

# THE *Current*

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## **Grant to UC Santa Barbara Opens Avenues for Science-Minded Transfer Students**

Study and training in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are increasingly seen as critical to the growth of the U.S. economy and to its competitiveness in global industry. Long devoted to advancing these areas, UC Santa Barbara is launching a new program intended to bolster the academic success of low-income community college students interested in pursuing STEM majors at UCSB.

Starting this summer with a weeklong residential program on campus, the new UCSB Cooke Bridges Program will partner with Allan Hancock, Oxnard, Santa Barbara, and Ventura community colleges to recruit students interested in transferring into STEM disciplines at UCSB. The initiative is named for its funding source, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, whose recently awarded three-year grant of \$450,000 will support this new initiative of UCSB's Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships, in collaboration with the Mathematics, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) program.

"The UCSB Cooke Bridges Program will add an exciting new element to the many programs that we are pursuing on campus to achieve our twin goals of increasing the diversity and quality of our students," said Gene Lucas, executive vice chancellor of UCSB. "We greatly appreciate the assistance of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation in

helping us achieve these goals."

From July 29 to August 5, the first cohort of Cooke Bridges students will take up temporary residence on campus, working with graduate student researchers in UCSB science and engineering labs to gain firsthand experience in how scientific research is conducted. The experience will include training in science communication, and opportunities to network with a number of researchers and industry professionals within an array of social, academic, and career development activities.

With the ultimate objective of transferring from their respective community colleges to UCSB, Cooke Bridges students will also focus on the academic requirements to do so, and gain insight into the campus resources available to support transfer students and ensure their success. New academic year orientation and integration activities will be led by the MESA program for all new STEM transfers, to ensure their adjustment to the challenges of completing a STEM degree and preparing for a future STEM career.

"This award comes at a good time, as more students are beginning their education at a community college, and there is a strong push nationwide to increase the STEM workforce by recruiting diverse students into STEM careers," said Ofelia Aguirre, director of CSEP, a science education center within the campus-based California Nanosystems Institute (CNSI), which has long sought to promote the education and professional development of current and future scientists and engineers.

The grant from the Cooke Foundation, a Community College Transfer Initiative award, builds on two previous CNSI projects funded by the National Science Foundation: Internships in Nanosystems Science, Engineering and Technology (INSET), and Expanding Pathways to Science, Engineering, and Mathematics (EPSEM). Both of those programs positively impacted more than 300 high-achieving community college students in STEM fields by engaging them in demanding research experiences, summer institutes, and scholarship programs.

The strong relationships between UCSB and its four community college partners -- which Cooke Bridges will leverage -- were largely fostered by these earlier efforts, and the targeted, ongoing outreach by MESA initiatives. Established in 1976, the MESA program presently supports diverse UCSB undergraduates pursuing STEM degrees. MESA is closely aligned with student organizations including the National

Society of Black Engineers and Los Ingenieros (Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers), which exist to promote student retention, academic success, and career preparation for student members.

#### About the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation is a private, independent foundation with a mission to help exceptionally promising students -- especially those with financial need -- reach their full potential through education. In 2011, the foundation awarded 62 grants totaling \$7.7 million, and 817 scholarships totaling nearly \$13 million.

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### **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.