

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

December 8, 2011

Gail Gallessich

UCSB Student to Accept White House Award

A UC Santa Barbara student studying ocean ecology will accept the 2010 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring from President Obama next week, on behalf of Ocean Discovery Institute. This is the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. government for efforts that advance those fields of education.

Anai Novoa, a senior at UCSB in the College of Creative Studies, will accept the award at a White House ceremony on Monday, Dec. 12. Ocean Discovery Institute is a San Diego-based nonprofit organization that promotes mentoring in science and engineering. The award highlights the crucial role that mentoring plays in the academic and personal development of students studying science and engineering -- particularly those who belong to groups that are underrepresented in these fields.

Serving City Heights, a diverse and economically disadvantaged neighborhood in San Diego, Ocean Discovery Institute has, for the past 12 years, worked to empower youth from urban and diverse backgrounds to become future scientific leaders.

Its programs, which are tuition-free, are designed to help young people work toward protecting oceans and the natural environment, as well as to improve the health of communities, and strengthen quality of life.

Novoa has been continuously involved with Ocean Discovery Institute since she was a freshman in high school. She is currently a research assistant to Craig Carlson, professor in the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology at UCSB.

"Anai has been a valuable member of my oceanographic research group," said Carlson.

"Not only has she made significant contributions to research at UCSB but she has also made a positive difference to the academic mission of the university through her important role as an undergraduate mentor. I have no doubt that Anai will continue to make a positive difference as she continues along her path to graduate studies."

Novoa intends to pursue a Ph.D. and continue her career as a research scientist. She also plans to continue working with nonprofit groups to reach out to minorities and to increase diversity in the sciences.

"From the moment I became part of Ocean Discovery Institute, mentoring was a critical part of my development as a person and a scientist," said Novoa. "Thanks to my mentor, Ocean Discovery Institute's Science Director and University of San Diego Professor, Dr. Drew Talley, I am now pursuing my dream to further my research in biology. Along with my research, I will continue serving as a minority, female scientific mentor for inner-city students."

Novoa, who is a first-generation Mexican American, said that her hometown of City Heights is one of the most diverse in the country with more than 30 languages spoken there. Following outreach by Ocean Discovery Institute, science test scores among area students has increased significantly, as has college attendance.

"Through their commitment to education and innovation, these individuals and organizations are playing a crucial role in the development of our 21st century workforce," President Obama said. "Our nation owes them a debt of gratitude for helping ensure that America remains the global leader in science and engineering for years to come."

Ocean Discovery Institute will receive a \$25,000 award from the National Science Foundation to advance its mentoring efforts.

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