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Working to Make Isla Vista a Safe Haven

Heat wave notwithstanding, the lazy days of summer are over and Isla Vista is once again bustling with the activity of UC Santa Barbara students who have returned to the seaside community adjacent to the university for the start of a new academic year.

As they settle in, students are noticing a number of changes both on campus and in Isla Vista, all of which are designed to enhance safety and security. As UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang wrote in a pair of letters to the campus last month, the changes also represent the university's continuing commitment to improving the quality of life for students in Isla Vista and the entire Isla Vista community.

"Over the summer, a broad group of university constituents, including faculty and staff members, students, donors, parents, UCSB Foundation trustees, alumni and Isla Vista residents, have spent countless hours working toward positive change on the UCSB campus and in Isla Vista," Yang wrote. "This has been a community-wide effort and it demonstrates the spirit of UC Santa Barbara. I am especially grateful to our trustees, friends and alumni whose generous support is providing the resources for many of these initiatives.

Yang also took the opportunity to extend his appreciation to local governmental and elected officials and to administrators at Santa Barbara City College for participating in efforts to address the important issues related to Isla Vista.

Additional lighting and fencing on campus and in Isla Vista are two of the changes students will notice immediately, but these represent only a couple of initiatives the university has undertaken. Others include an additional team of UC Police Department officers from UCSB as well as sister campuses to provide an increased presence on and around campus Thursday through Saturday nights, particularly in Isla Vista (this is in addition to the $2 million the university contributes to the County annually for policing and fire services) and new policies that restrict non-UCSB affiliates from parking on university property during weekend nights to discourage people from coming to drink. Yang noted also that he has been informed that law enforcement officials expect to conduct several sobriety checkpoints during fall quarter.

While improvements were undertaken with the goal of addressing the safety, quality of life and the culture of the Isla Vista community, that community continues to grow and develop. And so do concerns about safety, sexual assault, intoxication, student conduct, non-affiliates, zoning and code enforcement and governance, among other issues.

A Collaborative Effort

To ensure a comprehensive strategic approach and accountability for implementation of a wide variety of measures, Yang has established a Chancellor's Coordinating Committee on Isla Vista co-chaired by David Marshall, executive vice chancellor, and Kum-Kum Bhavnani, chair of the campus's Academic Senate. The committee includes faculty and staff members, students and representatives from the UC Santa Barbara Foundation Board of Trustees, Santa Barbara City College, the office of District Attorney Joyce Dudley, Santa Barbara County, the City of Goleta, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and Isla Vista Foot Patrol, the California State legislature and community leaders. Working in collaboration with many different groups and constituencies, it has the task of coordinating with all stakeholders and recommending specific implementation plans and actions.

The committee will develop a strategy that integrates Isla Vista into UCSB's academic plans, student life programs, governmental and community relations, housing, real estate and development plans. "These plans and strategies will transform I.V. so that the living and learning environment will complement the excellence, diversity and stature of our world-class university," said Yang.

“Over the past few months, the campus has expanded and intensified its efforts to address problems in Isla Vista,” noted David Marshall, UCSB’s executive vice chancellor. “The Chancellor’s Coordinating Committee on Isla Vista will help us to establish principles and priorities and to make recommendations that will guide us as we more fully integrate Isla Visa into our campus planning. UCSB is known for its collaborative, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary research; the same approach among academic, administrative and community-based efforts is needed in relation to Isla Vista.”

Said Bhavnani: “This committee is a clear indication of how critical this issue is to the Chancellor and our campus — the issue being to improve the quality of life for all residents of Isla Vista and to support initiatives that allow Isla Vista to further develop its identity as a college town. One that affords our students, and others, opportunities to live in a space that is vibrant, that offers opportunities for intellectual, community and social engagement, and that is simultaneously safe and friendly.”

Also serving on the committee are George Thurlow, assistant vice chancellor for alumni affairs and special assistant to the chancellor for Isla Vista affairs; Ali Guthy, Associated Students president; and Zach Rentz, president of the Graduate Students Association.

