

## HSI Servingness in CAFES

### FSLI Project Impact Statement

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The Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) Designation is given to colleges and universities that (1) have a Hispanic/Latinx/Latine enrollment of at least 25% and (2) demonstrate a high concentration (at least 50%) of students who are eligible for Pell Grants. Because Cal Poly is only one of two remaining California State University campuses without the HSI designation, Cal Poly has intentionally been working towards becoming an HSI. From 2018 to 2024, the enrollment of Latinx/e first time freshmen at Cal Poly has risen from 17% to 25.2%. Having reached the first criterion for HSI designation, and seeking an exemption to the second, Cal Poly is on its way to achieving its goal. However, merely achieving HSI designation is not the only objective. Cal Poly seeks to holistically support Latinx/e students and their total collegiate experience. The university is approaching this by actively implementing practices that address the framework of *Servingness*.

*Servingness*, a concept developed by Dr. Gina Garcia, addresses what it means to move from meeting the quota of merely enrolling Latinx students to actually serving them. This is particularly important, given the federal government defines HSI's by the percentage of Latinx/e students enrolled but has no federal requirements for the corresponding infrastructure required to support them on the journey. *Servingness* seeks to produce equitable outcomes for Latinx/e students and developing a culture that enhances and reflects the racial and ethnic experience of Latinx/e students. While deliberate planning has gone into *Servingness* at the university level at Cal Poly, this is a new focus for the academic colleges, particularly for the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES). In 2019, the six colleges were tasked with creating action plans around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). HSI *Servingness* fits within each of the priorities of the current CAFES DEI Action Plan.

To complete the FSLI project, I elected to guide each of the nine CAFES departments to create three to five *HSI Servingness* goals, and a plan to assess each. This project was a natural fit for me, given my professional responsibilities tied to DEI. It was also an innovative effort, as no other college has formally addressed *Servingness*. The project timeline is featured below:

March 2024	Secure Approval of Dean and CAFES DEI Committee
May 2024	Secure support from the Office of University Diversity and Inclusion (OUDI)
August 2024	Plan CAFES Fall Conference DEI Session

September 2024	Deliver <i>HSI Servingness</i> Workshop at CAFES Fall Conference DEI Session. Task Departments with <i>Servingness</i> Goal Development.
December 2024	Department <i>Servingness</i> Goals Due
Jan – Feb 2025	Goals reviewed by CAFES DEI Committees (faculty/staff & student) for feedback
March 2025	Feedback shared with Departments
June 2025	Adoption of CAFES <i>Servingness</i> Goals
December 2025	<i>HSI Servingness</i> Goal Assessment Reports Due to College

After securing approvals from the CAFES Dean, and meeting with OUDI leadership to secure their support, I worked with the CAFES faculty and staff DEI committee to plan the CAFES Fall Conference DEI session. Each fall, the college gathers for a 3-hour DEI session and is the only college to do so. In September, the session began with an update on the college's progress on meeting the goals set in the CAFES DEI Strategic Action Plan, followed by a short presentation by the DEI Committee leadership sharing progress made and opportunities for engagement. The next 1 ½ hours of the session was led by Diana Ortiz Giron from OUDI where she addressed Cal Poly's quest to becoming an HSI. She offered context on the framework, a primer on our campus' goals and direction, and then launched into table discussions. Seven questions guided the table groups' thinking about *Servingness* in their own contexts. The seven questions are as follows:

1. What would becoming a "Latinx-serving" college feel and look like for CAFES? What would it mean for every staff, administrator, and faculty member in CAFES to put the *Servingness* framework into practice? What does it mean for you in your individual role(s)?
2. What is the college doing in alignment with HSI institutional recommendations?
3. What resources are still needed to advance HSI efforts? What challenges and barriers may need to be addressed?
4. Given the fastest-growing underrepresented minority group enrolling in CAFES are currently Latinx/e students, how can we continue to expand efforts that seek to increase the recruitment and retention of Latinx/e students? Why is this important?
5. How is CAFES preparing to serve an increasingly diverse student population? What can you do to be student-ready in AY24-25?
6. What opportunities are there to amplify current curricular and co-curricular experiences that promote holistic student success and foster belonging for Latinx/e students?

At the close of the workshop, I charged departments to work collaboratively with their colleagues, in the development of three to five *Servingness* goals, to be assessed in the coming year. They were supplied with a template which tasked them with identifying goals, action steps to achieve each goal, and a plan for how they would like to assess each one. Many seemed genuinely excited about this opportunity, as they see a number of Latinx/e students enter the university each year and, in many cases, struggle with STEM coursework leading to higher DFW rates. They also notice slightly lower rates of retention for this

population from year to year. Some notice the lack of participation in leadership or club activities... all observations they wanted to address in their goals. Additionally, a number of faculty stated they wanted to focus their recruitment efforts on geographic areas with higher Latinx/e populations.

In December 2024, departments submitted their *Servingness* plans to the Dean's office. In January and February, I presented each department's plan to both the faculty and staff, and the student DEI Committees. In May 2025, each department received feedback on their *Servingness* plans and the green light to begin working toward their goals. Departments are expected to supply their assessment reports in December 2025, a report which will share their findings and next steps. Additionally, I am now working with the CAFES DEI committees to develop a series of college-level *HSI Servingness* goals. The consensus among faculty and staff committee members, is to examine what supports and structures are needed to help the departments realize their goals, and set a goal focused on mobilizing effort there. Discussion on the remaining goals is pending.

Regarding obstacles to successful project completion, I must say there were not many. The university, college, and department leadership were supportive and the faculty and staff in were motivated to tackle the work. My personal health was the greatest obstacle I faced. The issues I experienced led me to supplying departments with their feedback long after I initially planned. It was my goal to get the feedback turned around to departments by early March 2025, but it did not go out until May 2025. The departments were not frustrated by the delay, but it did slow the project's momentum. Thankfully, the commitment of those who crafted the plans continues to drive us forward.

In tackling this project, there have been several learnings from FSLI that have contributed to the successful completion of this project. First of all, the WISDOM (What Shall I Do On Monday) acronym has been vital in driving my reflection and planning, as I am always thinking about what is next. Active listening, creating a clear vision, networking, team building, understanding and communicating the why, as well as taking care of people, have all been critical to seeing the project through. These things have also built understanding in departments, due to my delay in supplying feedback and encouraging forward momentum of their efforts.