The UCSC M.I.N.T. Program:

Program Process Evaluation Proposal & Preliminary Analysis

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Preamble

This paper offers a proposal to do an empowerment evaluation of the UCSC Women’s Center M.I.N.T. program and summarizes preliminary results based on a survey administered to program participants. Program evaluation is the “use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 16). In thinking about political environments, evaluating a program that offers a social good is important in light of limited resources to fund programming and politicized tensions around what social goods to offer and to whom.

Programming and program evaluation in the U.S. takes place in a context that is neoliberal, white supremacist, patriarchal, colonial, among many other oppressive systems. As such, program evaluation is often used to serve these agendas by supporting the maintenance of “band-aids” to deeper structural issues and limiting these “band-aids” by exploring the best ways to fund a program as minimally as possible and yield a strong product/outcomes. Furthermore, social programs that support historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups are not enough to eliminate the root cause of social inequalities (nor are they necessarily intended to) and yet, they are crucial to have in the meantime. While we work toward deeper transformative changes, social programs that offer social goods and necessities to historically marginalized groups are important to evaluate and provide evidence for their continuation.
In this independent study I acquired an overall understanding of the different possible program evaluations that can be conducted. Program evaluations generally fall into 5 categories: 1.) needs assessment, 2.) assessment of program theory, 3.) assessment of program process, 4.) impact evaluation, and 4.) efficiency assessment. The type of evaluation that is conducted is contingent upon several factors, such as if there is enough data to support if the program is needed, enough data to support the program theory or logic of the programs inputs and expected outputs, and the age of the program (e.g., new or well-established). In tailoring a program evaluation three main things to consider is the primary question to be answered, the methods and procedures the evaluation will use to answer the question, and the nature of the evaluator-stakeholder relationship. There is no one size fits all to designing an evaluation. Ultimately then, a good evaluation design is one that answers the evaluation question with credible and useful answers (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

I chose to do a program process evaluation of the The UCSC MINT program, a relatively new graduate school readiness program for underrepresented college students that will shortly be described in detail. Given that the program is only in its second year, it made the most sense to conduct a program process evaluation, which generally asks the questions around program implementation, implementation, and service delivery or in other words, “is the program doing what is says it is doing?” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Although there may be strong interest surrounding the impact of the program, a program impact evaluation to assess the outcomes of the program should only be assessed when a program is more established (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). The MINT program was awarded funding for two years. As we are soon approaching the end of the second year of the program it is important to advocate for
continued funding and demonstrate whether or not the program has been effectively implemented and served its intended population. It is important to note that the MINT program is a program that values social justice and strives to empower program participants. As such, the proposed program process evaluation will be conducted using empowerment evaluation principles (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007), where program participants will be directly involved in the analysis and interpretation of the evaluation results and recommendations for improving the program.

This paper will begin by providing an overview of the MINT program, its organizational structure, and stakeholders. The paper will then continue by providing a brief literature review to affirm program need and program theory. Next, the program’s objectives/goals as well as logic model will be presented. Finally, the paper will present some preliminary data on MINT program participant’s perceptions and will conclude with a description of the program process evaluation plan and empowerment evaluation as an approach.

The UCSC MINT Program: Today, Genesis, and Mission Statement

The MINT Program Today

Currently, the M.I.N.T. Program (Matriculating, Influencing, Networking, Triumphing) is an achievement and graduate school readiness programs that provides mentorship on preparing for graduate school to women-identified and gender non-conforming students that also identify as first-generation in their family to go to college and/or a person of Color and are in their third or fourth (and sometimes fifth) year of college. The program also invites women-identified and gender non-conforming graduate students at UCSC who are passionate about equity in higher education to provide mentorship for two-quarters within one academic school year. Thus, there
are two target populations for the MINT program. The primary target population are the undergraduate students who are underrepresented in graduate education and the secondary target population are the graduate students who are passionate about equity and looking to acquire/sharpen their mentoring skills. The program serves students across all disciplines and majors.

The criteria for undergraduate student selection (aside from the gender parameters) is that the participant identifies as first-generation and/or a person of Color and expresses a need for the M.I.N.T. program’s services as well as a commitment to the program for a full academic year. The criteria for graduate student selection is that the participant identifies as a woman or gender non-conforming, expresses a desire to mentor/support a student in the program and a commitment to the program for the rest of the academic year. Graduate student mentors and undergraduate students are paired based on similarity in research interest or field of study.

Program activities include workshops on different areas related to the graduate school application, experience, and preparation, check-in events and celebratory events organized at the end of every quarter, and the sharing of resources that help with preparing for graduate school. Undergraduate program participants are expected to meet with their mentors throughout the Winter and Spring quarters and encouraged to apply to scholarships offered by the program that provide support with conference registration fees and graduate application fees. Mentors are expected to attend a 2.5 hour training to learn how to support underrepresented students. These activities are carried out in hopes of accomplishing program objectives and goals (see Figure 3).

Program Genesis
The initial proposal for the MINT program was submitted to the UCSC Student Fee Advisory Committee (SFAC) to request funding in the Fall 2013 by the Women’s Center director at the time, Stephanie Milton. The MINT program, as a resource to provide and receive mentorship, was intended to

“serve several needs on campus: undergraduate exposure to graduate careers, departments and research; support for graduate students who need to incorporate broader impacts into their research or grant requirements; increased engagement with the campus for both constituencies; and improved campus climate due to increased student access to resources on-and off-campus” (Milton, 2013, p. 2).

