight on the quality of the cohort component of the program across college sites in the Ventura county region involved case studies, with data collection occurring through focus groups with student participants. This evaluation design was piloted during the beginning of the 23-24 academic year with data collection occurring over the Fall term. While traditional focus group methods focus on consensus building, the pilot focused on analyzing common themes across sites rather than consensus of student participant experiences. While this is a limitation, the pilot case study findings provide direction for future evaluation procedures to produce credible and useful evidence. The comparative case study held particular relevance to the Early Academic Outreach Program due to its multisite program implementation. This methodology leaves room for control among the differences observed across college sites, as each site is centered as a case within a broader context of program and policy implementation across the region.

Case studies have long been employed in educational settings to facilitate implementation comparison among educational outcomes in classrooms and college access programs. This approach is particularly pertinent to this evaluation, due to the varying characteristics and student experiences at each college site, despite belonging to the same program and region. For instance, policies and student needs at Channel Islands High School may differ from those at Pacifica High School due to school capabilities and student, teacher, or administrator preferences.

Directly comparing student outcomes on an individual level presents challenges due to the diverse identities of each student. However, by focusing on student experiences that occur throughout a participant's time in the UCSB EAOP cohort across college sites allows the analysis to capture both individual perspectives, the extent to which other participants agreed, and the similarities and differences between each site are emphasized.

Identifying discrepancies within program activities and student outcomes between college sites enables constructive criticism for program improvement. Moreover, comparing student experiences allows researchers and evaluators to discover viable solutions across college sites in the region. Figure X illustrates the method by which schools are analyzed within the region and compared individually as distinct cases. The figure underscores the variables observed within a specific case, allowing college site coordinators to adopt solutions from other schools within their region. The factors due to the protocol and qualitative coding process in each case are explored in the paragraph following the figure.
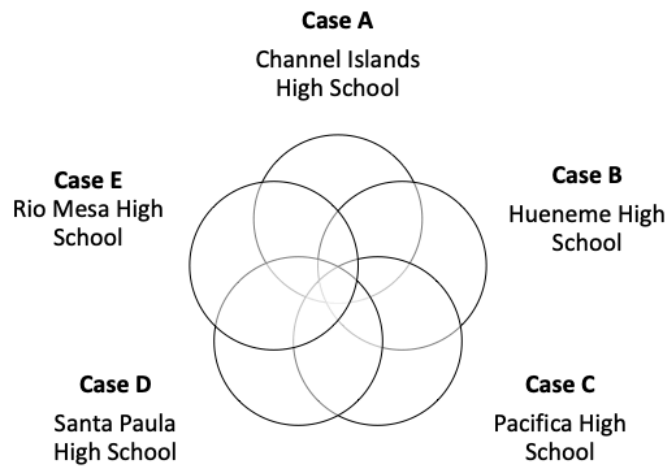
Ventura County EAOP Cases

Case A
Channel Islands
High School

Case E
Rio Mesa High
School

Case B
Hueneme High
School

Case D
Santa Paula
High School

Case C
Pacifica High
School

Figure X. Comparative case study employed to evaluate cohort quality in the Ventura county region.

The case study approach offers a methodology that permits program activity and student outcome comparisons across college sites within the region, encompassing the EAOP portfolio of schools in both Northern Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. Cases in this report were specifically chosen and compared between other cases in the Ventura county region, due to their discrete geographical position. Regional comparison of college sites will highlight effective practices which coordinators can adopt to provide services that meet school and student needs across the region.

Focus groups with semi-structured interview protocol

The evaluation executed focus groups with students to discover key factors linked to student experiences across various college sites. These sessions utilized a semi-structured interview protocol developed in collaboration with EAOP administrative leaders. The protocol consisted of a questionnaire based on program quality and specific activities that students engaged in. Implementation methods for these protocols varied across college sites depending on their unique needs and resources, affecting participant recruitment and consensus gathering during data processing for these focus groups. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. The protocol was designed to elicit feedback about specific program areas while allowing students space to reflect on their experiences participating in EAOP.

