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Sacramento State - Division of Student Affairs

Annual Report: El Centro Serna

Reporting Period: AY 2025-2026

Subdivision Information

- Subdivision Name: Student Success & Academic Excellence
- AVP/Executive Director Name:
  - Juana Zaragoza, El Centro Serna Director
  - Dr. Chao Vang, Associate VP

Executive Summary *(1-2 pages max)*

- Overview of Key Accomplishments:
  - AY 2025–2026 was a landmark year for El Centro Serna, defined by expanded programming, stronger campus partnerships, and deepened student engagement. Highlights include: La Bienvenida welcoming an estimated 700+ attendees (the largest in the event's history) featuring 40+ campus and community partners, food trucks, and live music; the inaugural Nuestras Historias Art Show showcasing 55 pieces by 28 student artists; the Chicanx/Latinx Recognition Ceremony (CLRC) celebrating 480 graduates across two ceremonies with 3,000+ in-person supporters and an estimated 2,000 joining via livestream; Farmworker Awareness Week's community supply drive benefiting 100 students and families in Woodland and Sacramento; and Feria de Educación transitioning to a virtual format, reaching over 700 students and families. The center recorded 1,910 total student engagements through advising, drop-in services, and events, with Coordinator Saray Aguirre serving 181 students and Integrated Advisor Areli Pinedo serving 52 students in Spring 2026 alone. The center also secured a $4,000 Nelsen Civic Engagement Grant through a partnership with the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to support nonpartisan voter education.
  - Notable initiatives this year included the official launch of the El Centro Serna name translation, celebrating the center's cultural roots while honoring the legacy of Joe and Isabel Serna. A formal reservation system for the Dolores Huerta Boardroom and the center lounge was implemented, yielding 59 reservations in Fall 2025 and 62 in Spring 2026 from departments, clubs, and community partners. A monthly newsletter was established to improve outreach and visibility. Advising services were formally integrated into center operations in collaboration with CARC and the College of Education. New partnerships with the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Latine Graduate Student Association, and the Latinx Alumni Chapter expanded the center's professional development and community-building reach.
- Impact on Students & University Goals:

  - El Centro Serna's work directly advances Sac State's mission as a Hispanic-Serving Institution committed to student success, equity, and inclusive excellence. With Latine students comprising nearly 40% of the student body, the center serves as a critical infrastructure for belonging, retention, and academic persistence. End-of-year and belonging survey results consistently reflect high satisfaction with events, services, and team members, and demonstrate meaningful gains in students' sense of community and connection to Sac State. Detailed survey data is included in the Assessment & Data section of this report. These outcomes align directly with the CSU's Graduation Initiative 2025 and the Division of Student Affairs' strategic priorities around equity-focused student success and community belonging.
- Major Challenges & Opportunities for Growth:
  - The primary challenge this year was staff capacity. Growing student demand for advising, programming, and individualized support stretched the team throughout both semesters. Coordinator Saray Aguirre's background as a former CAMP Retention Specialist means students frequently seek her support. This has required the Director to retain portions of event planning and operational responsibilities. The addition of the 1B and 1A Assistant Program Coordinator position is a key mitigation strategy, allowing for better delegation of programming duties.

  - A secondary and ongoing challenge is center visibility. Despite strong engagement among students who find us, many members of the campus community remain unaware of El Centro Serna's location and the full range of services available. The absence of external building signage and outdated campus wayfinding continue to be barriers. The center has been actively working to expedite the signage process through University Print, however, navigating the approval and production timeline has proven to be a prolonged process. Securing updated exterior signage and corrected wayfinding markers is a priority for the summer term, with the goal of having new signage in place before the start of Fall 2026. This investment is essential to ensuring students can physically locate and access the center, particularly during high-traffic moments like the first weeks of the semester.

Departmental Successes & Accomplishments

Department Name: El Centro Serna

- Mission Alignment: El Centro Serna serves as Sacramento State's dedicated resource center for Latine students, honoring the legacy of Mayor Joe Serna and Dr. Isabel Hernandez-Serna. As an HSI with Latine students comprising nearly 40% of the student population, El Centro Serna is central to the university's equity-focused mission. The center provides culturally responsive programming, academic advising support, community-building events, and connections to campus resources, all of which are designed to foster belonging, improve academic persistence, and support degree completion. In AY 2025-2026, the center's first full year operating under the translated

name El Centro Serna, the department deepened its impact through expanded staffing, stronger campus partnerships, and a broader range of student services.