To achieve these outcomes, Milton (2013) proposed to have four staff members hired: A graduate student researcher, a graduate student assistant, and two undergraduate mentee coordinators (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Salaries/Coi Fees</th>
<th>Year 1 Total</th>
<th>3-Year Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Researcher</td>
<td>$9,091.60</td>
<td>$26,103.60</td>
<td>$78,310.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(at 30% time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Student Assistant (at 50% time)</td>
<td>$12,800.00</td>
<td>$13,000.00</td>
<td>$39,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Mentee Coordinators</td>
<td>$9,600.00</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS Data Entry Premium Software</td>
<td>$127.81</td>
<td>$127.81</td>
<td>$383.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS Statistics Premium Software</td>
<td>$105.99</td>
<td>$105.99</td>
<td>$317.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-monthly Meeting Costs</td>
<td>$1,500.00</td>
<td>$1,500.00</td>
<td>$4,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Leadership Conference</td>
<td>$6,000.00</td>
<td>$6,000.00</td>
<td>$18,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Projected Budget $56,837.40 $170,512.20
Shortly thereafter, the SFAC approved the proposal, providing partial funding enough to support two years of the program. Stephanie Milton also stepped down as director of the Women’s Center at this time. Due to multiple changes in women’s center director leadership, the MINT program did not initiate until the Fall of 2016. In the Fall of 2016, a graduate student program coordinator was hired to carry out the program (yours truly). No other staff were hired to carry out the MINT program since the MINT program’s implementation.

**Program Mission Statement**

Currently the mission of the UCSC MINT program is as follows: The mission of the UCSC MINT scholars program is to assist womxn-identified and gender non-conforming undergraduate students who come from underrepresented backgrounds (First generation to go to college and/or Person of Color) in deciding if graduate school is the right choice for them and develop strong applications for graduate school. The program strives to do this through one one (or one to two) mentorship with a motivated graduate student mentor, organized workshops throughout the Winter and Spring quarter and access to the Women's Center library GRE prep books. In addition, we hope to build community and increase scholars' sense of confidence about applying and navigating graduate school.

**Organizational Schematic**

The UCSC MINT program is housed under the UCSC Women’s Center, which is one of six resource centers provided on campus to serve undergraduate and graduate students. The resource centers are funded primarily through student fees.
Program Stakeholders

Six major stakeholders have been identified in relation to the MINT program, 1.) The larger UCSC campus/UC System, 2.) MINT program participants, 3.) The MINT Program coordinator, 4.) Ethnic Resource center director, 5.) Women’s Center Director, and 6.) the program sponsor (SFAC).

The Larger UCSC Campus/UC System

As of the most recent quarter (Fall 2017), there are a total of 19,457 students enrolled (17,577 undergraduate and 1,880 graduate students; Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies, 2017). Important characteristics of this campus is that it federally recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution and recently implemented a campus-wide first-generation college student initiative, of which some of the goals include enhancing visibility
of first-generation students and creating a welcoming environment for them (UCSC First Generation Initiative, n.d.).

The most recent data available on the demographics of incoming students (Fall 2016) at UCSC, indicates that nearly half of all incoming students (42%) were first-generation and 39% received federal Pell grants. The demographics of the UCSC campus are reflective of the larger UC wide system, where 42% percent of incoming students across all UC campuses identified as first-generation and 39% received federal Pell grants (University of California Office of the President, 2017). The third year students in the current MINT cohort who started at UCSC in the Fall of 2014 started in a year where the rate of incoming first generation students (46%) and Pell grant recipients (45%) was higher. Indeed, the UC system prides itself educating more first generation students than other institutions of its caliber and contributing to their success (i.e., graduation within 6 years and earning a higher median income than their family’s total income; UCOP Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2017).

It is also noted in the 2017 UCOP report that a higher proportion of first-generation college students are Latino, low-income, transfer students, and come from homes where English is not the first language (UCOP Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 2017). As will be described in the following section, the majority of participants in the MINT program identify as first-generation, Latinx, and working class/low-income. Thus the larger UCSC campus is a stakeholder in that the underrepresented students served in the MINT program are reflective of the larger campus demographics of underrepresented students.

**MINT Program participants**
Undergraduate Students. This year there are 29 MINT program participants all of whom identify as either women, gender-queer, gender non-binary, and transfeminine folk. The majority of program participants identify as a first generation college student (86%), a person of Color (93%), and working-class or poor (75%). In terms of race/ethnic heritage, more than half (58%) of the participants identify as having Latinx heritage, 30% identify having Asian heritage, 6% (2 people) identify as having African American/Black heritage, 3% (1 person) identify as being non-affiliative Native, and 3% (1 person) identify as being white. When prompted to name other intersections of their identities, a few students named other identities such as being queer, undocumented, gender queer, neurodivergent, and having a learning disability. There are five academic divisions at UCSC (i.e., Division of Arts, Division of Humanities, Division of Physical and Biological Sciences, Division of Social Sciences, and Jack Baskin School of Engineering). All divisions except Division of Humanities are represented among the majors in this year’s MINT program cohort. The high rate of first-generation, Latinx students in this cohort is representative of the campus-wide racial/ethnic demographics of first-generation students.