Activities encompassed workshops related to college access and readiness, Summer enrichment activities, and other services for students in EAOP college site cohorts. As an alternative to observing a group consensus, transcript data was analyzed to identify distinct factors within each topic that encompassed student experiences throughout participation in the EAOP cohort. This analytic approach places emphasis on the diversity of experiences rather than

consensus in order to highlight unique insights at each site and allow EAOP to be curated in a way that will benefit students regardless of location.

Table X outlines the number of participants, time duration, and short description of location for each focus group. Note the different descriptions for the focus group locations; settings varied from focused spaces that allowed students to maintain focus and attention to open locations where other school site activities were conducted simultaneously. Limitations in space provision for focus group evaluations also limited findings and hindered comparison analysis across cases.

Table X. Focus group characteristics for northern Santa Barbara county EAOP cohort evaluation by college site.

School site	Number of participants	Focus group time duration	Description of focus group locations
Channel Islands High School	5	41 min	- Small multipurpose classroom next to coordinator office. - Slight interruption due to the shared nature of the space.
Hueneme High School	11	1 hr 1 min	- Used the library where there was also a presentation going on. - One student arrived at the end.
Pacifica High School	6	40 min	Hosted after school in the career center. The career center is shared with the EAOP coordinator with.
Santa Paula High School	6	30 min	- Conducted in the SPHS Career Center. - Other groups shared the Center, which may have interfered with student sharing and perspectives. - While the total group included six participants, participation was staggered with students joining and leaving the focus group at various points in the session.
Rio Mesa High School	7	42 min	- Conducted in the college and career center. - Center was a shared space during the focus group, but there were minimal interruptions.

Thematic coding and analysis

The coding process for the focus group data prioritized highlighting the diverse experiences of participants participating in the cohort. The open coding approach aimed to discover and explore shared experiences as well as individual experiences. Within each college site, the focus group method facilitated the emergence of multiple perspectives, bringing potential topics of discussion. Some focus groups delved deeper into certain factors and topics compared to others. The analysis particularly emphasizes the fluctuation in prevalence for certain factors and topics within each case.

A team of evaluators identified a total of 70 distinct topics across all school sites after the initial open coding approach in the first round. These codes were applied to transcripts multiple numerous times by at least two reviewers in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the developed codes from the initial open-ended coding phase. Subsequently, evaluators were able to produce more general factors from the initial codes produced in the first round through deductive reasoning. Following the second phase of coding, eight distinct factors that aligned with data across cases were identified by evaluators.

Results

Positive feelings about college

Many students noted their excitement, despite the stress and anxiety that accompanies exploring college and university pathways. When asked about feelings that arose when thinking about college, a student states, *"And then I don't know, there's just like, everything piled on, it's stressful, but like, I'm ready for it to be over. And I'm excited to see like, where the next four years are gonna be,"* - Student 6, Channel Islands High School. Moreover, in gaining exposure to different pathways that could be taken at universities such as UCs or CSUs, participants also felt an increased desire to receive higher education. A student at Hueneme High School exclaimed his desired path during the interview, he says, *"Yeah, so my, the career I'm going for is, I want to be a cop. So when I go into college, I decided I want to major in Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Administration. And I've searched, I researched the college I want to go to and they got the major I want,"* - Student 10, Hueneme High School. Respondents who had dream occupations seemed more comfortable applying to universities as well as identifying and exploring majors or career paths.

Negative feelings about college

In observing high numbers of applicants for college, students often felt discouraged and expressed their lack of motivation in filling out the applications for UCs and CSUs, *"Like if you're not selling yourself enough, cuz I feel like we're all pretty humble, and it's like now you have to brag about yourself and do all this. And then I feel like sometimes we might cut ourselves short. And that can be a missed opportunity for everybody. Just say, I'm not sure like, because there's obviously 1000's of applications. I don't know how I'm gonna stand out,"* - Student 7, Santa Paula High School. On top of discouragement, a student at Pacifica High School noted their regret in the amount of extracurriculars activities they failed to take advantage of within the last four years of high school, *"I do kind of feel like I've met the requirements for UCs, but then there have been so many times where I'm like, Oh, I wish I took more clubs, or whatever, you*

know, so I can, so it makes it easier to write about, or just so I seem more impressive I guess, when it comes to the applications." - Student 2, Pacifica High School. Overall, college admissions and applications seem to have impeded a student's confidence throughout the process.

