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PRESS RELEASE

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College Corps hosted their “What’s in the Mix for 2026?” event at the Whitewater Preserve on January 16, where fellows engaged in cohort building through collective volunteer service with the Wildlands Conservancy at the preserve, and engaged in leadership activities led by the Fulcrum Adventures team.

CSUSB Palm Desert Campus expands educational access and opportunity across the Coachella Valley through pre-college programs

PALM DESERT, Calif. – The California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Palm Desert Campus continues to play a transformative role in expanding access to higher education across the Coachella Valley through the university’s Office of Pre-College Programs (OPP). Serving more than 10,000 students annually across 21 school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, OPP delivers comprehensive academic and personal support services designed to increase high school graduation rates, college enrollment and degree completion.

Housed within CSUSB’s Division of Student Affairs, OPP supports a diverse population that includes middle and high school students, adult learners returning to education, youth experiencing homelessness or foster care,

children of farmworkers, and CSUSB students engaged in K–12 community service. At the Palm Desert Campus, OPP staff are deeply embedded in the region, offering targeted programs that meet the unique needs of Coachella Valley residents.

One cornerstone initiative is the TRIO Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), which supports adults ages 19 and older in completing a high school diploma or equivalent and pursuing higher education. EOC provides free services such as academic advising, financial aid guidance, college and career exploration, application assistance and connections to essential community resources including housing, mental health services, childcare, and utility support.

Participants come from a wide range of educational backgrounds—some returning after more than a decade, others beginning college pathways or vocational training.

“Being part of the Educational Opportunity Center has continued to influence my journey, even as I pursue my college education,” said Mariana Garcia Sanchez, an EOC participant. “Through consistent advising, I’ve been able to define my long-term goals and better prepare for life after graduation. Career workshops helped me explore internships and career paths aligned with my major, while support with financial aid renewal and academic planning has strengthened my confidence in navigating college. Most importantly, the program has empowered me to move forward with purpose and confidence in my chosen path.”

The program’s long-term impact is reflected in success stories like Alicia Hernandez, who joined EOC in 2023 while transferring to CSUSB to study psychology. With guidance from advisors, she navigated financial aid, developed professional skills and discovered a passion for community service—ultimately inspiring her to pursue a master’s degree in social work. Today, she gives back to families across the Coachella Valley while advocating for the importance of TRIO programs.

OPP also leads innovative initiatives funded through the K–16 education collaborative, including Coyote BLUE and Coyote PRIME, both designed to strengthen college readiness among high school students.

Coyote BLUE expands access to dual enrollment opportunities through the High School University Program (HSUP), allowing students to take college-level courses while still in high school. These experiences provide transferable credits, build academic confidence and introduce students to the rigor of higher education—often reducing time to degree completion. A summer residential component further fosters a sense of belonging and a shared college-going identity.

Coyote PRIME (Pre-College Readiness Instruction in Math and English) supports high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are on track with A–G requirements but need additional academic support. Through summer residential programming and year-round services, students strengthen critical skills in math and English while gaining the tools and confidence needed for college success.

Together, these programs are helping to close equity gaps and ensure students from historically underrepresented backgrounds are prepared to thrive academically and personally.

Another key initiative, CaliforniansForAll College Corps, connects CSUSB students with meaningful service opportunities in climate action, food insecurity and K–12 education. At the Palm Desert Campus, fellows provide tutoring, mentorship, and college-readiness support in local schools while completing 450 hours of service. Participants receive financial benefits, including a living allowance and education award, along with leadership and professional development training.

CSUSB's College Corps program has been selected as a 2026–2029 College Corps campus, securing nearly \$3.7 million in state funding to support fellows over the next three years.

“Being a part of College Corps has been life changing,” said student fellow Yajaira Florencio Villicana. “I've met so many amazing people and expanded my network professionally and personally. I've learned valuable skills that I have used and will continue to use throughout my college and career journey. Seeing the different challenges youth in my community face has reinforced my goal of giving back to my community through mental health and wellness resources. The experience I've gained through College Corps is invaluable. The support I've received from the College Corps team has been incredibly encouraging. Because of their support, I've learned to step out of my comfort zone and become more resilient. I will be forever grateful to the College Corps team and program.”

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) further supports students from migrant and seasonal farm working backgrounds during their transition into college. CAMP provides first-year students with academic advising, financial aid support, leadership development, and cultural enrichment opportunities to ensure persistence into their second year.

Brian Gaytan, a Coachella Valley High School graduate who joined CAMP in 2023, credits the program with helping him adjust to university life and build confidence.

“Being part of CAMP has shaped my journey in ways that continue to impact me,” he said.

“We are thrilled to offer these innovative pre-college programs at CSUSB,” said Summer Steele, executive director of the Office of Pre-College Programs. “At our Palm Desert Campus, we take immense pride in serving the Coachella Valley, supporting not only students, but also their families and the educators who guide them every day. These programs are more than services; they are lifelines that open doors to higher education and economic mobility.”

As federal policymakers consider potential changes to college access programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and Migrant Education, CSUSB leaders emphasize the importance of sustained investment.

“These proposed changes risk diminishing access and disrupting pathways that so many students rely on,” Steele added. “At stake is not just funding, but the continued success of programs that have transformed lives and strengthened entire communities.”

For more information about CSUSB's Office of Pre-College Programs, visit the [program's website](#).

About the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus: The [CSUSB Palm Desert Campus](#) is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience in the Coachella Valley. With a focus on academic excellence and community engagement, the campus offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs designed to meet the diverse needs of its students and the region.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.