Graduate Students. This year there are 29 graduate student mentors. All of the mentors agreed to mentor students for at least 1-2 hours per week throughout the remainder of the 2017-2018 academic year. When asked why they wanted to mentor for MINT, many mentors stated that they had mentored for MINT last year and enjoyed the experience, had great mentoring experiences as an undergraduate and want to pay it forward, and want to support students who are underrepresented in higher education achieve their goals. More than half of the

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1 The MINT Program wants to be gender inclusive of people who do not subscribe to the category of “woman” or “woman identified,” but have some connection to female socialization and/or experience.
mentors this year identify as people of Color (62%), and nearly 80% are either in their first or second year of graduate school and have not yet advanced to candidacy.

The MINT Program Coordinator. The MINT Program coordinator (myself) is the primary contact person for the program and coordinates all workshops and activities. I have a vested interested in seeing that this program is appropriately implemented and is successful for two reasons. First, I believe that this program is deeply needed on the UCSC campus. We do not have a McNair scholars program, a program that is present at other UC campuses, and there are limited resources on this campus to help first-generation students and women of Color pursue graduate school specifically. I am also a first-generation college student, a woman of Color and a McNair scholar. I personally understand the experience and challenges of trying to pursue graduate school without having many resources and the importance of the guidance of an achievement program and a community.

Ethnic Resource Center Director. Nancy Kim oversees all six ethnic resource centers and also serves as the director for the Asian American and Pacific Islander Resource Center. Since the MINT program is housed within the UCSC Women’s Center she has an interest in seeing that the program aligns with the values of the resource centers and is successful.

Women’s Center Director. Esther Wallace is currently the interim director of the UCSC Women’s Center. The MINT Program is the only program at the Women’s Center that runs throughout the entire academic school year and provides a service to large number of people. Further, the MINT program is one of the most time and labor intensive program at the women’s center. Thus, the director has a vested interested in ensuring the program’s success.

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2 This program will be described in more detail under the “program theory” section.
**Student Funding Advisory Committee (SFAC).** SFAC is an advisory committee and the financial sponsor for the MINT program. The committee is composed of 10 undergraduate students, 2 graduate students, 1 staff member, and 1 faculty member serving two year terms. The primary objective of SFAC is to provide funding recommendations to the Vice Provost of Student Success. The Vice Provost of student success, Jaye Padgett, is interested in developing and supporting initiatives that “increase overall graduation rates, decrease time to degree and eliminate disparities in graduation rates for historically underserved students groups” (UCSC Dean of Students, n.d.). Thus, SFAC sponsors the MINT program in light of these initiatives.

**Needs Assessment**

First generation college students are students whose parents have not obtained a Bachelor’s degree. Students who are the first in their families to go to college demographically tend to be female/woman-identified, low-income, older, and from racially marginalized backgrounds (Engle, 2007). First generation college students are also less likely to persist to degree (Engle, 2007; Means & Pyne, 2017; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). Much focus on supporting first-generation students is primarily framed around economic and life chances, emphasizing that without a Bachelor’s degree students who are first-generation are less likely to experience upward economic mobility (e.g., Grimmett, Bliss, Davis, & Ray, 1999; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). There are many challenges that first generation may students experience in their pursuit of a degree, including lacking financial support, experiencing higher educational spaces as hostile, feeling alienated and isolated, feeling a lack of supportive guidance (Means & Pyne, 2017), and feeling underprepared for the rigor and expectations of higher education (Engle, 2007; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).
Important to understand is that these experiences and challenges persist for many underrepresented college students (i.e., first-generation, working-class, person of Color) who pursue graduate studies. Graduate students from underrepresented backgrounds tend to experience graduate school as hostile/oppressive (e.g. racist, classist), alienating, unaffordable, an environment where they feel underprepared and frequently question their abilities (Gildersleeve, Croom & Phillip, 2011; Willison & Gibson, 2011), and as a cultural mismatch with their home communities (Gay 2004). Reportedly, while less than 1.5% of the general population has obtained a doctoral degree, among underrepresented groups, only 0.5% have obtained a degree (Willison & Gibson, 2011). Thus, while more first-generation college students and students from other underrepresented background are enrolling into 4 year universities at increased rates, it does not necessarily translate into persisting to degree at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Many suggestions have been made in the literature for improving support for first-generation college and graduate students (e.g. Engle, 2007; Means & Pyne, 2017). Broadly, it has been suggested that the best way to prepare underrepresented college students for success in graduate school is to begin cultivating support for their path to graduate school at the undergraduate level by providing the skills and knowledge to successfully navigate (Willison & Gibson, 2011). Two ways that this support can be cultivated is through providing networks of social support and mentoring by a knowledgeable and culturally responsive mentor (Gildersleeve, Croom & Phillip, 2011; Willison & Gibson, 2011).

