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UCSB's Critical Issues in America Series to Explore the Effects of Sea Level Rise

The rise in sea level around the world is perceived, understood, and portrayed differently by various disciplines within academia, as well as among those who live or work in coastal zones. UC Santa Barbara's Critical Issues in America series for the 2012-13 academic year will focus on this issue, paying specific attention to the projected effects of sea level rise on human and natural systems.

"Figuring Sea Level Rise" will feature a series of lectures, panel discussions, screenings, related courses, a digital tools workshop, and a site-specific interactive experience designed to cultivate an ongoing interdisciplinary conversation among scholars, students, policymakers, activists, and others. All events are free and open to the public.

The first event, a symposium titled "Santa Barbara Geography: Past, Present, and as the Sea Levels Rise," will take place at 1 p.m. on Friday, November 9, in 1414 Bren Hall. The main speaker will be Gary Griggs, professor of earth science at UC Santa Cruz and co-author of the City of Santa Barbara sea level rise vulnerability study, which was prepared for the California Energy Commission. Other UCSB speakers include Bruce Tiffney, professor of earth science and dean of the College of Creative Studies; Edward Keller, professor of earth science; and Marc Fisher, senior associate vice chancellor for administrative services, and campus architect.

"It's painfully timely," noted Janet Walker, professor of film and media studies at UCSB and co-convenor of the Environmental Media Initiative Research Group at the campus's Carsey-Wolf Center. "We are particularly excited to do something that is so socially meaningful as well as intellectually stimulating."

The series has been organized around three major themes: "Vulnerable Communities" for fall quarter; "Interactive Visioning" for winter quarter; and the Rupe Conference, "Risk, Uncertainty and the Communication of Sea Level Rise," in the spring.

Rising sea levels and their effects on people and places constitute a truly interdisciplinary topic, Walker noted. Indigenous peoples, as stewards of the waterways, have recorded shifting marine currents, weather irregularity, and changing animal migration patterns through intergenerational media such as oral history and ecological knowledge. Ocean scientists calculate possible sea levels based on climate models, and create interactive maps that illustrate how the ocean will expand. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities explore the socio-cultural experiences and landscapes of affected communities, and the representation of people, place, and environment in documentary films, entertainment media, news outlets, the Web, and literature. Managers of coastal communities and companies, and those who insure them against risk, deal with probabilities of likely impact from coastal threats.

"Ultimately, it's an issue that requires different kinds of expertise," Walker said. "It can't be solved by researchers in one certain discipline. With this series we want to open the dialogue with people elsewhere who are working on this issue, and figure out how we can work together."

In addition to Walker, UCSB investigators in the Critical Issues in America series include John Foran, professor of sociology; Mary Hancock, professor of anthropology; Stephanie LeMenager, associate professor of English; Ann-Elise Lewallen, assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies; and Josh Schimel, professor of ecology, evolution, and marine biology, and chair and professor of environmental studies.

Sponsors include UCSB's College of Letters and Science; Carsey-Wolf Center; Arthur N. Rupe Chair in the Department of Communication; Bren School of Environmental Science & Management; Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research;

Center for Nanotechnology in Society; Interdisciplinary Humanities Center; Center for Information Technology and Society; Department of Film and Media Studies; and the Art, Design & Architecture Museum.

An endowed program in the College of Letters and Science at UCSB since 1995, the Critical Issues in America series examines relevant social topics from a multidisciplinary perspective. Previous series have focused on environmental issues and policy reform; media ownership; women, employment, and globalization; violence in America; ethnic studies; and marriage and alternatives.

More information about "Figuring Sea Level Rise," including a full schedule of events and locations, is available at www.criticalissues.ucsb.edu.

Related Links

[Critical Issues in America](#)

[Carsey-Wolf Center](#)

[Environmental Media Initiative](#)

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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.