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A Recipe for Success

When the California state legislature passed Assembly Bill 2016 mandating the development of ethnic studies curricula for high schools, Lisa Sun-Hee Park was delighted.

The professor and chair of Asian American studies at UC Santa Barbara had been meeting with the chairs of Chicano and Chicana studies, Black studies and feminist studies and they all saw the bill as a great step forward for diversity and inclusion.

But they had questions: Who would teach the curricula? How are teachers going to be trained for it? It's not, as Park noted, as though they could just pick up a book. Teachers are already stretched thin and doing so much on their own.

"So that's where we sat down and thought, you know what? We could do something here," Park said. "We actually have all the capabilities right here at UCSB. We have, first of all, a robust group of faculty on campus whose area of research is ethnic studies. And then we also have an excellent school of education that trains school teachers. And we thought, well, why don't we collaborate and create the teachers who will be needed in order to carry out this initiative?"

And thus ÉXITO was born. Known in full as Educational eXcellence and Inclusion Training Opportunities, it will develop a "4+1" program in which students graduate with a bachelor's degree in an ethnic studies or feminist studies major, then earn a master's and a teaching credential at UCSB's Gevirtz Graduate School of Education (GGSE). And last month, ÉXITO received a significant boost with the award of $3

million over five years from the U.S. Department of Education's Title V program.

The program — éxito is Spanish for success — was quickly embraced by Jeffrey Milem, dean of GGSE, and Charlie Hale, SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences.

"The Gevirtz School has always been at the forefront of adapting and improving evidence-based teacher education, so it's no surprise that we will be among the first programs to produce qualified teachers for the new ethnic studies requirement in California high schools," Milem said. "What pleases me even more is to know that ÉXITO will become a hub for all undergraduate and graduate students who are committed to practicing inclusive excellence in their future careers as educators. It is a program that echoes and amplifies the Gevirtz School's core value of embracing our responsibility as a Hispanic Serving Institution to catalyze the strengths of diversity and address the challenges of our complex world."

Hale said ÉXITO is an important investment in the future of diversity and inclusion in California's schools.

"This is a visionary program, which could not have arrived at a more apt historical moment," Hale said. "Our ethnic studies, feminist studies and education faculty, already at the forefront of campus pedagogy and scholarship with an equity lens, have won the opportunity to expand their impact even further, by recruiting and training future generations of ethnic studies high school teachers, and generating the curricular resources these teachers will need to excel. As storm clouds of threats to such efforts gather in some quarters, it is deeply affirming to have joined forces with Dean Milem and the GGSE to advance our shared commitments to equity and justice in education."

The program will start with a small class of current undergraduates in the spring quarter, said Park, who is co-director of the program with Rebeca Mireles Rios, an assistant professor in GGSE's Department of Education. In the meantime, they're developing the infrastructure and curricula, hiring an associate director who will help guide the daily operations and bringing aboard graduate students. Core members working on this project include Laury Oaks, Dolores Inés Casillas, Ingrid Banks, Terrance Wooten, Diane Fujino and Barbara Endemaño Walker.

"We're getting all the pieces and people together, and we're going to focus on our pool of undergraduates that we currently have at UCSB," Park said. "We're going to

start off a little small in the beginning. We want to make sure we do it right and fix anything that goes awry."

While all ambitious new programs experience hiccups, ÉXITO benefits from UCSB's deep resources and expertise. Most of the courses needed for the program already exist, Park noted, which means it doesn't have to be created from scratch.

"It's about taking what resources we already have on campus," she said. "And then organizing it in a way that carefully lays out what each year will look like for these students whose interests lie in this trajectory and with the goal of becoming a teacher."

But ÉXITO, likely the first program of its kind in the state, will do more than offer classes, Park said. Getting into and succeeding in graduate school isn't a simple matter, even for good students. So the program will focus on preparing students to make the leap.

"Our goal is also to help them make that transition from undergrad to grad and to help facilitate that through mentorship and professionalization," she said. "But also having a cohort of students to support each other as they go through this will be key."

As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) — one with 25% or more Hispanic undergraduates — UCSB is also positioned to help increase the number of people of color who are teachers. According to the California Department of Education, Hispanics made up 54.9% of the students in the state's public school in 2019-20; and 7 out of 10 are ethnic minorities. The experiences and histories of these students, however, remain largely marginal in their school curriculum.

"Given that we're an HSI," Park said, "ÉXITO fulfills our mission to ensure that all our students have an equal opportunity to excel. And we already have students who have expressed interest in this program. So, it all seems to click very well that way."

The program is intended to include the community as well. A summer institute for California teachers — and potentially from across the nation — who want to learn more about ethnic and feminist studies is being developed. The initial idea was to bring teachers to UCSB for workshops, but the pandemic has put a crimp in the plan for now.

In the Santa Barbara area, UCSB has begun to work with local teachers and principals to learn what they need and want in the classroom. Among their wish-list items was a digital repository of teaching materials, Park said.

“If we could do that for them and create a space where they can find this information in one place that would save them so much time,” she said. “It’s one of the first things that we have on our to-do list right now.”

Establishing the ÉXITO program is a lot of work, but Park said the time is right.

“I think at this moment of so many different kinds of crises — it’s hard to even name them all — to have something like this, which is concrete, which is something that we can do now,” she said. “And for the benefit of all of us, it just seems like it could not come at a better moment.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.