More specifically, mentoring and networks of social support can help underrepresented graduate students successfully navigate major learning curves. In one interview and survey
study of 22 university alumni from underrepresented backgrounds who went onto a graduate program, five big learning curves were identified, 1.) academic readiness, 2.) weaving a supportive web, 3.) managing the clock, 4.) being accepted, and 5.) staying financially fit (Willison & Gibson, 2011). To mitigate against these challenges, the authors suggest the importance of mentoring and guidance to help graduate students prepare and navigate such steep learning curves and challenges. Before attending graduate school, a knowledgeable mentor can help a student make good selections for graduate programs as poor student-program fit has been cited as one reason underrepresented students drop out of graduate programs (Grimmett, bliss, Davis, & Ray, 1999; Willison & Gibson, 2011). A knowledgeable mentor (before and during graduate school) can also help a student pursuing graduate school learn how to navigate other challenges by providing support with finding and obtaining graduate school funding and preparing the student for the expectations and pace of graduate programs (e.g. time management). A support network before and during graduate school can also help to mitigate the challenges of not feeling accepted (Gildersleeve, Croom & Phillip, 2011; Willison & Gibson, 2011). For example, a supportive network of peers and faculty can help students to decompress their experiences and obtain affirmation for their ideas and belonging at the university (Gildersleeve, Croom & Phillip, 2011).

Furthermore, seeing that first generation college students and other underrepresented college students who are at the intersections of being low-income and of Color are still struggling to persist to degree at undergraduate and graduate levels of education, it makes sense to contend that providing supportive mentoring and spaces where community and networking can emerge are needed resources that should be provided to students within these demographics.
In the following section, an example is given that illustrates that providing such resources can indeed support students in pursuing graduate school.

**Program Theory**

Given that first generation college students do not have parents who have gone to college and much less, graduate school, and given that students of Color have historically been excluded from access to higher education, mentoring and supportive peer networks become key resources to success. The MINT program was in many ways modeled off of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program (McNair program), a federal program instituted at several universities across the nation. The aim of the McNair program is to increase the representation of underrepresented students (first-generation, low-income, and from racial/ethnic marginalized groups) in PhD programs. The program offers mentoring, access to research and internship opportunities, and the opportunity to network with faculty and other students pursuing a PhD.

A program evaluation of the McNair program at one site examined how effective selected McNair program components (mentoring, research, internships, financial incentives, having friends in the program, opportunities to interact with other scholars), were in preparing McNair scholars for graduate school (Grimmett, Bliss, Davis, & Ray, 1998). The evaluators administered likert scales to assess participant’s perception of importance, utility, and satisfaction with each of the program components in their preparation for graduate programs. The means and standard deviations suggest that participants found research opportunities most useful, followed by mentoring relationships, internships, and opportunities to interact with other scholars.
Although this program evaluation is almost two decades old now, more recent work suggests that the success of the McNair program is well-established as demonstrated by high rates of McNair scholars obtaining their bachelor’s degree (in the 90% range) and that between 1989 and 2002, 19% of McNair scholars have gone onto Master’s or Doctoral programs. One relevant recommendation by the program evaluators is that perhaps one area that the McNair program could improve upon is to provide mentoring in the student’s field so that guidance offered can be more knowledgeable with regards to the student’s interests and trajectory. The MINT program intentionally pairs undergraduate students with mentors in their field of study who share their research interests, which might predict student’s sense of satisfaction, importance, and utility with regards to their mentoring relationships.

The McNair program and the MINT program are not the same program and offer slightly different services in preparing undergraduate students for graduate school. Yet, the results of the program evaluation and the well-established success of the McNair program support the argument that mentoring and the opportunity to interact and build community with other scholars are important elements in supporting success of underrepresented students in graduate school. It is with this knowledge that the MINT program builds its program theory of how program activities will support program goals and objectives.

**Program Goals and Objectives**

**Goals (Proximal and Distal)**

**Proximal Goals.**
- Each student will develop strong application materials for applying to graduate school (CV, Personal Statement, list of schools to apply to, relationships with faculty to obtain strong letters of recommendation).

- Each student will become well informed about what graduate programs are like, how to navigate graduate school, funding opportunities, and opportunities at UCSC to enhance pathway to graduates school.

- Each student will develop an:
  - Increased sense of community and belonging within their major and at UCSC.
  - Increased sense of ability to be successfully navigate higher education (borderlands scale)
  - For graduate students: increased sense of professional development and community.

**Distal Goals.**

- Each student will come to an informed decision about whether or not graduate school is right for them.

- Application to graduate school (for those who have decided grad school is their path).

- Admission into graduate school (for those who have decided grad school is their path).

**Objectives.**

1.) 100% of undergraduate/graduate student pairs will meet throughout the year (at least 3 times per quarter) to discuss various aspects of the graduate school application process.

2.) 100% of undergraduate students will have completed at least 4 of the following:
   a.) Development and polishing of curriculum vitae,
   b.) Development of a list of graduate programs they would like to apply to,
c.) Created a plan to be involved in a research or internship opportunity,

d.) Development of a draft of personal statement,

e.) Discussed and created a list of funding/scholarships to apply to,

f.) Made/deepened connections with faculty members (through participation in research, office visits, teaching, etc.) that will be potential letter of recommendation writers, and

g.) Development of research ideas from the time of application.

3.) 100% of undergraduate students will have attended at least 5 of the 6 workshops.

4.) 80% of undergraduate students will have expressed through qualitative measures an increased sense of belonging and community at UCSC.

5.) 80% of undergraduate students will have expressed through qualitative measures an increased perception that they can be successful in navigating higher education.

