UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

July 18, 2012
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UCSB Swim Program to Provide Free Lessons to McKinley 3rd- and 4th-Graders

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drowning is second only to motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of unintentional injury death among children under 14. The 3rd Grade Swim Program (3GSP) at UC Santa Barbara is helping turn that statistic around for students at McKinley Elementary School in Santa Barbara.

Beginning tomorrow, a group of 53 third- and fourth-graders will receive a series of seven free swim lessons at UCSB's Recreation Center Aquatics Complex, where they will be taught how to tread water, float on their backs, and swim 25 yards. The program is a unique partnership between the campus's Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP); Associated Students Community Affairs Board; UCSB Optimist Club; Santa Barbara Unified School District; and the South Coast Community Aquatics Center.

The students will also be provided with free swimsuits, goggles and caps, which they may keep.

"The 3rd Grade Swim Program is a fantastic opportunity that brings together several campus- and community-based programs, organizations, and volunteers in an effort to help students that come from families that normally can't afford swim lessons,"

said Britt Ortiz, director of UCSB EAOP. "The program is an absolute win-win in the areas of health, safety, and wellness for life."

EAOP's connection to the students doesn't end after they swim those 25 yards, however. When the students reach the fifth and sixth grades, EAOP staff members will be on hand as they prepare for the transition to junior high and high school, to help them understand college eligibility requirements for the four systems of higher education in California.

The concept of 3GSP is not completely new, Ortiz noted. About six years ago, the South Coast Community Aquatics Center received a grant from the Santa Barbara Foundation to fund the same program in the Goleta Union School District. Several Goleta elementary schools participated over three successive years, and approximately 1,500 third-graders learned basic water skills. "EAOP played a role by providing college information to these same students when they became sixth-graders," said Ortiz.

The weekly lessons begin at 12:30 on Thursday, July 19, and continue through August 2. "We had always wanted to expand the opportunity to the Santa Barbara Unified School District, so this will be our pilot year for testing the waters, so to speak," said Ortiz. "If all goes well, and we can secure additional funding, we hope to see the program expand across most, if not all, elementary schools in Santa Barbara."

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.