- Key Achievements:
    - Formalized a reservation system for the center's lounge and the Dolores Huerta Boardroom to establish ourselves as a campus and community hub. Faculty, staff, students (including clubs/orgs) held a total of 62 (Spring 2026) and 59 (Fall 2025) events, meetings, and gatherings.
    - Outreach:
        - El Centro Serna maintained an active outreach presence throughout the academic year, participating in 25 events in Fall 2025 and 31 events in Spring 2026 (a mix of on-campus engagement and community-based outreach). These efforts ranged from resource fairs, transfer day events at local community colleges, and campus cultural celebrations to off-campus community events such as Sac Republic FC Noche Latina and HOPE's Latina Action Day. Additionally, the center hosted 3 campus visits each semester from high schools or community colleges, welcoming prospective students and familiarizing them with Sac State's resources and the Latine community on campus. These visits serve as an important pipeline and early connection point for future Hornets.

        - Lake Tahoe Community College Campus Visit: Each summer, El Centro Serna hosts an overnight campus visit for 30 students from Lake Tahoe Community College, providing a hands-on introduction to Sacramento State. Students stay in the campus residence halls and participate in a full day of programming that includes presentations from Financial Aid, the Dreamer Resource Center, Housing, and other key campus offices. This initiative serves as a direct pipeline for transfer students, the majority of whom are Latine, and reflects the center's commitment to building pathways to higher education before students ever set foot on campus as enrolled Hornets.

        - Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project (CLYLP): El Centro Serna serves as the primary campus partner for the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project's annual one-week conference held at Sac State. The Director serves as the institutional point of contact throughout the duration of the program, supporting logistics coordination, arranging campus tours, and sponsoring room fees and activities. Each year, 120 high school juniors and seniors from across California visit Sac State through this program, many for the first time, gaining exposure to university life, campus resources, and the broader possibilities of higher education. This partnership deepens the center's role as a bridge between the Sacramento State community and the next generation of Latine college students.

    - Events:

- El Centro Serna hosted 26 events in Fall 2025 and 39 events in Spring 2026, reflecting continued growth in programming scope and collaborative reach. A defining feature of this year's event calendar was intentional partnership. For example, every Café y Conversación session and most socials were co-hosted with either a CARC program or a student club (MAR, MEChA, SHPE, ALPFA, and others), ensuring each gathering connected students to broader campus resources and community networks while deepening the center's relationships with partner organizations.
- Farmworker Awareness Week: This year's Farmworker Awareness Week was elevated through a collaboration with Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity, CAMP, and the HSI Office that extended the event's impact beyond the campus. Together, partners organized a supply drive that collected and distributed donations to 100 farmworking students and families across Woodland and Sacramento.

- El Centro Serna's advising team provided robust, culturally responsive support to students across both semesters. In Fall 2025, Coordinator Saray Aguirre worked with over 105 students through individual meetings and ongoing check-ins, supporting them with academic planning, financial aid guidance, personal development, resume building, and career exploration, often meeting with the same student multiple times as their needs evolved. Integrated Advisor Areli Pinedo served over 20 students through the center, providing critical general education advising, while Assistant Program Coordinator Gabriel Conejo Gallegos connected over 25 students to career exploration resources, internship and job search support, scholarship opportunities, and center services orientation. In Spring 2026, the team's reach expanded further. Saray held 181 appointments with 78 distinct students, and Areli held 52 appointments with 49 distinct students, reflecting both growing student awareness of available services and the team's sustained commitment to individualized support.

- Quantitative outcomes:
  - Spring 2026: 1,910 total student engagements recorded through the EAB system, 727 lounge/study visits, 215 GE advising contacts, and 162 Coffee Corner visits. *Note: EAB was not utilized in Fall 2025.*
  - 700+ students attended La Bienvenida; 480 graduates were celebrated at the CLRC across two ceremonies with 3,000+ in-person supporters and an estimated 2,000 joining via livestream; the center lounge averaged approximately 25 student visits per day each semester, totaling an estimated 4,000 visits across the full academic year. Full data is included in the Assessment & Data section.

