

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

September 28, 2006

Eileen Conrad

Ecology Center Awarded \$21-Million by National Science Foundation

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has renewed and increased funding for The National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), which is based at UC Santa Barbara.

Over the next five years, the unique national think tank for ecologists will receive a total of \$18.4-million, an increase of \$1.6-million over the previous award.

In addition, the NSF will provide \$2.6-million to advance the center's research on the management of complex ecological information.

NCEAS is widely recognized as the premier international center for collaborative research in ecological synthesis.

This is the second time that the NSF has renewed and increased funding for the pioneering center, which has been in operation for 11 years.

"NCEAS has made it possible for thousands of ecological researchers to study the big picture in a way that was impossible just a decade ago," said Michael Witherell, UCSB vice chancellor for research.

"The NSF renewal recognizes the fact that NCEAS has transformed the study of ecology, and the field cannot succeed without it."

The National Science Foundation established the National Center for Ecological Analyses and Synthesis in 1995.

Recognizing the potential value of utilizing existing data on ecology and the environment, and the need for new approaches to assembling, accessing, and synthesizing information, the ecological community rallied around the idea of creating a synthesis center.

"The center promotes extensive collaboration among scientists and students from many disciplines and their efforts have generated a greater understanding of natural systems and the means to conserve and manage them," said Jim Reichman, director of NCEAS and a professor of ecology, evolution, and marine biology at UCSB.

In research that spans the spectrum from genes to the biosphere, the innovative center provides a fertile arena for interdisciplinary collaboration, focusing on novel questions and approaches and intensive sustained investigations into core areas of ecology.

"NCEAS has become part of the intellectual infrastructure of ecology and allied disciplines," said Reichman.

"The success of the collaboration and synthesis at the center is facilitated by the excellent staff, the strong support from the administration and faculty of UCSB's Marine Science Institute, and the campus."

Ecological data are widely dispersed and profoundly heterogeneous, such that researchers face major obstacles when using existing data to address important ecological questions.

NCEAS has become a leader in developing collaborations and technical solutions to overcome these obstacles by providing generic access tools for more efficient and powerful access and analysis of ecological data.

Thus far, more than 3,100 scientists have participated in NCEAS research activities.

In addition to 25 scientists in residence at NCEAS for between one to three years, more than 500 scientists, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows visit NCEAS over the course of each year to work together and use its high performance computing capabilities, bringing their own data.

As a reflection of the ecological community's commitment to solving problems that meet societal needs, more than a quarter of the projects at NCEAS also seek to inform environmental policy and management.

Its new Conservation and Resource Management Program -- a cluster of research projects funded primarily by private foundations -- is applying the NCEAS research model to address important environmental issues such as loss of biotic diversity, habitat decline and fragmentation, and the over-exploitation of ocean resources.

NCEAS ranks in the top one percent of more than 38,000 scientific institutions worldwide in the total number of citations in research publications in ecology and the environment.

In addition to support from the NSF, the national center receives funding from the State of California, UC Santa Barbara, and private foundations.

It is located in downtown Santa Barbara.

Related Links

[National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis](#)

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.