6.) 80% of undergraduate students will have expressed through qualitative measures that MINT helped them decide whether or not graduate school is in their best interest.

7.) 80% of graduate students will have expressed through qualitative measures an increased sense of professional development after mentoring in the program.

8.) 80% of graduate students will have expressed through qualitative measures an increased sense of belonging and community at UCSC.

9.) At least 10% of the current year’s cohort will apply to a graduate program the following fall quarter.

10.)
## Logic Model

**Logic Model for the UCSC Women’s Center M.I.N.T Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Longer Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of graduate student mentors and underrepresented college students</td>
<td>Program provides workshops on different areas related to the graduate school application, experience, and preparation</td>
<td>Undergraduate students attend, workshops, celebratory events, and meet with their mentors regularly.</td>
<td>Each student will develop strong application materials for applying to graduate school (CV, Personal Statement, list of schools to apply to, relationships with faculty to obtain strong letters of recommendation).</td>
<td>Each student will come to an informed decision about whether or not graduate school is right for them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairing of graduate student mentors with undergraduate students based on field of study or similarity in research interests</td>
<td>Undergraduate students will meet with their mentors throughout the Winter and Spring quarters</td>
<td>Mentors attend critical mentoring training, celebratory events, check-ins, offer supportive guidance to their mentees, and meet regularly with them.</td>
<td>Each student will become well informed about what graduate programs are like, how to navigate graduate school, funding opportunities, and opportunities at UCSC to enhance pathway to graduate school.</td>
<td>For graduate students: increased sense of professional development and community.</td>
<td>Application to graduate school (for those who have decided grad school is their path).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.I.N.T. Program coordinator runs the program with the assistance of women’s center director and undergraduate interns</td>
<td>Check-in event and celebratory event organized at the end of every quarter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook and listing of resources made available</td>
<td>Encourage participants to share resources with one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary Data Collection

In the Fall of 2017, a survey was administered to the current cohort of 29 MINT undergraduate student participants. The purpose of this preliminary data collection was to obtain a baseline description of this cohort’s understanding of what it means to be successful in the academy and perceptions of their knowledge about the graduate school application process, the guidance and support they are receiving as they prepare for graduate school, and their reservations about applying to graduate programs. The data yielded from the survey can provide useful information about this cohort’s needs, areas where they need support, and strengths. The data can also help to identify if the program theory of services delivered by the MINT program makes sense in light of students needs.

Borderlands Scale

Under a neoliberal model of education, “success” in a four year university is measured based on high grades (i.e. G.P.A.) and graduating with a bachelor’s degree within four years. Yet, there is a mismatch between how first-generation college students understand success and how the university measures it (Pyne & Means, 2013). For students who are underrepresented in higher education (first-generation and/or person of Color), the notion of “success” must be re-conceptualized and understood from the perspectives commonly found within this demographic. I also contend for the purposes of this program process evaluation, understanding whether the M.I.N.T. program implementation and impact is successful cannot rely solely on such measures such as program participants GPA’s and admission into graduate programs. Students perceptions and experiences in the program are also valid measures.
In a focus group at UCSC with ten college students who identified as first-generation and/or a person of Color, participants asked how they, their peers, and their families defined success. The transcript of the focus group revealed that students felt that “success” included being able to navigate between the university and their home communities. That students felt they were in an in-between space navigating two worlds seemed to map on theoretically to the experiences of being in Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999) Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúas Borderlands theory (1999) and Border Thinking (Cervantes-Soon, & Carrillo, 2016) two subscales were created to measure how students conceptualize success in the university: Straddling and Testimonio.

Items on the Straddling subscale were designed to assess “experience with holding multiple identities and using that multiplicitous positionality to work toward social change” (Langhout, Gordon Jr, Rosales, Lopez, 2017, p.21). For example, one item on the straddling subscale asks, “Since you have started college how often have you balanced the needs of your family or community with your own needs or aspirations?” There were six total items in the Straddling subscale and the highest possible score someone could earn is 30. Items on the Testimonio subscale were designed to examine “if students were critically examining power structures, and co-narrating the self within context in a way that resisted dominant narratives” (Langhout, Gordon Jr, Rosales, Lopez, 2017, p.21). For example, one item on the Testimonio subscale asks, “Since you have started college how often have you perceived your situation as part of a power structure that is created by humans and therefore changeable by humans?” There were 5 items on the Testimonio subscale and the highest score a participant could earn is 25. Items on both scales are measured on a 1 to 5 likert scale (1=Never, 5= Always). The
Borderlands scale has been compared to Schreiner’s (2013) Thriving Quotient of college student success since it is a well established scale for measuring student success or thriving in college. Three of Schreiner’s subscales (academic determination, social connection, diverse citizenship) correlate positively and significantly to both of the Borderlands subscales. To make a clear distinction, the Borderlands scale is different in that it has been applied specifically to the experiences of underrepresented students and includes a component of wanting to use college education to make positive social changes in line with social justice values.

Two hundred and fifty participants (UCSC college students) participated in a survey, which included the Borderlands scale. Of the participants who completed the survey most of the participants were women, first-generation college students, and federal Pell grant recipients. Although the participants were ethnically diverse, the largest group to participate in the survey was Latins (41.6%). The development of the Borderlands scale with this demographic makes the scale appropriate to use with MINT program participants since most are also women, first-generation to go to college, Latinx, and low-income.

