

California State University San Marcos



PROGRAM EVALUATION AY2012-13

Report prepared by
National Latino Research Center



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The TRiO Student Support Services Program at California State University San Marcos offers personal, transitional, and academic support to students from first-generation, low-income, and disability backgrounds, enabling them to persist and graduate from Cal State San Marcos. The project evaluation aims to assess TRiO SSS program participants' experiences of program services; their relationships with program staff, fellow students, and faculty; their perceptions of the effectiveness of program in helping them achieve their educational goals; and their perceptions of the supportiveness of the overall CSUSM institutional climate.

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INTRODUCTION

TRiO Student Support Services Program (TRiO SSS) at California State University San Marcos conducted a comprehensive evaluation to track and monitor completion of the project's identified needs, objectives, and plan of operation. The National Latino Research Center (NLRC) continues working with the TRiO SSS program and was contracted to carry out the external evaluation in AY2012-2013.

NLRC is a research institute promoting scientific research, training, and dissemination of information, particularly, on Latino populations in the United States. NLRC's evaluation of TRiO SSS utilized a research model consisting of semi-structured survey with a few open-ended questions. Using a reliable and culturally-sensitive approach, the research design gathered measurable baseline and process data. The first phase of the program evaluation focused on gathering quantitative data. The quantitative evaluation provided descriptive data via a semi-structured survey. This quantitative data effectively assesses participants' experiences with program services; their relationships with program staff, fellow students, and faculty; their perceptions of the effectiveness of TRiO in helping them achieve their educational goals; and their perceptions of the supportiveness of the overall institutional climate. The survey results provide a quantitative description of student's perceptions of the program services, program staff, and the institutional climate.

The semi-structured survey with some open-ended questions included a new subset of questions designed for students who utilize the tutoring services the program provides.

This report summarizes the survey results collected in Spring 2013.

OVERVIEW OF TRiO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM

The TRiO SSS evaluation is the result of a partnership between TRiO and the National Latino Research Center promoting educational equity and serving underrepresented students at California State University San Marcos.



The TRiO SSS program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The program has been hosted at Cal States San Marcos since 1993. It currently supports 200 students from first-generation, low-income, and/or disability backgrounds, who are U.S. citizens or legal residents, qualify and applied for federal financial aid, and have evidence of academic need.

TRiO SSS provides services to increase retention and graduation rates of targeted students. By collaborating with other service departments on campus, students receive targeted outreach to maximize their success in higher education. The services TRiO SSS provides to students include:

TRiO SERVICES	DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES
Annual Recognition Ceremony	Each spring, graduating TRiO SSS students and their families are honored at a ceremony preceding University commencement. The TRiO Senior Excellence Award recipient – selected for academic achievement, campus leadership, and commitment to the SSS program – is recognized.
The Center	TRiO SSS students may utilize The Center, a multi-purpose computer lab, study area, and community building space. Limited amounts of free printing and copies are available at The Center.
Cultural Enrichment Activities	A limited number of co-curricular events and activities (plays, lectures, musical performances, museum exhibitions) are available each year to SSS students, with the intent of increasing cultural awareness and building community among SSS participants. University credit may be available with participation.

Educational and Personal Counseling	Students work with counselors to develop an educational plan, which includes both short-range academic goals and long-range graduation planning. Counselors assist students in exploring majors, academic success strategies, and personal matters which impact their academic performance.
First Learning Community	The Learning Community is an innovative retention strategy which links academic courses, faculty, students, and academic support services. Students receive priority registration in specific general education courses and become part of a supportive community of scholars committed to academic success.
Graduate School Preparation	Students are encouraged to pursue graduate and professional school opportunities through participation in graduate school fairs and workshops addressing graduate school preparation strategies. Counselors provide students with assistance in writing personal statements and letters of recommendation.
Laptop Loans	A limited number of laptop computers are available for TRiO SSS students who do not have computer access at home.
Mid-Semester Evaluations/Early Interventions	Faculty are encouraged to complete mid-semester progress reports for TRiO SSS students each semester. Students who are having academic or other difficulties meet with a counselor to identify appropriate interventions to increase their likelihood of success in the course(s) of concern. First-Year students receive additional early intervention strategies and services.
Peer and Faculty Mentoring	Peer mentors provide general academic information and assist students in becoming active members and leaders in the campus community. Faculty mentors, available to upper-division students, encourage academic inquiry and mentor students wishing to pursue graduate and professional degrees.