  - Student Testimonials:

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- "Since my first visit to El Centro Serna I have felt extremely motivated to continue exploring higher education. I am so grateful to see so many peers have similar backgrounds as me that are also first generation interested in increasing the numbers of Latinx students in the university system."
- "El Centro has been a foundational pillar of support to me knowing there is community in a beautiful city like Sacramento. I was well informed of events through El Centro Serna's Canvas page. I believe it should be offered to every student at the beginning of their time at Sac State."
- "I found it not only welcoming but also helpful with all its resources. Every time I walked into the center, the energy was just right. I felt truly comfortable, and it seemed like such a safe space."
- "Saray Aguirre has been very helpful and provides guidance that supports my career and future endeavors. She is always willing to help with my questions in a very professional method."
- "I scheduled an advising meeting with Saray this spring and not only did she answer all my questions, but she provided me with the time and dedication to help me select my courses and plan my path as a pre-veterinary student. She was motivating and I truly appreciated the guidance."
- "My experience with El Centro Serna's services and team members has been very supportive and encouraging. Everyone I've interacted with has been welcoming, approachable, and genuinely invested in helping students succeed."

- **New or Improved Services/Programs: In addition to the items already noted (newsletter, reservation system, Noche de Familia, Feria de Educación virtual transition), the following new programs launched this year:**

    - Nuestras Historias Art Show: The inaugural exhibition featured 55 pieces of artwork submitted by 28 Latine students, providing a meaningful platform for students to share their lived experiences through creative expression. The event drew strong attendance and generated enthusiastic student feedback, with participants requesting it become an annual tradition.

    - Pásale y Pregunte: A new early-semester drop-in initiative during the first two weeks of the semester through which over 100 students received class/student center guidance and many became regular center visitors.

- El Camino: The Road to Graduate School: A four-session series co-hosted with the Chicanx/Latinx Studies Program covering graduate school applications, personal statements, CVs, and financial planning.

- Integrated Advising Services – Formally structured collaboration with CARC Advisor Areli Pinedo, College of Education (Dr. Amber Gonzalez/Degrees Project), Chicanx/Latinx Studies Program, and Financial Aid (Jose Gallegos) to provide students weekly drop-in access to multiple advising types in one location.

- Listserv & Canvas: All Latine-identifying students were added to El Centro Serna's listserv and Canvas page, providing a direct and regularly updated communication channel that complemented the center's monthly newsletter. Both platforms were consistently maintained throughout the academic year to keep students informed of center events, campus happenings, important academic deadlines, job and volunteer opportunities, and scholarship resources. This proactive approach to outreach ensured that students who may not visit the center in person still had consistent access to the information and opportunities most relevant to their success.

- **Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Efforts:**
  - AY 2025–2026 was the first full academic year operating under the translated name El Centro Serna. In conjunction with the new vanity mark, the Spanish-language branding has contributed to increased student engagement and strengthened visibility across campus. Equity and belonging were further advanced through the Braids Not Raids event (demonstrating solidarity with the immigrant community), Farmworker Awareness Week (benefiting farmworker students and families), the Nuestras Historias Art Show (centering Latine student voices), the Latine Graduate Student Association mixers (addressing graduate students' sense of isolation), and the Nelsen Civic Engagement Grant's voter education initiative. Belonging survey results affirmed these efforts, with the majority of respondents strongly agreeing that center events and spaces increased their sense of belonging at Sac State overall. Full data is included in the Assessment & Data section.

- **Partnerships & Collaborations:**
  - Internal and external collaborations were a defining feature of AY 2025–2026. Key partnerships included:
    - HSI Office – Supplemental funding support for La Bienvenida, CLRC, Feria de Educación, Open House, Graduate Student Mixers, Nuestras Historias Art Show, Farmworker Awareness Week, and general outreach supplies.
    - California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce – Co-leading the Nelsen Civic Engagement Grant ($4,000) focused on nonpartisan voter education with eight Civic Fellows; also hosted a financial literacy Café y Conversación.

