UC SANTA BARBARA

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In Pursuit of Knowledge

With a $250,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, Michael Gottfried, assistant professor of education at UC Santa Barbara, is looking into the impact friends and family have on how tenaciously students in K-12 pursue classes in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas.

“My research in this area is important because while we have a significant amount of information about how teachers and curriculum affect students’ interest in and pursuit of STEM areas, we know surprisingly little of the influence of parents and peers,” Gottfried explained. “Therefore, my study will help shed light on how ‘my parents’ and ‘my friends’ might make a difference in what STEM classes I take and what major I choose in college and whether their impact on me is short-term or long-term.”

Gottfried’s research team, which includes faculty members from the University of Southern California and Tufts University, will conduct two large-scale meta-analyses — based on the quantitative and qualitative research bodies, respectively — in order to draw conclusions about which contextual factors relate to which STEM outcomes. With this methodology, Gottfried’s study will also be the first to provide a clearinghouse of rigorous research related to contextual factors of STEM outcomes. Moreover, this project will provide new evidence regarding the significance of youth contexts on STEM outcomes that will assist policymakers and educators in evaluating which non-schooling contexts are most effective.

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.