Priority Registration	Students in TRiO SSS receive first selection of classes each semester.
Supplemental Grant Aid	First and Second Year TRiO SSS students who are financially eligible, as determined in collaboration with the Financial Aid office, may receive supplemental SSS grants during their first and second years of college enrollment. Students must have a current FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) on file to be eligible.
Tutoring	TRiO offers our students one-to-one tutoring in English, English as a Second Language, and writing. Students who are struggling in any of the above mentioned areas can contact the program tutor for help. Tutorials are conducted in three ways, in person, by e-mail and phone. TRiO SSS program tutors are professionally trained and gain certification through accredited tutor programs.
Workshops	A diverse range of workshops provides students with opportunities for academic and personal development. Topics, which vary each semester in response to student requests, have included time management, library research strategies, making campus connections, managing stress, financial literacy and diversity awareness.
<p>For additional information about TRiO SSS, visit their website at http://www.csusm.edu/SSS</p>	

METHODOLOGY

Sample

TRiO SSS program staff compiled a comprehensive list of current TRiO SSS students (N=205) and provided the list to NLRC researchers. NLRC created an invitation requesting participation in the program evaluation and NLRC sent the invitation to participate via email using Survey Gizmo program. The notification email advised students of the evaluation study and directed them to a web site to complete the survey. Of the 205 students contacted via email, a total of 66 participated in the survey and 58 students completed the survey (response rate of 32.2%).

Demographics

Student respondents were asked to respond to a number of demographic questions. Students were asked about their current academic standing, age group, gender, racial/ethnic status, and the year they started at CSUSM.

Attitude, Perception, and Frequency

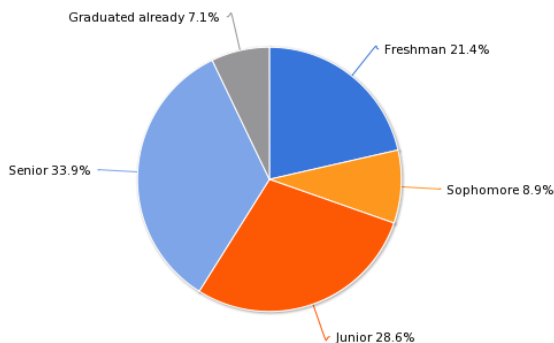
After completing the demographics section of the survey, students were asked a series of questions covering three main topics. The survey questions asked students to report on their attitude about and perceptions of the “institutional climate”, the “SSS staff members” and “SSS services” they received at CSUSM. Students were asked to respond to attitude and perception questions in a Likert type format options such as “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree” (1=highest and 4 lowest).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

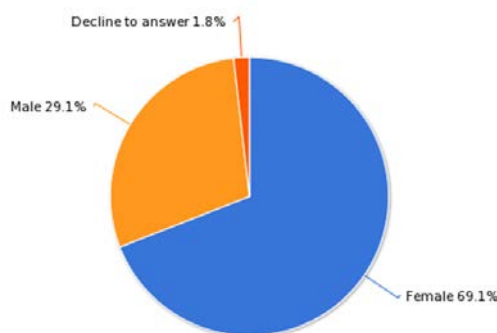
Below is a summary of 2013 survey findings including demographics, perceptions of institutional and campus classroom climate, TRiO SSS staff members, and services.

Demographics

Class Level A total of 58 students completed the online survey. The sample consisted of college juniors (28.6%), seniors (33.9%), freshman (21.4%), sophomores (8.9%), and a few students who had already graduated at the time of survey (7.1%). N=56

