

UC SANTA BARBARA

# THE *Current*

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

## Pathways to Understanding

As the body's control center, the brain oversees every aspect of an individual's existence, from physical movement — both voluntary and not — to cognition and sentience. It is the seat of human consciousness and unconsciousness, knowledge, memory and judgment.

In its yearlong series "The Humanities and the Brain," the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at UC Santa Barbara will explore the brain from a variety of perspectives deriving from the humanities and fine arts, as well as from newer interdisciplinary fields such as neuroesthetics and neurethics.

The series begins Thursday, Oct. 15, with a lecture by Ann Taves, a professor of religious studies at UCSB. Taves, who holds the Virgil Cordano OFM Endowed Chair in Catholic Studies, will speak on "Ecstasy: Linking the Humanities and the Brain." Her talk will draw on humanistic approaches to examine the range of experiences people have characterized as ecstatic and the meanings they have found in and drawn from them. She will also consider the psychological and brain sciences that help in understanding the underlying mechanisms involved.

Just as the brain is composed of two hemispheres, the "The Humanities and the Brain" is designed to bring together two sides of campus by creating a dialogue among humanists and scientists, said Susan Derwin, IHC director and a UCSB professor of comparative literature. An interdisciplinary collaboration in every sense of the word, the series draws from departments and centers across UCSB, including the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind, the Center for Spatial Studies, the

Carsey-Wolf Center and the English department's "Literature and the Mind" program.

"The series is interested in the correspondences between brain science and the humanities — how each can address the other as they explore common objects," Derwin continued. "We hope to bring to light developments in neuroscience that are opening new paths of research in the humanities and to understand how methodologies from the neurosciences and the humanities can influence each other."

Among fall quarter's speakers are anthropologist Rebecca Seligman of Northwestern University; Kenneth Kosik, a professor in the Department of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at UCSB, director of the UCSB Brain Initiative and co-director of the campus's Neuroscience Research Institute; and Anjan Chatterjee, a neuroscientist at the University of Pennsylvania.

Seligman will speak on "Conditions of the Brain: Meaning, Metaphor, and Mechanism in Illness and Healing" at 4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 22. Kosik will give a talk titled "Nature Spends the Past Few Million Years Experimenting with a Prosocial Brain" at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7. Chatterjee will discuss "The Neuroscience of Aesthetics and Art" at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 19.

All lectures are free and open to the public and will take place in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building at UCSB.

Also as part of the series, the documentary "Marwencol" will screen at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4, in the UCSB Pollock Theater. A discussion with director Jeff Malmberg will follow. The film centers on artist and photographer Mark Hogancamp who, after being beaten nearly to death, spent nine days in a coma — and 40 days in the hospital. Discharged with brain damage that left him little memory of his previous life, Hogancamp took charge of his own rehabilitation by building a 1/6-scale World War II-era Belgian town in his yard and populating it with dolls representing himself, his friends and even his attackers.

The screening is free, but tickets are required. Reservations can be made at [www.carseywolf.ucsb.edu](http://www.carseywolf.ucsb.edu).

The series will continue during winter and spring quarters with lectures, symposia, film screenings and a conference on themes ranging from cognitive science and

Buddhist philosophy to the musical mind, language and illness and the ways in which scientific and literary thinking coincide and foster each other's growth.

"It's very difficult to articulate the common ground between the humanities and the neurosciences when you really get very specific because they operate in such different registers," said Derwin. "We want to see people try to find a third discourse, a third form of expression. The way humanists and scientists talk about the same topic is very different, and we want to see if we can find a common language in which people can converse not only about shared interests but also see how they might influence one another methodologically."

More information about "The Humanities and the Brain," including a complete schedule of events, can be found at [www.ihc.ucsb.edu/brain](http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/brain).

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## **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.