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UCSB Sociologist to Give Plous Lecture on Crime and Desistance Among Marginalized Youth

Victor Rios, associate professor of sociology at UC Santa Barbara and a specialist in the interplay between institutions of social control, juvenile crime, and gang-associated youths, will give the Harold J. Plous Award Lecture on Wednesday, April 18.

His talk, titled "State Failure and Group Dynamics: Processes of Crime and Desistance Among Marginalized Youths," will begin at 4 p.m. at the University Center's Corwin Pavilion. It is free and open to the public.

In his research on social control and juvenile crime, Rios seeks to understand processes of marginalization and resilience among young people. Over the last 10 years, he has developed several distinct data sets that have helped him to understand and expose issues of delinquency, labeling, mass incarceration, interpersonal and institutional violence, chauvinism, racialization, and educational inequality.

In his lecture, Rios will discuss the findings from six years of major ethnographic studies conducted in northern and southern California on black and Latino young males who have a history of incarceration. The findings suggest that, beginning in elementary school, some of the boys are marked by teachers and law enforcement

officials as dangerous or difficult, and are punished harshly for petty infractions. Once they accumulate what Rios describes as "negative credentials," the young men are subject to surveillance, and, consequently, are more likely to end up in confinement.

Rios terms this criminalization "the youth control complex," and explains how it systematically deprives boys of their dignity and their ability to succeed at school or in the job market. He examines how the culture of punishment pushes young men into the very criminality the punishment is meant to deter, leading to social incapacitation. One proposed solution for reducing gang violence and juvenile crime is his concept of "dignity enhancement as crime suppression."

Rios, who came to UCSB in 2006, completed his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley in 2005.

In 2010, he received the Chancellor's Award for Mentoring Undergraduate Research. His book "Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys" (New York University Press, 2011) is in its fifth printing, and has received national attention in venues such as The Chronicle of Higher Education, National Public Radio, The News Hour, and Publisher's Weekly.

Rios received the 2011-12 Harold J. Plous Award in June. The award is one of the university's most prestigious faculty honors, given annually to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences who has shown exceptional achievement in research, teaching, and service to the university. The award was established in 1957 to honor the memory of Harold J. Plous, an assistant professor of economics.

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.