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Laura Romo Appointed Director of the UCSB Chicano Studies Institute

Laura Romo, associate professor of education at UC Santa Barbara, is the new director of the campus's Chicano Studies Institute. She replaces Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, professor of English at UCSB, who held the position for the past six years.

Romo received her Ph.D. in psychology from UCLA, and joined the UCSB faculty in 2003. A leading researcher in the areas of adolescent development, parent-adolescent communication, and informal health education, she has been working with community agencies in Santa Barbara, including Girls, Inc. and La Casa de la Raza, to develop and implement family-based sex education programs for low-income, mostly immigrant, Mexican-origin mothers and daughters.

"The mother-daughter relationship is a protective factor against sexual risk behavior for adolescents," Romo said. "In the workshops, we address cultural barriers to open communication about topics such as puberty and anatomy." To date, her work has focused on younger adolescents, ages 11 to 13, but she is now conducting a study with older adolescents, ages 13 to 16, and their mothers. "The new workshops also focus on the prevention of dating violence, in addition to sexual health, contraception, and HIV transmission," she explained.

"The Chicano Studies Institute is delighted that Professor Romo accepted the position of director," said Maria Herrera-Sobek, associate vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and academic policy. "Her grant writing skills are exceptional, and

she has demonstrated an ability to translate these skills into mentoring and guiding our faculty members and graduate students. Professor Romo is the recipient of several major grants, and already has been working with graduate students at the Chicano Studies Institute."

Romo, who has served as associate director of the Chicano Studies Institute and as director of the UC Linguistics Minority Research Institute, has identified three main goals for the Chicano Studies Institute that are consistent with its overall mission. First, she hopes to form interdisciplinary groups of faculty members who will collaborate on developing extramural grants related to research on Latino populations. "Bringing together experts from different disciplines within the humanities and social sciences is important because today's most pressing research and societal questions are often best addressed by scholars with different backgrounds and training," she noted.

Romo also plans to develop a training program that will directly assist graduate students in writing grant proposals for funding to support their research. "We'll also develop an undergraduate program that will provide students with training in Latino research under the mentorship of faculty members," she said.

Consistent with her own research interests, Romo plans to create opportunities to involve undergraduate students in community health efforts. Latinos are among several populations in low-income communities who suffer from a variety of health problems, according to Romo, and she is currently developing an undergraduate course that will allow students to see firsthand the health issues that exist in Latino communities. As part of the course requirements, students will complete a set number of service hours with a community-based health agency. "This type of experience may serve to increase the number of Latino students who pursue careers in the health sciences," she said.

Established in 1969 at the Center for Chicano Studies, the Chicano Studies Institute is an organized research unit that facilitates interdisciplinary research regarding the Chicano/Latino experience in California and the United States.

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