UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

September 11, 2014
Shelly Leachman

Sea of Opportunity

With a handful of motivated undergrads serving as his assistants, UC Santa Barbara marine scientist Craig Carlson spent part of his summer at sea on the South Pacific, leading the biogeochemical component of a multidisciplinary research cruise aboard the RV Kilo Moana.

For Carlson, professor and chair of UCSB's Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology (EEMB), such trips are routine. For the students, however, they can be the experience of their college careers.

Similar field research opportunities may soon be available to more students, courtesy of a new scholarship program conceived by two UCSB alumni and funded by their family foundation.

A gift of $500,000 from the Bentson Foundation will fund the Bentson Scholars Program at UC Santa Barbara, a merit-based initiative for undergraduates with an interest in aquatic biology. The program is something of a passion project for Gaucho grads Laurie Bentson Kauth, chair of the foundation, and her husband, William Kauth, a longtime marine biology teacher who retired from Santa Barbara High School.

"When Bill was teaching, there was a sort of unofficial collaboration between his class and UCSB — they visited the campus labs quite often — and it was wonderful," Bentson Kauth recalled. "With the Bentson Foundation we have scholarships other places, so bringing one here seemed like the perfect thing to do. And we're really

excited about it.”

The feeling is mutual.

“We are thrilled by the Bentson Foundation’s generous gift to establish the Bentson Scholars Program at UC Santa Barbara,” said Chancellor Henry T. Yang. “This merit-based program for undergraduates will be a tremendous boost to our Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology, for those studying aquatic biology. We are especially grateful to our alumni Laurie Bentson Kauth and William Kauth for their pivotal role in making this possible, and for investing in the futures of aquatic biology and of our students.”

For Carlson and EEMB, the hope is that the Bentson scholarships will support high-achieving aquatic biology students, in part, by affording them invaluable research opportunities as they pursue their educations in marine science. Participating in a research cruise, for example, is exactly the type of “immersion experience,” Carlson said, that can set UCSB students apart when they seek entry to graduate programs and scientific jobs.

“This fantastic gift clearly gives a great shot in the arm to what we can offer our undergrads from the standpoint of research experience as well as of enrichment — so they can take what they’re learning in the classroom and bring it into the field,” Carlson said. “This looks like a win-win for students supported by the scholarships and the faculty working with these outstanding students. It will create opportunities for undergrads and help them excel in this important field.”

Which is precisely the point, according to Bentson Kauth.

“We are firm believers in protecting our natural resources and it is our hope to nurture a new generation of leaders in the field to preserve our coastline,” said Bentson Kauth, whose parents, Larry and Nancy Bentson, founded the Bentson Foundation in 1956. “We hope these students go on to help save the ocean, which is really the reason that you study marine biology. And certainly UCSB is one of the very best places to do that. Hopefully they will be so inspired that they will eventually give back to UCSB, too. That’s the whole idea.”

The partnership with UCSB also made perfect sense for the Bentson Foundation, a Minnesota-based philanthropic organization with public education at its heart — and scholarship programs part of its efforts on other campuses. This is the foundation’s

first gift to UCSB and to the UC system.

“We are pleased to support UCSB in this manner and foster future leaders in marine science, who we believe will play a critical role in protecting the world’s oceans,” said Judi Dutcher, the Bentson Foundation’s executive director. “We hope not only to grow this program at UCSB but also to inspire other donors to create a legacy of support for students that attend this important institution.”

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.