Social factors

Social pressures on top of family pressures affect student outcomes across sites. Those with family members or close ones that have attended college are able to communicate the significance of higher education and its long-term effects, *"And my dad recently graduated from college like two or three years ago. So he was able to get a better position in his job. So now I feel obligated to at least do better than them,"* - Student 4, Hueneme High School. Others, who may be first-generation students, are heavily influenced by what their parents may want for them and abide by their desires, *"So basically, I was told I can succeed, like if I go to just a community college, what like, you can, but personally like, I kind of want to go far away, I want to like explore my own options, and kind of be more independent. But um, it's also a struggle too, because sometimes parents don't really understand that whatever you want to do, there's specific schools for that,"* - Student 4, Channel Islands High School. Depending on a student's environment at home, perspectives and outcomes differed per subject.

Visiting colleges and enrichment activities

Benefits from university tours and enrichment program support are clearly recognized through student interviews. Expansion of a student's list of viable colleges are noted, as their impression of a college is influenced by their respective cohort coordinators. A student at Channel Islands High School emphasized her cohort coordinator's efforts, *"And then the fact that like, she's helping us with like college tours, I remember we went to go to UC Northridge and that one helped me a lot because I never even considered applying to that school,"*- Student 4, Channel Islands High School . Some students took on summer programs that also aided in guiding a student through the admissions process, *"Well, okay so over the summer I'm a part of Upper Bound, so they helped me, at least not specifically, like hands on, but more talked about how to approach college apps. And that definitely somewhat helped me sort of, set personal deadlines,"* - Student 4, Channel Islands High School. Enrichment activities such as advertising other programs and partnerships has boosted student confidence throughout the application process and imposed time management practices.

EAOP cohort benefits

A first-generation student remarked EAOP's effect on their family. They noted that the cohort has allowed them to better understand paths to higher education and the process of college admissions, *"So EAOP is like on top of it, helping me understand it, and not only me, but my parents too. The ways they've helped me fill out applications, and also getting different views from different people like guest speakers coming in, and their experience, how it went and how, like, benefits they got out of it and points, like advice they give us,"* - Student 12, Hueneme High School. On top of aiding student success in a student's transition from high school to college, EAOP makes advances in including parents through the process, expanding on the participant's total support system.

Admissions requirements and application process

Students experience many obstacles and road bumps throughout their application processes. Some students at Channel Islands High School noted issues with the general application process, such as writing PIQs and not knowing where to begin or finding difficulty being vulnerable through their writing, *"We've been reminded to be vulnerable in our PIQs. But I feel like it's kind of hard for some of us. I feel like for me, personally, it's comparing my story to everyone else. Especially like in a low income community, you feel very pressured to find how you stand out,"* - Student 5, Channel Islands High School. However, at Hueneme High School, benefits from the Summer Readiness Program through EAOP were emphasized as a student says, *"But even when I came to, like the Summer Readiness Academy, I was given a lot more information like, like that, there were different processes, like, like you said, there are different processes for different colleges,"* Student 4, Hueneme High School.

Financial aid

Many students claimed their lack of knowledge in filling out the FAFSA form or knowing how it is processed to determine financial aid. This led students to experience feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or pressure, even when they know that they have other sources of financial support, *"I honestly don't know what to feel because like, I don't really know how like financial aid and like the FAFSA. I don't really know how that works,"* - Student 2, Hueneme High School. In general, students understood their financial situation and whether they would qualify for aid, but the process of filling out the FAFSA seemed to be overwhelming, *"So I think like, financial wise, with college, I'm able to get a lot more benefits, but still, like that process of filling out a FAFSA still kind of worries me,"* Student 4, Hueneme High School.

