UC SANTA BARBARA

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Opportunity for All

It’s still early in the game but Leslie Magaña knows what she wants to do.

“I want to teach,” said the Santa Paula High School freshman. “I love being around little kids.”

However, like many kids in her age group who may have the desire and brainpower, she wasn’t clear on how to get to her goal. Sometimes it’s the money. Sometimes it’s the motivation. Sometimes it’s the seemingly Byzantine application process. Whatever the obstacle, representatives from UC Santa Barbara and the University of California were on hand to make sure that students at Santa Paula High School knew that they could overcome it and get a world-class education. The outreach effort, on Monday, November 3, was part of Achieve UC, a program that encourages high school students — particularly those who may not see themselves as college graduates — to pursue a University of California education.

“At your age I was not that much different from you,” said Laura Romo, director of the UCSB Chicano Studies Institute and associate professor in the Department of Education at UCSB’s Gevirtz School of Education. Like many of the students in the Santa Paula High auditorium she was speaking to, she came from a lower-income Hispanic neighborhood, was a child of immigrants and had the talent and brains to go to college, but not necessarily the encouragement or the clear direction. However, the fact that she was able to go to college and accomplish her goal inspired her audience, perhaps enough into seriously considering getting their university education.

Now in its third year, Achieve UC continues to target high schools with populations for whom a college education is not an obvious choice. The effort has resulted in a 30 percent increase in applications to the 10-campus system from these schools.

To assist the potential future UCSB students, various speakers made presentations covering topics such as admissions and financial aid. Others also made it a point to assure the kids that they would not be alone — up to 40 percent of UC freshmen are the first in their families to get a university education, and programs exist to ease these pioneers' transition into college. Breakout sessions were held to outline what students could and should start doing and thinking about to increase their chances of getting in.

For those who worry most about the money, there is the Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan, which pays for student's entire tuition if their family income is less that $80,000 a year.

Whatever the students' background, the message was the same: Know what you want, be ready to work hard and UC will do its best to get you to your goal.

"My foremost advice is this: Do not ever assume your intellectual abilities are somehow fixed," said Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, UCSB acting dean of undergraduate studies and professor of English. "Reach deep for that part of yourself that can struggle on, that can be resilient."

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.