**Qualitative Responses**

To understand student’s perceptions about their academic preparedness for graduate school, perception of current guidance and support, and perception of barriers to applying to graduate school, four open-ended questions were asked before participants received exposure to the MINT program’s services. The questions are the following: 1.) Do you feel like you know enough about graduate school at this moment to confidently pursue applying? Please explain why or why not, 2.) Do you feel like you have adequate guidance in preparing for graduate school? Please explain why or why not, 3.) Do you feel like you have adequate social support in
pursuing a graduate program? Please explain why or why not, and 4.) Do you have any reservations about applying to graduate school? If so, please explain what they are.

**Preliminary Results**

Of the 29 participants, 24 responded and completed the Borderlands scale and provided qualitative responses to four questions within the survey. Responses to the four open ended questions were brief, the majority were 1-2 sentences long.

**Borderlands Scale**

Twenty-four participants filled out the Borderlands scale to completion, which includes the Straddling subscale (M=22.4, SD= 5.7) and the testimonio subscale (M=19.5, SD=2.5). The two subscales were highly correlated with one another (pearson correlation= .683) and this correlation was significant (p <.0005). Although the scale does not yet have a standardized notation of what range of scores constitute low, medium, and high, the means are notably high, meaning that the participants resonated with the notions of success on the Borderlands scale.

**Qualitative Responses**

**Question 1: Do you feel like you know enough about graduate school at this moment to confidently pursue applying? Please explain why or why not.** Not a single MINT participant responded with a definitive, “yes” response. Most of the participants said they did not know enough about graduate school at this moment to confidently apply (n=16) and cited various reasons. One common reason for feeling like they were not confident to pursue applying was not knowing how to research and select graduate schools to apply to (n= 9). A second common reason was having little knowledge about the graduate school application process and the requirements that need to be fulfilled for the application, such as taking entrance exam tests
(e.g. GRE), obtaining letters of recommendations, and the timeline for applying (n=14). For example, one participant wrote, “No, because I am not sure how to research graduate schools to apply and have not taken the GRE yet.”

The other eight participants responded with a mixed response, indicating that they had some preparation in applying to graduate school but still needed some guidance. For example, one participant wrote, “Maybe, I feel like I am stuck between applying for an MSW or going for a Social Psychology program. I also would want to gain more recommendation letters.” Another respondent wrote, “I know a good amount, but I feel I still need guidance on how to choose the best graduate schools to apply to for my major and interests.”

**Question 2: Do you feel like you have adequate guidance in preparing for graduate school? Please explain why or why not?** The results of this question are interesting in that a large portion are anticipatory and reflect people’s expectations about guidance rather than the guidance they are receiving in the current moment. Fourteen of the respondents, nearly half, indicated that the MINT program is their only form of guidance at the moment. Additionally, some of the responses suggest that they believe the MINT program will be the key to helping them figure out some of the gaps in their knowledge regarding the graduate school process. For example, one participant wrote, “A little bit, I think I'll feel more prepared after MINT picks up and we meet up more.” Four of these participants expressed that they are already receiving guidance from the MINT program and are satisfied. For example, one participant wrote, “Yes, absolutely! My mentor is so wonderful and we have already met a few times to get started on this. I couldn't be more thankful!” Two respondents indicated that they felt like they had adequate support, but from the guidance of other programs on campus.
A smaller number of respondents indicated affirmatively that they did not have any guidance at the moment (n=6) citing reasons such as being the first generation in the family to go to college and apply to graduate school and not having access to resources that provide guidance (i.e., programs and supportive figures). Two respondents indicated that they have some guidance but either struggle to balance attending workshops on graduate school on top of attending classes or struggle to make connections with someone who could guide them.

**Question 3: Do you feel like you have adequate social support in pursuing a graduate program? Please explain why or why not?** Respondents overwhelming reported (n=18) that they felt like they had adequate social support, primarily from friends and family. For example, one respondent wrote, “Yes, my family and my friends are encouraging me to apply to graduate school.” Another person wrote, “many of my friends want to go to grad school, so it is very motivational,” suggesting that knowing people who are applying to graduate feels supportive. Some respondents cited other reasons they felt supported, such as having joined the MINT program (n=2), having a relationship with a supportive UCSC staff member (n=1), and being a part of other achievement programs on campus (n=1).

A fewer number of respondents indicated that they felt they did not have adequate social support (n=6). The reasons provided varied, but included reasons such as not knowing anyone who is going to graduate school (n=3), being undocumented (n=1), the expense of graduate school (n=1), and not having shared with anyone that they were pursuing graduate school (n=1).

