UC SANTA BARBARA
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Putting UCSB First

Fluffy pancakes, fresh fruit, hot coffee — nothing like free food to draw out the college crowd. But it's the camaraderie that keeps them hanging around even after the caffeine well runs dry.

And that's exactly how UCSB First wants it.

Connecting students with each other, and with their university at large, is a core function of the UC Santa Barbara philanthropy organization, which aims to cultivate a culture of giving on campus.

The student-run group's annual Senior Breakfast has become a popular kickoff party of sorts for an array of activities leading up to commencement in June. But for UCSB First, it's just one in a yearlong slate of events meant to instill an altruistic ethos in all future UCSB alumni.

When your goal is to foster such a sensibility now, in hopes of seeing more alumni donating to the campus later, engagement is the name of the game. So say past and present leaders of UCSB First, which prioritizes personal involvement as much as it does philanthropy in the traditional, monetary sense of the word.

"It's about educating people but also making it fun and not in your face," said 2014 alumna Jessica Fenton, until January a co-chair of the committee and now a UCSB staff member. "It's more about participation and awareness than anything else, so when they're at an age and ability to give, they understand why it's important and what a difference it can make."

For current co-chair Madison Frame, getting a window into that difference is partly what motivated her involvement with UCSB First. A caller for the UCSB Annual Fund since shortly after her arrival on campus as a freshman in 2013, Frame said she has seen the impact of philanthropy firsthand.

“My roommate uses CLAS, the Campus Learning Assistance Services, which provides free tutoring to UCSB students,” said Frame, of Menlo Park, who is now in her second year at UCSB. “To see her going there on a regular basis, and knowing I’m supporting that by raising money for the campus, that feels really good. It’s not necessarily about monetary donations — it could be a donation of time as well.

“All of us who attend UCSB are so lucky,” Frame added. “Not only are we attending an amazing university, but we are supported — by parents or scholarships or financial aid. We live on the beach. It’s easy for young people to get lost in that bubble and take it for granted. It’s something I’ve done before. But it’s important to be grateful and also to take a step beyond that and demonstrate that gratitude by giving back.”

Launched in 2010, UCSB First was founded on the belief that engaging current students around philanthropic ideals is the best way to ensure that future alumni are philanthropically inclined. The nearly all-volunteer organization (save for the co-chairs, who are UCSB staff members) also aims to be a hub for all such student activity and so far has raised $40,000 for an endowment intended to support philanthropic efforts on campus.

All of which plays into an equally key component of UCSB First: raising awareness about how the university is funded — and how critical private support has become.

With state support for the University of California currently making up less than 15 percent of its operating budget, alumni giving will play an ever-bigger role in the campus’s ability to thrive, according to Beverly Colgate, executive director of the UC Santa Barbara Foundation and UCSB’s associate vice chancellor for development, which oversees UCSB First.

“It is amazing to me how thoroughly our UCSB First students understand the need for future philanthropy from our alumni to sustain the excellence of this institution,” Colgate said. “They work on so many engaging philanthropy-focused projects with boundless energy and creativity. Their work to promote the senior class gift has produced a significant increase in participation numbers from our seniors. The

organization is now working under the mentorship of our Foundation Trustees and learning how to build a permanent fundraising structure that will ensure the further development of a culture of giving for our campus. We are so proud of these students and their efforts."

Those efforts include things like an annual Philanthropy Awards Dinner honoring student organizations engaged in community service and philanthropy. A Senior Legacy Day aims to rally the graduating class around the Senior Class Gift, which sees money raised for a specific campus cause (for the class of 2015 it's a student safety fund.)

"For me personally, UCSB has become my community and my home — I'm protective of it, I love it and I'm passionate about it," said Frame's co-chair Megan Jones, of Cupertino. "Something like the Senior Class Gift is a great way to give back to something that's given me us much — degrees, friends, amazing professors and facilities. This is a good way to continue that, to pay it forward.

"It's important to help our community," Jones continued. "Funding is dwindling, and if we want UCSB to continue to grow and become even better, and to reach its best potential, people are going to have to give back and support it and let it grow the way it can."

"When you graduate from UCSB, and you think about giving, think about UCSB first," Frame added, noting the meaning behind the committee's moniker. "That's the idea, and that's the goal."

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.