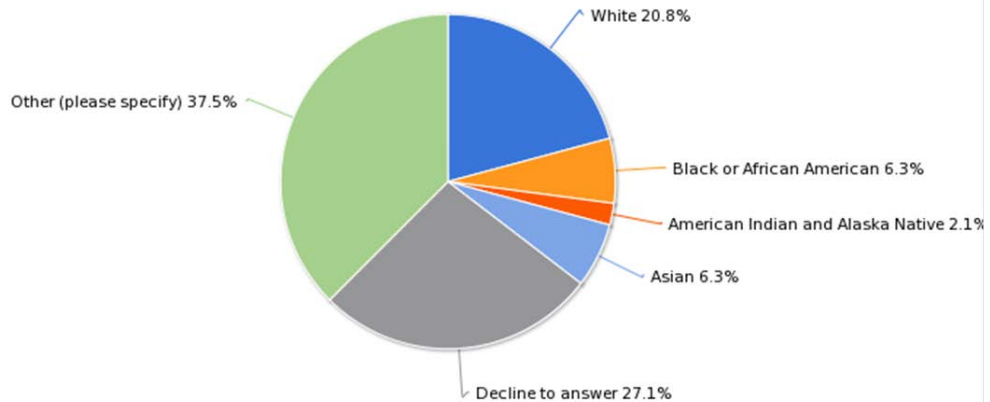


Gender The sample comprised mostly of female students (69.1%) and fewer male (29.1%) and one student declined to answer (1.8%). N=55



Race/Ethnicity The majority of participants consider themselves Hispanic/Latino (79.6%) compared to non-Hispanic/Latino (20.4%). Those who consider themselves Hispanic/Latino, report their ethnicity or ethnic origin as Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicano/a (88.4%), Cuban (2.3%), and other Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (9.3%).

Race The majority of participants declined to identify a race (27.1%) and/or marked Other (37.5%). Participants who reported a race consider themselves White (20.8%), Black or African American (6.3%), Asian (6.3%), and American Indian and Alaska Native (2.1%). N=48



Country of Origin The majority of respondents are U.S. born (78.6%). Those who were born outside of the United States reported being born in Mexico (10.7%), Asia (7.1%), and Other countries (Cuba and Syria) (3.6%). N=56

Language The majority of respondents usually communicate in both Spanish and English (61.8%). 30.9% usually communicate in English and 7.3% communicate in Other language (Vietnamese, Japanese, Tagalog and Arabic). N=55

The majority of respondents read/write most frequently in English (83.9%). 12.5% read/write in both English and Spanish and 3.6% read/write in Other language. N=56

Miscellaneous The majority of the respondents began at CSUSM as first year students (72.7%) compared to transfer students (27.3%). N=55

The majority of the respondents live off campus (92.9%). N=56

The majority of the respondents currently work (69.1%). N=55

Of those who work, 65.8% currently have off-campus jobs, 21.1% work on campus and 13.2% work both on campus and off campus. N=38

The majority of the respondents started SSS as first year students (58.9%), transfer student (23.2%), and continuing student (17.9%). N=56

Means of Communication The majority of the respondents reported email (82.1%) as the most effective means of communicating with the student followed by in-person meetings (17.9%). N=56

About SSS Staff

Students were asked to report on their experiences and perceptions of SSS staff members on a scale ranging from 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, to 4=Strongly Disagree, meaning that, in most cases, 1 is the highest score and 4 is the lowest score. Overall, the students rated their interactions and experiences with SSS Staff members very favorably. SSS staff members have created a comfortable environment for students on campus, students perceive SSS staff members as their advocates, SSS staff members encourage them to stay and college and do well in their class, SSS staff members are sensitive to their unique needs, SSS staff members direct them to valuable campus resources such as financial aid and tutoring and reminded them of important deadlines.

Table 1: Experiences with SSS Staff

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	N=
1. SSS staff members have directed you to valuable campus resources (i.e. financial aid, tutoring, counseling, disability services, etc.)	66.1%	28.6%	0.0%	1.8%	3.6%	56
2. SSS staff members have created a comfortable environment for you on campus.	66.7%	29.6%	1.9%	0.0%	1.9%	54
3. SSS staff members have advocated on your behalf.	55.4%	23.2%	3.6%	0.0%	17.9%	56
SSS staff members have demonstrated sensitivity to your unique needs as a first generation college student.	69.6%	23.2%	1.8%	0.0%	5.4%	56
4. SSS staff members have encouraged you to stay in college and to do well in your classes.	74.5%	16.4%	1.8%	1.8%	5.5%	55
5. SSS staff members have reminded you of important deadlines.	69.1%	27.3%	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	55

TRiO SSS Resources and Services

The questions in this section asked students to rate their perceptions and experiences with services and resources the program offers. Overall, students expressed favorable attitudes toward SSS services and resources they have received ranging from helping them to pass entry-level requirements to helping them maintain good grades.