**Question 4: Do you have any reservations about applying to graduate school? If so, please explain what they are.** With regards to this question two major themes emerged. The number one reason for having reservations in terms of applying to graduate school in this sample
is that they lack confidence in their ability to succeed (n=12). Such responses indicated feeling as if they were not intelligent enough or prepared enough to apply to graduate school and become a graduate student. For example, one participant wrote, “I mostly have anxieties around the writing process and have a hard time really pushing myself. My lack of confidence comes into play here but it really effects [sic] my ability to put more of myself into the application process. I'm worried that I will apply and not get accepted and how that will effect [sic] my confidence in the process. I also worry that if i do get accepted, I won't actually be able to attend because of affordability, something that has been an issue for most of my life.” The latter part of this response illustrates the second biggest reason for having reservations in applying to graduate school- finances. Ten of the respondents indicated that they were concerned about how they would be able to afford graduate school. For example, one respondent wrote, “The only reservation that I have about applying to graduate school is how will I be able to afford it? I am aware that there are fellowships that you can apply for; however they are very limited. So besides fellowships, what other options is there for students to be able to afford graduate school?” Respondents of course indicated other reasons for having reservations, although they were not predominant in this sample. This included such feelings as fear of re-locating, fear of burnout, fearing a sense of not belonging, and being undocumented. Three participants indicated that they did not have any reservations.

**Preliminary Analysis**

This preliminary data is insightful for a number of reasons. First, it illustrates that although most MINT program participants at this moment feel supported by their friends and family, they have strong reservations against applying to graduate school, primarily because of
lack of confidence in their ability to be successful in graduate school and because they do not know whether they will be able to afford graduate school. In addition, at this very moment most also do not feel confident about applying to graduate school because they do not know enough about how to pick schools to apply to and the process and requirements for applying. This is consistent with a point made by Grimmett, Bliss, Davis and Ray (1998) that underrepresented college students pursuing graduate school generally have good social support from friends and family but insufficient guidance and mentoring from knowledgeable faculty and peers. Second, these results suggest there is a lot of hope being poured into the MINT program. Nearly half (n=14) of the respondents indicated that they do not have adequate guidance at the moment, but expect that they soon will through the efforts of the MINT program with 4 respondents indicating that they are already satisfied with the mentorship they have received in this short time period. Finally, these students high scores on the Borderlands scale also suggest that their perceptions of success involve navigating and balancing both the demands of the university and their home communities, as well as using their college education to effect positive social change.

**Program Process Evaluation Plan**

**Empowerment Evaluation**

As a young program, the goal of this proposed evaluation is to examine the program’s process and to assess whether the program is adequately delivering services to its primary targets and beneficiaries. The MINT program has an explicitly social justice agenda in wanting to address systematic disparities in college and graduate programs, specifically with regards to the underrepresentation of women and gender non-conforming first-generation college students and people of Color. The program is guided through the principles of social justice,
self-determination or “having the opportunity and power to direct one’s life as one wishes” (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 35), and empowerment of program participants. The hands-off approach of our financial sponsors gives us the flexibility to create and shape the program in congruence with these principles. Since the primary target population and beneficiaries of the services of the MINT program are the undergraduate MINT program participants, it makes sense that they be involved and have ownership in the process of evaluating the MINT program. Further, an approach that perhaps best allows for a program process evaluation where the program participants’ voices, ideas, and recommendations are centered is an empowerment evaluation.

Broadly, an empowerment evaluation centers the self-determination, advocacy, and initiative of program stakeholders (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). There are 10 principles to an empowerment evaluation: 1.) Improvement (e.g., helps focus evaluation on improvement-oriented goals), 2.) Community ownership (e.g., supports the community as it conducts its evaluation and use the findings for decision making, 3.) Inclusion (e.g., invites as many stakeholders to empowerment evaluation activities, 4.) Democratic participation (e.g., designs democratic forms of decision making), 5.) Social justice (e.g., focuses on projects with a social justice and self-determination agenda), 6.) Community knowledge (e.g. cultivates and validates the community knowledge), 7.) Evidence-based strategies (e.g., helps communities adapt evidence-based strategies with the community in the organization), 8.) Capacity building (e.g. helps the community conduct its own evaluation), 9.) Organizational learning (e.g. helps the community meaningfully interpret and use data to inform decision making), and 10.) Accountability (e.g. places the evaluation in the hands of community members to enable them to
learn how to hold themselves accountable; Fetterman, 2005). There have been some critiques directed at empowerment evaluations as an approach, some suggesting that empowerment evaluations are biased. In response to some of these critiques, especially with regards to bias, Fetterman and Wandersman (2007) assert unapologetically that no program evaluation is neutral and that empowerment evaluations allow for more critical and deeper than external evaluations (that are ostensibly less biased) because program participants are driven to improve the programs that serve them.

Commitment to an empowerment evaluation, however, can vary across the 10 principles. Fetterman (2005) provides a guideline to assess if commitment across the 10 principles is either “high,” “medium,” or “low,” among the evaluator, community participants, and the funding sponsor. The following will review the predicted levels of commitment across the 10 principles of empowerment evaluation among the evaluator and program participants involved in the MINT program. As a stakeholder in the MINT program through my position as the program coordinator and program evaluator, my position serves a dual role. The predicted commitment levels of the funding sponsor, SFAC, will not be reviewed since they are a hands-off funding source and will not partake in the program process evaluation.

**Improvement.**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. The evaluator (from here on out referred to as myself) will help community build on strengths, encourage community to focus on improvements, and will help design feedback mechanisms that are used for program decisions.
**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. The participants will use the evaluation to improve program performance, use data to inform decision making, and use tools to monitor program change over time.

