

UC SANTA BARBARA

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New Geography of Surfing Class Takes Off

A new course in UC Santa Barbara's Department of Geography -- possibly the first of its type in the U.S. -- is making waves among undergraduates. "The Geography of Surfing," which starts today -- the first day of spring quarter -- filled up over a month ago. The introductory course also has a long waiting list.

Taught by Stuart Sweeney, an assistant professor of geography and an expert in migration patterns, the course provides an integrated view of regional, human and physical geography through the lens of surfing. Topics include wave generation and forecasting, navigation, the economics of the surf industry, behavior under crowding, territorialism, and the generation and diffusion of regional surf cultures.

Sweeney, a lifetime surfer, grew up in Los Angeles and learned to surf when he was eight. As an undergraduate at UC San Diego, he spent summers as an LA County ocean lifeguard. "My motivation for offering the course is to teach some of the ideas central to geography in a context that will connect strongly with the cultural milieu of the students," he said. "After all, most of the young people I teach at UCSB grew up in, or near, beach cities of California. I'm hoping that the course connects on a deep level with the students, allowing them to see the world around them through the lens of geography."

The 92 students in the class will work in teams on a variety of projects -- for example, sending out a team member on a daily basis to watch and document what goes on in certain areas of the beach. A significant amount of writing is required,

and students will write group papers profiling particular geographic regions. Their papers will examine differences in localism, territorialism and differences in surf languages.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.