Student feedback

At each high school site within Ventura county, students had positive feedback on EAOP's influence. A common theme that was noted about the counselors at every site was their accessibility and friendliness. With such counselors navigating students through college applications and admission processes, participants felt comfort knowing they could find support through EAOP.

Tangible progress on students' applications was one of the key effects that was emphasized during the cohort interviews. Students were asked how they felt about A-G requirements and other eligibility demands, and responses never failed to mention EAOP's impact in guiding them through the learning process. Many responded with confidence about their progress and mentioned their respective counselors' efforts in keeping them on track through PIQ workshops.

Improvements in time management was another recurring theme that was observed throughout the cohort interviews. As high school seniors applying to colleges around the same time, it's inevitable to make comparisons between peers. Numerous students acknowledged the progress of their peers and noted a sense of security regarding their own positions on the trajectory facilitated by EAOP. Students often mentioned that they would not have been as far along on the application process had it not been for EAOP guiding them in preparation.

Overall, the community that EAOP has built at each school site seems familiar and comfortable for participants. On top of the logic model's anticipated outcomes, these services have led to an increase in student confidence and comfortability in taking a step forward towards higher education.

Evaluation recommendations

The sense of community within cohorts at each college site seemed to be a trend, and if anything, students recommended an earlier start date for the program. With most college applications opening in October, seniors believed a head-start in the application process would have been beneficial. The need for advertisement was also mentioned; participants were often referred to the program by friends or counselors without having heard of the program beforehand. With targeted advertising, EAOP could expand its audience and to meet more students' needs.

Students within Ventura county held heavy burdens with finances when choosing colleges. At least one student from each cohort mentioned their lack of knowledge in scholarships available and expressed feeling lost in figuring out the next steps. Scholarship/grant workshops, where students can be given resources to learn about their eligibility and how they can apply would be a beneficial addition to the program.

In discussing negative feelings towards college, many students mentioned a low level of self esteem among the thousands of other applicants. Some revealed their regret in lacking extracurriculars - a student at Hueneme specifically mentioned his desire for an internship within his desired career path of becoming a cop. Another student at Rio Mesa discussed her interest in Nursing, and wondered how she could increase her chances in getting accepted to the specific major. Catered internships or assistant positions for students with different interests may open many doors for those interested in the experience, while building confidence for the application process.

Other students in the Pacifica cohort mentioned that hands-on experience on campus tours would be beneficial. College tours are an existing activity that EAOP offers, but an incorporation of a student/faculty guide may establish an immersive experience for the student at the college and may hold different effects.

Conclusion

The logic model outlines cohort and whole school services that were successfully carried out, as mentioned in cohort interviews. Participants often mentioned their comfortability with EAOP counselors at each school site and expressed gratitude for not only the counselors themselves, but the activities that led them to advance their college application track. Although UC/CSU eligibility rates decreased from 2019-2022 in the Oxnard High School District, it is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic heavily affected high school students' decisions and opinions about college. Overall, early intervention programs such as EAOP have proven themselves effective within Ventura county through an increase in graduation rates and positive feedback from its participants.

One of the most common themes that was observed between school sites was family influence on students. Upon being asked about the root of their motivation and decisions on college, students often mentioned social factors and their parents' influence. Parental support in the steps following an individual's grade-school years is crucial; and EAOP strives to involve

parents in the process. This assumes parental involvement promotes college enrollment for students participating in EAOP. Perna's study mentions association of parental involvement and greater likelihood of aspiring to attend college and actually enrolling (Perna, 2000).

Other services outlined in the Logic Model stems from similar rationing; student academic advising sessions supports a student in terms of academia, university tours enhances a student's experience with college applications, and monthly cohort meetings builds a community that comforts a student by showing others in similar situations or leaves room for growth in learning from those with differences. All things considered, EAOP has allowed students to grow confident and be comfortable in attaining higher education. The program outlines measurable and short-term outcomes such as increasing student involvement in pre-college activities, and it is clear that the outlined long-term goal of increasing underrepresented students' pursuance of higher education is on the horizon.