

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UCSB Conference Addresses Issues of Fair Housing and Public Policy

A group of attorneys, activists, and scholars will gather at the University of California, Santa Barbara next week for a two-day conference focusing on new approaches to providing universal access to fair and affordable housing. The conference will cover a broad range of topics, including efforts to enforce existing fair housing laws; problems posed by the subprime lending crisis; the virtues of asset building programs that emphasize home ownership; and the imperative to combine litigation, legislation, and education in creating new democratic housing opportunities.

Sponsored by UCSB's Public Policymaker-in-Residence program and titled "Fair Housing and Public Policy," the conference begins at 10 a.m., Saturday, April 5, in UCSB's MultiCultural Center Theater and continues at 10 a.m. Sunday, April 6, in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. It is free and the public is invited to attend.

"The years ahead promise to be hectic and challenging ones for housing advocates, attorneys and activists. Housing access and affordability will be at the forefront of public debates and private worries," said George Lipsitz, a professor of black studies and sociology at UCSB. He is organizing the conference with Michelle White, executive director of the nonprofit Affordable Housing Services in Pasadena and UCSB's 2008 Public Policymaker-in-Residence. White is a civil rights attorney and activist with 35 years of experience working with federal agencies, state and local

commissions, fair housing organizations, and affordable housing development programs.

The Public Policymaker-in-Residence Program is an initiative sponsored by the UCSB College of Letters and Science and Melvin Oliver, the College's Dean of Social Sciences. The program brings to UCSB experts in various public policy areas who share their expertise with students and help them to apply this knowledge in "real world" situations. Previous participants have included Kazuhiko Togo, formerly Japan's ambassador to the Netherlands, and Hannah-Beth Jackson, former member of the California State Assembly.

Said Lipsitz: "We face a growing subprime crisis, the impact on domestic programs of the combination of tax cuts and increased spending on the Iraq war, the emergence of both slow growth and inflation, and the increasingly conservative stands on civil rights taken by the courts. The conference will take a look at what we should be doing now and how we should be doing it."

Conference participant Shanna Smith, president of the National Fair Housing Alliance, will give the keynote address. Based in Washington, D.C., the National Fair Housing Alliance is the only national organization whose sole purpose it to eliminate housing discrimination. Smith's talk is titled "Race, Place, and Fair Housing."

Other speakers include White; Mary Scott Knoll, director of the San Diego Fair Housing Council; Scott Chang, a fair housing attorney with the Washington, D.C. law firm Relman and Dane; and Richard Marciano, director of Sustainable Archive and Library Technologies (SALT) at UC San Diego's Supercomputer Center.

Among the topics to be discussed are the strategies that fair housing attorneys, activists, and advocates should pursue now; how clients can win damages that reflect the actual harm inflicted by housing discrimination; the legal principles that are best suited for bringing new kinds of cases; what fair housing attorneys and activists need from researchers; and ways in which attorneys, activists, and academics can work together on issues related to fair housing.

The conference grew out of a course titled "Housing, Race, and Inheritance" that Lipsitz and White taught together last quarter. Students enrolled in the course helped shape the focus of the conference and will present some of their own research findings at 10 a.m. Sunday morning.

"We hope to develop new ways of working together, of blending campus and community knowledge, and of involving students in the positive and practical work of promoting equal rights," said Lipsitz.

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.