

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Assemblyman Das Williams to Speak at UCSB's Science & Technology MESA Day

Approximately 600 junior high and high school students from the Santa Barbara area, mainly first-generation college-bound and underrepresented minority students in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, will participate in the 14th annual Science & Technology (S&T) MESA Day at UC Santa Barbara on Saturday, February 23.

The daylong event is designed to expose potential college students to STEM in a fun and accessible way. Participants not only get a firsthand look at university life, they learn about academic preparation and the college application process. In addition, interactive workshops, demonstrations, presentations, and project competitions expand their knowledge of STEM. The event is hosted by UCSB's Los Ingenieros; the National Association of Black Engineers; the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/as and Native Americans in Science; and Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA)

This year's guest speaker will be California State Assemblyman Das Williams, chair of the Assembly's Committee on Higher Education, and a UCSB alumnus. He will discuss his experiences leading to college and a Master's Degree from UCSB in environmental studies.

"The purpose of Science & Technology MESA Day is to immerse students in engaging science, technology, engineering, and math activities that will allow them to envision themselves as future STEM college students," said Mario Castellanos, executive director of UCSB's Office of Education Partnerships. "The experience reinforces their academic preparation and goal orientation for higher education, introduces them to college models and opportunities, lets them experience being on a university campus, and allows them to picture themselves as future college students."

Participants in S&T MESA Day will also have an opportunity to meet with representatives from the Office of Admissions and the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. Representatives will provide assistance with admission procedures; Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) preparation sessions; and information for students impacted by Assembly Bill 540, which allows qualified undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at California's public colleges and universities.

The junior high and high school students -- along with their parents -- can also attend college- and career-focused workshops, UCSB student panels, and question-and-answer sessions. "As college volunteers guide students to workshops and host campus tours, they share how they prepared for college, and talk about their experiences as UCSB students," Castellanos said.

These UCSB students serve as important role models in leadership, scholarship, and community involvement, he added. "This aspect of S&T MESA Day is unique in that the majority of the university volunteers and host students come from similar limited economic and educational backgrounds as the visiting students themselves," said Castellanos. "Meeting these university students who are exceptional in their families -- and even in their communities -- allows the young students to connect with real role models, get sympathetic answers to their questions, and imagine themselves as confident college students who, one day, can also be involved and encouraging to other young students."

For the precollege students and their families, the opportunity to witness the successes of a relatively large collective of underrepresented minority, first-generation UCSB students is unique and powerful, especially in the STEM fields, Castellanos noted. "S&T MESA Day lets us put a human face on STEM fields that have been known as obscure and inaccessible, especially for people of color from backgrounds with limited resources and higher education," he said.

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