Table 2: SSS Resources and Services

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	N=
1. SSS support and resources are helping you to make progress towards completion of your degree.	65.5%	29.1%	1.8%	0.0%	3.6%	55
2. SSS support and resources are helping you to maintain good grades.	56.4%	30.9%	5.5%	0.0%	7.3%	55
3. SSS support and resources are helping you to complete entry level math and writing requirements.	47.2%	20.8%	3.8%	1.9%	26.4%	53
4. SSS support and resources are offered at times/days that are convenient for you.	56.4%	38.2%	3.6%	0.0%	1.8%	55

Students were also asked to report on the most helpful services and resources of the TRiO SSS program. The students' responses were tallied and ranked from the most to least frequently occurring responses. The students ranked Priority Registration as the most helpful service provided by the program staff. Conversely, the lowest ranked service was Annual Recognition Ceremony. N=56

Most Helpful Aspect of SSS	Percent	Rank
Priority Registration	87.5%	1
Educational and Personal Counseling	76.8%	2
The Center	62.5%	3
Mid-semester Evaluations/Early Intervention	58.9%	4
Cultural Enrichment Activities	33.9%	5
Peer and Faculty Mentoring	26.8%	6
Supplemental and Aid Grant	26.8%	6
Tutoring	19.6%	7
Laptop Loans	16.1%	8
First-year Learning Community	14.3%	9
Workshops	12.5%	10
Graduate School Motivation and Preparation	12.5%	11
Annual Recognition Ceremony	1.8%	12
Other (Free printing access)	1.8%	12

Students were asked if they had additional comments about the services and resources SSS provides. They commented the following:

- *Everything is great*
- *Great help for students all the time*
- *I like printing for free!*
- *I love the free printing*
- *The SSS is very helpful*
- *They are extremely helpful to their students.*
- *They are really great people.*
- *They are wonderful help -- very appreciated.*
- *Priority registration is definitely a big help when it comes to registering for classes. I am able to enroll in the classes I need.*
- *SSS has helped me since the first day I stepped foot on this campus. I would go to the counselors when I was homesick and they were always willing to listen. When I told them that I wanted to move back home, they were always willing to help, they never pressured me and allowed me to do make my own decision. I ended up moving home and continuing school, they have been much help.*
- *Wonderful program that has guided me. I have gained personal relationships which appreciate me and helped improve my work ethic.*
- *The priority registration helps a lot because it allows me to stay on track and not worry about not getting into certain classes*

Tutoring

TRiO offers students one-to-one tutoring in English, English as a Second Language, and writing. Students who are struggling in any of the above mentioned areas can contact the program tutor for help. Tutorials are conducted in three ways, in person, by e-mail and phone. TRiO SSS program tutors are professionally trained and gain certification through accredited tutor programs.

Overall, students rank tutoring as the 7th most helpful service or resource TRiO offers. Even though the number of students proactively seeking tutoring on a regular basis is relatively small. Almost a quarter (23.6%) of the survey respondents reported receiving tutoring services from SSS staff. N=55

One hundred percent (100%) of students who reported receiving tutoring support received tutoring in writing and 7.7% received tutoring in math. N=13

One hundred percent (100%) of students who received tutoring report class grade improvement as a result of the tutoring support SSS provides. N=13

Overall, students who received tutoring services said the following:

- *Helped me a lot with my writing assignment and skills*
- *Helped me gain an understanding of the assignment.*
- *It is good to have an extra set of eyes to look at your paper.*
- *It's been helpful*
- *The tutoring for writing helped me spot my mistakes so that I don't make the same mistakes again.*
- *They are good mentors, makes me feel more confident about my work.*
- *Tutoring has helped me with my flow of my essay.*
- *It helped me better my essays and try to analyze them a bit more*
- *I was able to better my writing assignment because of the tutoring help which in the end betters my grade overall.*
- *Tutor was always there for me and she is amazing! With her aid and guidance, I was able to develop better writing and math skills!*

Financial Literacy

The financial literacy section asked students about their financial need and support they are receiving at CSUSM.

In general, many students are concerned with accumulation of excessive debt from educational expenses and worry about not being able to pay off their loans when they graduate. The majority of respondents agree/strongly agree that SSS has provided the students with guidance about financial aid needed to pay educational and living expenses. Furthermore, half of the participants agree/strongly agree that SSS has helped to alleviate concerns that they have about accumulating excessive loan debt. The majority agree/strongly agree that SSS has made them aware of scholarships. The majority of students would like SSS to give them more information and/or guidance to help them develop financial management plans and about a quarter of the students believe SSS can give them more guidance to better understand the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized loans.