- Chicanx/Latinx Studies Department – Hosted events (Paletas con Profes, etc.) at the center and led the Grad School 101 series; cross-promotion increased mutual event attendance.
- Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity – Partnered on Farmworker Awareness Week supply drive.
- Latine Graduate Student Association – Spring 2026 was its inaugural semester; co-hosted two graduate mixers and a Finals Study Jam.
- Latinx Alumni Chapter – Building toward career networking and alumni connection events in the coming year.
- HSI Advisory Council and CHYLA – Center staff serve on both bodies; CHYLA facilitated attendance of 15 participants at the annual Latina Action Day.
- College of Arts and Letters / College of Education – Joint drop-in advising initiatives supporting student registration and GE planning.
- Student Service Center (Jose Gallegos) – Weekly drop-in support at the center.
- <u>All collaboration efforts are listed on the Event Impact Report.</u>

- **Assessment & Data Highlights:**
  - **Key assessment data for AY 2025–2026:**

    - EAB Appointment Data (Spring 2026) – 1,910 total student engagements; 1,850 drop-in contacts; 37 scheduled appointments; 149.65 scheduled advising hours.

    - Top engagement categories: Study/Lounge (727), CLRC Tickets (465), GE Academic Advising (215, 123.24 hrs), Coffee Corner (162), Event Sign-In (104), Financial Aid Support (50, 2.75 hrs).

    - End-of-Year Survey – 93% Satisfied or Very Satisfied with events; 89% Satisfied or Very Satisfied with programming; 94% Satisfied or Very Satisfied with services; 94% Satisfied or Very Satisfied with team members; 89% visited the center during the academic year; 75% attended at least one center event.

    - Belonging Survey – 70% strongly agreed they felt welcomed by staff; 55% strongly agreed they made social connections; 70% strongly agreed they felt a sense of belonging at the event; 70% strongly agreed the center increased their belonging at Sac State overall; 70% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed they would recommend the event to a friend.

    - Social Media

      - Fall 2025 – 2,975 Instagram followers; 63 posts; 16 reels created.

  - Spring 2026 - 3,350 Instagram followers; 60 posts; 16 reels

- Mailing list and outreach database reflects hundreds of students connected through orientation tabling, events, and QR code sign-ups across both semesters.

Strategic Priorities & Future Goals

- **Short-Term Priorities (Next 1-2 years):**
  - Short-term priorities for the next 1–2 years include: (1) Increase campus visibility by updating wayfinding signs, adding external building signage, and revamping the exterior area around the center with additional seating to position El Centro Serna as a premier campus destination. Add Latine Greek Council flags to the Main Quad to celebrate their legacy. (2) Formalize a retention strategy. The current staffing model does not support a dedicated retention specialist, despite Latine students comprising nearly 40% of the student body. A structured retention plan with clear caseloads and intervention/prevention protocols is needed. (3) Create and launch the Serna Scholars Program – a cohort-based, peer mentorship model with one unit of academic credit for a leadership and professional development seminar, culminating in an internship placement. (4) Increase donor and alumni relationships to diversify funding and expand professional development opportunities for students. (5) Launch targeted phone banking and direct outreach campaigns to connect first-year and at-risk students to advising, financial aid, and academic support services.

- **Long-Term Vision (3-5 years):**
  - El Centro Serna aims to become the most utilized student success hub on campus for Latine students, with a staffing model that includes dedicated retention specialists capable of serving the full breadth of the Latine student population. The center will expand its capacity to host signature events at scale (building on the CLRC's record of 3,000+ attendees), grow the Serna Scholars Program into a recognized academic pipeline, and deepen alumni and donor engagement to create sustainable funding streams for student scholarships, professional development, and community programming. The center also aims to expand digital access options (virtual events, online programming) to better serve students who work full-time or attend primarily in the evening.

- **Resource Needs & Support Requests:**
  - Staffing: A dedicated retention specialist position is the most critical resource need. The Coordinator's advising load (181 appointments in one semester) demonstrates that student demand far exceeds what can be absorbed within her role. The 1A & 1B Assistant Program Coordinator position is a meaningful step, but a formal retention-focused role is essential to meet the needs of the Latine student population at scale.

- Budget: Continued and expanded funding is vital so as to not heavily rely on HSI Office funding. Increased discretionary programming budget would allow the center to grow signature events, add evening programming, and pilot new student engagement initiatives.