**Community Ownership**

*Evaluator.* The expected level of commitment is medium. Although I as a program coordinator and evaluator of the program will have been involved from the beginning, the MINT program undergraduate participants will not be introduced to the program process evaluation until the middle of the academic year. Additionally, the program participants will not be involved in the program long enough to see the end of the evaluation (final analysis and report write up). Finally, although the one of the aims of the evaluation is to provide data that is useful to advocate for continued sponsorship by SFAC, this evaluation will also fulfill the requirements for myself to obtain program evaluation certification at UCSC. Thus, the MINT community is not granted full ownership of the evaluation. I will provide training to the MINT community to learn the basics of program evaluation, the purpose of the evaluation, and an overview of the possible methods that could be utilized to answer the evaluation questions.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is medium to high. Although the MINT community does not have full ownership of the evaluation, MINT participant’s ideas about how to carry out the remaining program process evaluation and how to present/use the findings will be primarily considered.

**Inclusion**
**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. I have developed a deep knowledge of the MINT Program undergraduate participant demographics and intend to include as many MINT program undergraduate participants as possible.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. All of the program participants share one thing in common, either being a first generation college student or a person of Color. Yet, there is still a diversity of experiences and perspectives within this group as indicated by their other intersecting identities (e.g. undocumented, queer). A framework will be developed to hear and actively seek out diverse voices that are not typically heard.

**Democratic Participation**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will design evaluation activities that ensure fairness and equal representation, monitors the degree of democratic participation, and provide feedback surrounding how democratic participation and decision making is performed.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. The MINT program is designed to be a supportive space for everyone to grow and be heard. It can be expected that everyone will agree to democratic participation.

**Social Justice**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. The MINT program was designed with social injustices in high education mind and wanting to create a resource for students to mitigate against these injustices. I will work to help the community to conduct evaluations and interpret evaluation findings within a social justice framework.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. The program participants will use the evaluation to improve programs and services to those who need these resources.
(underrepresented college students) and will use a social justice lens in program and evaluation decision making.

**Community Knowledge**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will center and value community knowledge, encourage multicultural participation, and use community knowledge in combination with evidence-based strategies to guide the program process evaluation.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. My hope is that MINT participants will claim the right to assert the value of local knowledge, use local community knowledge in combination with evidence-based strategies to guide the program process evaluation.

**Evidence-based Strategies**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will bring relevant and useful evidence-based strategies to the MINT program participants for their own consideration and assessment and help MINT participants combine their knowledge with these evidence-based strategies.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will encourage MINT program participants to reach out to me for assistance in identifying evidence-based strategies in order to combine them with their community knowledge.

**Capacity Building**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is medium. This ties into the issue of community ownership described previously. With time constraints, MINT program participants will not be offered extensive training. Although they will have gained some understanding of the program
evaluation process, the training will not be expansive enough to help the community conduct its own evaluations in the future.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is medium. The MINT participants will learn some evaluation skills (e.g. developing an evaluation question, identifying methods and strategies for an evaluation, combining community knowledge and evidence-based strategies) and adhere to evaluation guidelines, but will not be able to acquire all the skills necessary to conduct an evaluation independently in the future.

**Organizational Learning**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is medium. I will provide learning opportunities for the community to learn from the evaluation process and be able to apply this learning to improve the program/organization.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is medium. MINT participants will be encouraged to take this program evaluation as an opportunity to learn how to improve the MINT program and collectively make decisions about next steps.

**Accountability**

**Evaluator.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will train the community how to hold themselves accountable, encourage the use of accountability mechanisms, and encourage community participation in and implementation of the evaluation.

**MINT Participants.** The expected level of commitment is high. I will encourage the MINT community to hold myself and other stakeholders accountable for actions and uphold high standards methodologically and ethically in terms of social justice.
Conclusion

After 1 quarter (approximately 3 months) of exposure to the M.I.N.T. program, participants will be invited to engage in a focus group (informal small group discussion) to discuss the program empowerment evaluation process and the goals of the process evaluation. The intention of the focus group will be to introduce the program process evaluation/empowerment evaluation, begin exploring areas where participants would like to see improvement in the program, and co-create a plan for designing a program process evaluation. Focus groups are ideal in this context given that the purpose is not to produce generalizable data but rather acquire in-depth qualitative information that reveal participants' perceptions of the program (Dean, 1994). During the focus group I will also explain the empowerment evaluation approach, discuss each of the 10 principles, and explore with the group whether the proposed levels of commitment are possible. The focus group will be a space for undergraduate MINT participants to share their perceptions of how we can collaborate together on this program process evaluation and work to best achieve the proposed levels of commitment for each principle of empowerment evaluations.

The remaining design of the program process evaluation will be shaped by the undergraduate MINT program participants with my guidance. One method I will suggest for the program process evaluation are interviews. Should interviews be endorsed by the MINT program participants as an appropriate method, they will be used for acquiring a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences of the services provided by the MINT program. Some of the questions that might be guide the interview include the following: 1.) Do students come to a decision about going/not going to grad school through the help of MINT? 2.) Do students feel
an increased sense of confidence about navigating higher education (college and/or graduate school after participating in the MINT program? 3,) Do students feel an increased sense of community in a way that benefits their desire to pursue higher education opportunities after participating in the MINT program? Ultimately, the program process evaluation will be successful if it informs improvement of the program in a way that maximizes benefits for undergraduate MINT participants and shows the MINT program’s funding sponsor that we are adequately delivering much needed services.
References


http://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/first-generation-student-success-at-UC.pdf