Table 3: Financial Literacy

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	N=
1. Has SSS provided you with guidance about your financial aid needed to pay your educational and living expenses?	48.2%	25.0%	14.3%	3.6%	8.9%	56
2. Has SSS helped to alleviate any concerns you have about accumulating excessive loan debt?	26.8%	23.2%	16.1%	3.6%	30.4%	56
3. Has SSS made you aware of scholarships?	41.1%	32.1%	10.7%	7.1%	8.9%	56
4. Has SSS given you guidance about the loans you have taken or are currently taking out to pay for educational and living expenses?	23.2%	19.6%	19.6%	7.1%	30.4%	56
5. Has SSS given you guidance about, and do you understand the difference between subsidized student loans and unsubsidized loans?	26.8%	19.6%	23.2%	3.6%	26.8%	56
6. Would you like SSS to give you more information and/or guidance to help you develop a financial management plan?	50.0%	26.8%	10.7%	0.0%	12.5%	56

Inclusiveness & Diversity

This section asked students to reflect on their experiences at CSUSM as first generation college students and to describe how SSS helped them become more connected.

Overall, students rated CSUSM's institutional climate favorably and agreed that SSS promotes more inclusiveness and community building, particularly for first generation college students and based on the first generation college students' particular needs.

The students reported positive perceptions of SSS's various effort. In addition, on average, respondents felt that SSS encourages them to get involved in campus activities, student organizations and community events. Also, SSS program ensures that these students feel a sense of pride and belonging at CSUSM, which may play an important role in their educational success.

Table 4: Inclusiveness and Diversity

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	N=
1. SSS has helped you feel more connected on campus.	41.1%	46.4%	5.4%	0.0%	7.1%	56
2. SSS has provided opportunities to meet other first generation college students on campus.	58.9%	30.4%	7.1%	0.0%	3.6%	56
3. SSS is increasing campus awareness and understanding of challenges first generation college students face in college.	55.4%	26.8%	3.6%	1.8%	12.5%	56
4. SSS is contributing to building a sense of community on campus for first generation college students.	58.9%	30.4%	5.4%	0.0%	5.4%	56
5. SSS promotes a sense of pride and belonging at CSUSM for first generation college students.	58.9%	32.1%	3.6%	0.0%	5.4%	56
6. SSS encourages you to get involved in campus activities, student organizations, or community events.	57.1%	30.4%	3.6%	1.8%	7.1%	56

Additionally, students commented the following about their experiences at CSUSM as first generation college students:

- *I'm thankful for this program, especially for the advisors and for priority registration.*
- *It has been a great experience.*
- *Overall, SSS has been helpful in any way possible.*
- *SSS is a great mentoring program and the counselors are great.*
- *Thanks to the First-Year generation program Trio/SSS does, STEP, I am able to go around campus easily, finding what I needed which has really helped; I see people walking around lost all the time.*
- *I do wish we had more events that brought the SSS community together and allow us to make different connections with students in the program*

The Best of SSS

Students were asked: What is the best part of being in SSS? Student responses are listed below:

Educational and Personal Counseling

- *The counselors! They are so helpful and really care about your well-being. Also, priority registration has been extremely helpful!*
- *Counselors*

- *Always having a counselor available*
- *Always having counselors to go to and answer questions*
- *Counselor advising and prior registration*
- *Counseling and the center and the cultural events*
- *Educational Guidance*
- *Getting help from my tutor and personal counseling*
- *Knowing that you are not alone that there is someone to help you out when you need it*
- *Knowing you can turn somewhere when you need help or guidance.*
- *The best part is being able to talk to a mentor and receive honest help.*
- *The best part is the advising that I am given towards my four year plan and the free printing!*
- *The sense of support that is provide through my college experience*
- *They are there when I need to "vent" and they always greet mw in and out of the office*
- *having a place for people like me to congregate*
- *Staff is very helpful and will try to help in any way possible. Counseling was beneficial during the time I spent at CSUSM.*
- *I liked that i can go to my adviser/counselor to help me deal with my classes and guide me through college life. Also I think it's a great opportunity that we receive priority registration. At least it's a great help for me because i get the classes that i want and fits around my work schedule.*
- *I like the fact that I can be guided with which classes I can take next year. I also like how I can use the computers and also print for free. I also like how we can get priority registration*
- *The best part of being in SSS is the communication between counselors and students. The relationships formed.*
- *They help me organize my class schedule each semester and I am able to get the classes I need because of priority registration.*
- *I have someone and somewhere on campus where I feel I can talk to someone about my educational problems. I have a place on campus where I feel I belong. I get priority registration which helps me work with my school schedule and my work schedule.*
- *The constant support that is provided, the counselors like Joe, is always making time for students to drop by his office.*
- *I love having a team that is available to help me. They not only help me academically but also emotionally. They have been a great support.*
- *The best thing about being in the SSS program is that whenever I need to talk to the counselors I do not have to wait a long time to see one. Also they always are ready to answer my questions whenever I have one.*
- *The reassurance that I have counselors to answer any questions I may have in regards to my college career.*