- Physical Space: External signage, updated campus wayfinding signs, and exterior seating improvements are needed to increase foot traffic and establish El Centro Serna as a visible campus destination.

Assessment & Data-Driven Insights

- **Student Engagement & Success Metrics:**
  - El Centro Serna recorded 1,910 total student engagements in Spring 2026 through the EAB system, reflecting a broad range of services.
  - The lounge and study space averaged 25 visits per day both semesters, with an estimated 2,000 total lounge visits each semester.
  - The CLRC reached 480 graduates and 3,000+ in-person attendees, the largest ceremony in its history.
  - End-of-year survey data indicates 89% of respondents had visited the center during AY 2025–2026, and 94% were Satisfied or Very Satisfied with both services and team members.
  - Social media followership reached 3,350 on Instagram, reflecting growing brand recognition and a wider reach for event promotion.

- **Use of Assessment for Improvement: Examples of how assessment results informed policy, programming, or service changes:**
  - Belonging survey feedback requesting more icebreaker activities and diverse art mediums led to enhanced programming at Café y Conversación sessions and the lauch of the Nuestras Historias Art Show.
  - Student feedback requesting expanded advising access led to the formalized integration of Financial Aid drop-in hours and CLSP advising at the center.
  - End-of-year survey responses requesting more events will be incorporated into AY 26-27 programming planning.
  - The EAB attendance data was used to identify GE advising (123.24 hours) as the highest-demand service category, reinforcing the case for a dedicated retention specialist.
  - Student requests for more marketing and visibility of events have led to expanded newsletter outreach and Canvas hub communication strategies.
- **Data Challenges & Needs:**
  - Fall 2025 visitor data was collected through manual observation and staff estimates, as the EAB system was not yet fully operational for individual visitor tracking. This created a gap in unique student counts and service utilization records for that semester. Going forward, full EAB deployment for both semesters

will enable more accurate tracking of student engagement, appointment frequency, and service impact.

Financial Overview (Optional or as required)

- **Budget Overview:**
  - El Centro Serna's programming this year was supported through supplemental funding from the HSI Office. HSI support was instrumental in enhancing signature events including La Bienvenida (food trucks, live entertainment), the CLRC, Feria de Educación, Farmworker Awareness Week, Nuestras Historias Art Show, Open House, and Graduate Student Mixers.
  - The $4,000 Nelsen Civic Engagement Grant secured through the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce partnership represents a new external funding stream that will support student staff wages in AY 26-27.

Recommendations

- **Key Takeaways for Division Leadership:**
  - AY 2025–2026 demonstrated that El Centro Serna is operating above capacity relative to its current staffing model, and that student demand for its services continues to grow. The center has successfully positioned itself as the cultural and academic home for Latine students at Sacramento State, evidenced by record event attendance, strong satisfaction data, and an expanding set of campus and community partnerships. The most pressing institutional need is dedicated retention specialists who can serve the nearly 40% of the student body that identifies as Latine. Without this investment, the Coordinator will remain in a reactive role that limits the center's ability to pursue strategic initiatives. Division leadership is encouraged to champion this position as a high-return investment in student persistence and graduation outcomes aligned with Graduation Initiative 2025. The center's growing external partnerships (California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Latinx Alumni Chapter) also signal an opportunity to engage university advancement and development in building a donor base for the center.
- **Final Reflections from AVP/Executive Director:**
  - Juana Zaragoza: AY 2025–2026 was a year of meaningful growth for El Centro Serna. From the official launch of our new name to record-breaking event attendance, the expansion of advising services, the debut of the Nuestras Historias Art Show, and a secured civic engagement grant, the center demonstrated both its depth and diversity of impact and the strength of its community. Our team (Coordinator Saray Aguirre, Advisor Areli Pinedo, Assistant Program Coordinator Gabriel Conejo Gallegos, Graduate Assistant Osvaldo Jimenez, Lead Program Assistant Jazmin Baena, Program Assistants Anabel Charre, Natalia Chavez, David Hernandez, and Salomon Gomez; and interns Leticia Tenorio and Alexander Sanchez) brought extraordinary dedication to every initiative this year. The center has established itself as a critical pillar of student success and belonging at Sacramento State.