

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

March 1, 2005

Bill Schlotter

Experimental Economist Ernst Fehr to Discuss Intersection of Altruism and Economics at UCSB's Carl Snyder Memorial Lecture

Until recently, most economists felt that human economic behavior was exclusively motivated by self-interest. One of the first to suggest that other factors might be involved was Ernst Fehr, a professor of economics at the University of Zurich and one of the world's leading experimental economists.

Fehr, who believes that human concerns such as altruism and fairness also play a role in economic choices, will talk about his research in "The Nature of Human Altruism," at 2 p.m. Monday, March 7 at UC Santa Barbara's MultiCultural Center.

The talk, the 47th annual Carl Snyder Memorial Lecture, is sponsored by UCSB's Department of Economics.

The talk is free and open to the public, but seating is limited and reservations required. To RSVP, contact Carmen Earle at (805) 893-3569.

"For decades, economists have simply assumed that, when interacting in markets, humans behave in a purely self-interested manner," said Peter Kuhn, chair of UCSB's Department of Economics. "While others have questioned this approach, Ernst Fehr

was among the first to provide convincing experimental evidence that departures from pure self-interest matter for economic behavior.

"His creatively-designed experiments have earned him a reputation as one of the world's foremost experimental economists, and one of the profession's deepest thinkers about the basic motivating forces underlying economic behavior."

Throughout history, humans have asked themselves if humankind is essentially selfish or altruistic.

"This question was at the heart of many controversial debates in politics, science, and philosophy," Fehr said. "Experimental evidence indicates that human altruism is a powerful force and unique in the animal world. However, there is much individual heterogeneity, and the interaction between altruists and selfish individuals is key for understanding the evolutionary dynamics as well as the proximate patterns of human cooperation."

Fehr's visit to UCSB is part of a weeklong visit to the United States that will include stops at Harvard and MIT.

"Naturally, we are delighted to have Professor Fehr visit UCSB," said Kuhn. "UCSB's economics department has an active and prolific group of researchers in the emerging field of experimental economics who are particularly looking forward to exchanging ideas with Fehr during his visit."

"Having Professor Fehr on campus also highlights the department's strengths in experimental economics, a promising research area in which we hope to grow our capacity in the next several years."

Fehr holds many positions in addition to his post at the University of Zurich.

He is director of the Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the Analysis of Economic Growth, president of the Economic Science Association, and an affiliated faculty member of the economics department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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