UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

May 15, 2012
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Verizon Foundation Grant Enables UCSB Linguistics Project to Include Additional High Schools and Upward Bound Program

A project at UC Santa Barbara that has area high school students conducting original research on language in their communities will expand to include two partner schools and an Upward Bound program thanks to a $30,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications. The students are part of School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society (SKILLS), a project sponsored by Verizon and UCSB's Office of Education Partnerships.

The Verizon grant allows the program to include Santa Barbara and Carpinteria high schools, as well as UCSB's Upward Bound Saturday College program, which serves students at five area high schools. The students, nearly 100 in all, are guided in their work by a team of UCSB graduate and undergraduate students in linguistics, Chicana and Chicano studies, education, sociology, and Spanish.

Beginning at 9 a.m. on Friday, May 18, 35 students from the program will present their projects in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building at UCSB. The event is free and open to the public.

The students have been carrying out a variety of projects as part of the SKILLS program, including creating an online dictionary of local youth slang, documenting their own linguistic autobiographies and the linguistic oral histories of family members, producing video ethnographies of language in their schools and communities, and creating public awareness projects to challenge linguistic stereotyping and prejudice.

"Students of all linguistic and academic backgrounds benefit from SKILLS," said Mary Bucholtz, professor of linguistics at UCSB and director of the project. "They're not just learning a set of facts. They're learning to look at everyday speech in a whole new way they're collecting and making sense of data, and they're communicating their ideas to the wider world. These kinds of opportunities are rare for high school students, and, even if they don't plan to become linguists, the skills they gain are valuable for college and their careers."

While the project enriches students academically and personally, it is also of value to researchers, according to Bucholtz. "Young people are really the language experts in our society," she said. "They're at the cutting edge of linguistic innovation, so their knowledge is invaluable for linguistic research. The students in SKILLS are helping us to understand how they use language."

The SKILLS project is an initiative of the Center for California Languages and Cultures, part of UCSB's Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research.

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.