As the Chancellor noted, addressing issues in Isla Vista requires collaboration among several constituents, including the university, the County of Santa Barbara, the City of Goleta, the Sheriff’s Office, elected officials, and Isla Vista residents and property owners. The university is advocating for projects that fall within the purview of the County, such as a permit parking program in Isla Vista to limit street parking for visitors; improving enforcement of existing codes and ordinances; and adopting new ordinances to improve safety in Isla Vista, such the ability of the County to double fines during Halloween and Deltopia; and ordinances that enable the County to address problem properties.

“The City of Goleta is pleased to have participated in meaningful discussions with members of the Isla Vista community, the university, Santa Barbara City College and the County of Santa Barbara on how to make our community as a whole safer,” said Goleta Mayor Michael Bennett. “The proposed actions are a step in the right direction and I look forward to seeing the impacts of these changes.”

Commented Santa Barbara County District Attorney Joyce Dudley: “We are seeking to make Isla Vista safer. We are well aware that adding more lights, cameras, fencing and a greater law enforcement presence is just the beginning. We know we must also support and empower the community of Isla Vista. We won’t be satisfied until our world-class university is known not just for its academics, beautiful beaches and superb faculty, but also for the safety of the communities that surround it.

Students Taking Action

Students also play a key role in improving safety in Isla Vista and they are active participants in the process. They are leading a number of initiatives, including the “I Heart UCSB” campaign created in 2013 was expanded over the summer to include the “I Heart UCSB Pledge.” Written by students, for students, it was introduced by A.S. President Ali Guthy at the 2014 New Student Convocation.

Yang also cited Gaucho FYI, the mandatory orientation program for incoming students that was revised to include more information about Isla Vista, with a greater emphasis on safety, sexual violence prevention and the UC Santa Barbara Code of Conduct.

A campaign being launched this fall highlights the Code of Conduct, as well as students’ rights, expectations for behavior and information about the process of adjudicating violations.

Bringing the University to Isla Vista

In his letters to the campus, the chancellor also outlined a set of initiatives designed to expand the university’s presence in Isla Vista in fun and meaningful ways. One of those is the Faculty Dinner Program in Isla Vista, which invites faculty members and lecturers and their spouses to host dinners at I.V. restaurants for up to six students per meal. The dinners are intended to give faculty members an opportunity to extend their interaction with undergraduate students beyond the classrooms, laboratories and other campus facilities to the I.V. community.

The campus is also organizing a variety of activities such as I.V. First Fridays, a series of evening and weekend, late-night arts and culture programming to take place between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. in downtown Isla Vista. The first was held on Oct. 3. A campus-led collaboration between the university, the County of Santa Barbara and community partners, the program brings after-hours

entertainment to public spaces such as Little Acorn Park, Perfect Park, and Embarcadero Road. The hub of activity is designed to draw people from the residential areas of Del Play to the central business district.

No Tricks, No Treats

With Halloween fast approaching, the chancellor also highlighted several initiatives in place that are designed to discourage out-of-towners from descending on Isla Vista and the surrounding community, and to provide students with a safe late-night alternative to Isla Vista parties.

As an additional safety measure, the UC Police Department expects to triple the number of UC officers in Isla Vista over Halloween weekend, in addition to the anticipated increases in officers from the Sheriff's Office and the California Highway Patrol.

In addition, no overnight visitors will be allowed in campus housing over Halloween weekend and access to overnight parking will be restricted for non-UCSB affiliates. Also, the City of Goleta plans to restrict parking in neighborhoods adjacent to Isla Vista, and the university is working with local businesses, including Camino Real Marketplace, to prohibit overnight parking in an effort to deter out-of-town visitors.

The chancellor's letters to the campus are available in their entirety at https://chancellor.ucsb.edu/memos/?9.25.2014.Isla.Vista.Safety.Progress... and https://chancellor.ucsb.edu/memos/?9.25.2014.Chancellor%27s.Coordinatin....

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.