The Center

- *I feel like were a family*
- *The growth and connectedness I have in myself and this campus. The ability to mentor younger students.*
- *The best part was knowing there is a place on campus i can socialize and get essays printed. SSS made campus feel like a community.*
- *Having a lab where I can do quick assignments and print necessary materials. Having counselors that we are able to talk, and most definitely Priority Registration! It helped me get the classes I needed to stay on track and graduate in a timely manner.*
- *Being able to use the computer lab and being able to meet with the staff when I need their help.*
- *Free printing!!*
- *Help is available anytime I need it*
- *The best part of being in SSS is having access to all of the services offered.*
- *The best part of being in SSS is printing assignments and having access to a computer.*
- *Getting to know other students who are in similar circumstances as you are. The guidance from the counselors and feeling like you have somewhere to go for help, whether is personal or for academic reasons. The free-printing really saved me some money too.*

Tutoring/ Academic Support

- *Having the tutoring and priority registration.*
- *The academic support and counselors. Priority registration is a huge help for us students.*

Priority Registration

- *Priority in electing classes*
- *Priority registration*
- *Priority on registering for classes. Printing access*
- *registration*
- *Priority registration and all the people that really try to help and make your life easier.*
- *Priority registration and free printing*
- *Priority registration. The Computer Lab. Mid-Term Evaluation.*
- *Priority registration, computers for free printing, and the counselors.*

Cultural Events and Community Service

- *I enjoy their cultural and community service events.*
- *I really enjoy the independent classes :) I feel like that's where I learn the most about the real world and culture.*

Mid-Semester Evaluation

- *The mid semester evaluation form*

First-Year Learning Community

- *The sense of community and meeting other first generation students.*

Least Favorite Part of SSS

Students were asked: What is your least favorite part of being in SSS? They answered the following:

- *Crowded center area*
- *Everything has been great and flawless.*
- *I do not have a least favorite part.*
- *I have nothing bad to say about the program*
- *I have nothing negative to say about the program or staff*
- *In my opinion there is not one least favorite*
- *Keeping contact is hard sometimes with busy work and school load*
- *Making appointments can be difficult.*
- *No financial support*
- *None, it's great!*
- *None. This is a great program.*
- *Not all students are involved with events and activities.*
- *Not be able to attend all of the events that SSS hosts*
- *Nothing*
- *One time I needed to use a computer but they were all occupied*
- *Small room*
- *Sometimes the computer lab is really full, but it is ok.*
- *The chairs at the center/computer lab.*
- *The lease favorite part of being in SSS is sometimes waiting for a computer to be available.*
- *Not enough communication*
- *There is no least favorite*
- *Walk-in's times are always lengthy*
- *We can only print 10 pages a day.*
- *Lack of appointments and limited extracurricular activities (it was hard to do any events because none fit in my work schedule , they all seemed to be same day and time*

CONCLUSION

The results of the semi-structured survey and evaluation of qualitative responses reveal that, on average, students are satisfied with the TRiO staff, resources and services, financial literacy, and the effort to increase inclusiveness and community-building. It is evident from student responses that they value TRiO SSS services and utilize them frequently. Most importantly, students attribute TRiO SSS staff, programs and services with supporting and encouraging them to achieve personal goals, to stay in school, and achieve academic goals. It is evident that the program is achieving its mission of providing services that support student retention and graduation at CSUSM. Most importantly, SSS staff members have effectively developed a support system for students who now feel more connected to the campus in general because this program is available to them. The main weakness is that the program has outgrown its Center space.