



A learning community for first-year students

OUR PURPOSE

On a mission to increase first-year retention and empower students to foster long-lasting connections at CSULB, the campus came together in fall 2023 to launch its first-ever sweeping learning community program, The Beach Experience (Beach XP). Designed as a multi-level and interdisciplinary program, Beach XP represents the university's commitment to supporting incoming first-year students in their academic and social transitions.

Offering a true holistic approach, the program fosters community building through smaller college-specific learning cohorts. Students meet weekly for first-year experience courses and scheduled activity hours that create a consistent space for them to engage, connect, and support one another. This structure also expands their access to important opportunities and campus resources, at the same time nurturing a staff culture of collaboration that bridges gaps in our pursuit to become a student-ready, OneBeach community. While Beach XP is a university-wide effort, individual colleges organize and manage their unique learning cohorts.

Growth in Year Two

In year two, Beach XP will continue to refine aspects of the program, building upon a growth strategy and expanding alternative infrastructures to better support our students, faculty, and campus community. This fall, the program is taking the following steps to further align with the university's strategic priorities and action plans laid out in CSULB's [Beach 2030 vision](#):

Building Community

Redefining the activity hour and first-year experience courses with specific learning outcomes aims to better support our students with resource navigation and cultivate their sense of belonging. Rooted in collaboration, self-discovery, and resource utilization, these new learning

outcomes are crafted to build an interconnected community that fosters academic success and social connections.

Engaging All Students

As a robust web-based platform for managing digital learning and extra-curricular engagement, Beach XP will leverage Canvas to develop new course shells tailored to the unique needs and strengths of our diverse communities: students, faculty, campus partners, and coordinators. This initiative aims to create a centralized hub for communication and support, cultivating further engagement in online and in-person spaces.

Cultivating Resilience

Driven by the goal of implementing forward-looking solutions to cultivate resilience, Microsoft Bookings serves as an innovative advancement to improve operational efficiency and create synergy that can be scaled up for the greater CSULB community. Introducing Microsoft Bookings as Beach XP's new scheduling and appointment tool streamlines the process of booking campus partners' workshops.

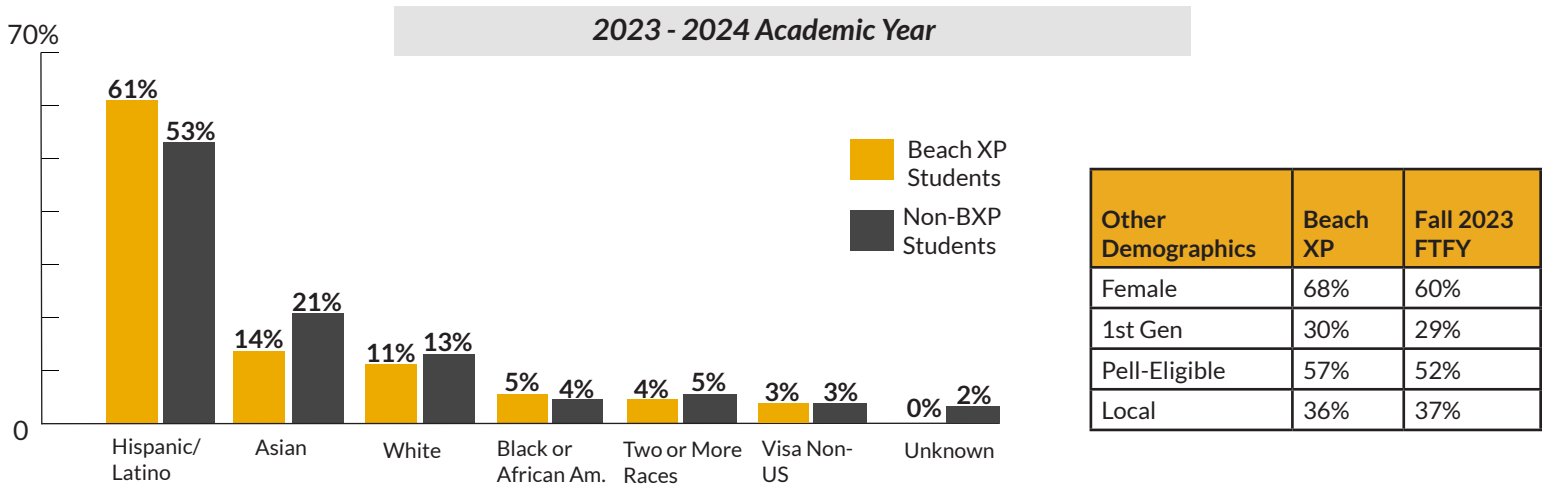
Empowering Faculty

Establishing the Beach XP Advisory Task Force empowers faculty by integrating best practices for teaching within a dynamic learning community. The faculty role is elevated to broaden expertise and enhance interdisciplinarity to ultimately become more responsive to the ever-changing needs of the higher education landscape.



POPULATION SERVED

In the '23-'24 academic year, Beach XP students represented the larger CSULB student population in terms of demographics.



'24-'25 Academic Year

Having served over 700 students in year one, Beach XP aims to increase its impact with around **1,300** students enrolled in fall 2024 across **55** cohorts.



OUTCOMES

A team of researchers led by Dr. Leilani Madrigal, Associate Professor of Kinesiology, conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of Beach XP in its first year. It offers a promising glimpse of the program's impact, and further insights gleaned from assessments in year two and beyond are highly anticipated.

Data regarding the program's effects on student persistence and retention will be more accurately measured in the coming years, as these metrics require longitudinal analysis. However, early trends are promising. A recent report from the Chancellor's Office shows that the fall 2023 cohort has an 86.3% one-year retention rate, which is 1 percentage greater than fall 2022 and the second highest in the CSU system. It's also evident from the qualitative data that Beach XP students had a positive first-year experience, primarily through forming friendships, establishing peer connections, and successfully navigating their courses as a first-time college student. Students and faculty repeatedly voiced their appreciation and support for the program. Below are quotes gathered from focus groups conducted as part of the evaluation.

Student Experience

"I enjoyed the friendships and relationships made in the classroom. It helped build the strongest relationships I have personally on this campus. I became friends with classmates who ultimately became great people to be with even outside of the classroom setting."

"I like how it was easier to contact my professors since it's a smaller cohort. I was also able to meet people in the same major as me a lot easier compared to being in a larger class."

Faculty Experience

"Beach XP program built a sense of community fast amongst the students! This was the best attendance, best grades, and best participation in class that I've ever had teaching this class."

"Students felt comfortable in the classroom, which allowed for more open discussions. Students definitely made friends. Students felt comfortable on campus and expressed to me that the program had helped make the transition to college easier."