UC SANTA BARBARA

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Civil Engagement

These are, by most any measure, trying times in America. A bitter presidential election and race relations strained to the breaking point have created swaths of anger, mistrust and fear. No one is immune in such a climate. What we need is a kind of vaccine for hate — and UC Santa Barbara working on it.

The campus's Division of Student Affairs is launching a new series, "Resilient Love in a Time of Hate: A Discussion," which is designed to bring the campus community together in a way that promotes dialogue to find creative, positive responses to our uncivil society.

"We were inspired to create the series because last spring we had a number of contentious debates on campus that tested our capacity for civil dialogue when feelings were running strong," said Margaret Klawunn, vice chancellor for student affairs at UCSB. "Given the tough events of the summer for our nation, including gun violence and tense police/community relations as well as this historically uncivil presidential campaign, it seemed like it would be helpful to start the fall quarter with an event that would begin discussion on campus in a positive way. We want to take on the hard issues but set the bar for engaging each other with compassion and openness."

The first "Resilient Love" event will be an evening with spoken word artist Sunni Patterson Tuesday, Oct. 4 at 8 p.m. at the St. George Family Youth Center in Isla Vista. The first discussion of the series follows the next day at 5 p.m. in UCSB's Lotte Lehmann Concert Hall. George Lipsitz, a professor of sociology and of black studies

at UCSB, will share the stage with Patterson and David Kyuman Kim, a professor of religious studies at Connecticut College. Both events are free and open to the public.

“I think, within our lifetimes, there’s rarely been a time with so much war overseas, violence at home, hate crimes and hate speech, a society that seems to be unraveling and suffused with hate, hurt and fear,” Lipsitz noted. “As Dr. Martin Luther King said, it’s a downward spiral in which hate produces more hate. We don’t want to be mere spectators to that kind of unraveling. We don’t want to let ourselves lose the capacity to find something left to love in ourselves and others, even if circumstances make us unlovable, and make others unlovable. There’s a fundamental human bond that would be broken if we succumb to that.”

“Resilient Love” is an effort to respond against a climate of hate at the local level. The university, Lipsitz said, has a responsibility to address issues that affect so many on campus and in the surrounding community. “This is not only a moral issue; we think in the university it’s also an issue of academic integrity and academic excellence. So what we’re trying to do is find people who can come and talk to our students, talk to the staff, talk to the faculty about how they do meaningful work in the world that strengthens rather than weakens the bond among people.”

For students in particular, Lipsitz said, society’s strife can have an outsized affect on them. Students from immigrant families, he explained, “can’t turn on the television or read the paper or sit in a cafeteria without hearing themselves described in less than human terms. People who are Muslim are asked to defend their religion, defend their right to exist, prove that they’re not terrorists because of their religion.

“This is a lot to ask of 18- and 19-year-olds,” Lipsitz continued. “This is going to have a corrosive affect on them. So as elders, as faculty members, we can’t walk in their shoes; we don’t know what it feels like to be experiencing those things for the first time. But we can try to put them in contact with adults who’ve been living with these things a long time and have developed tools to respond to them. This is our hope.”

The “Resilient Love” series, which likely will hold events two or three times a quarter, is a way to counter a climate of hate by embracing its opposite, Lipsitz said. Fighting hate with hate solves nothing. “You can’t be generous unless somebody’s been generous to you,” he explained. “You can’t be forgiven unless you forgive others. The world we want to live in can’t be found, it has to be forged, and I think one of the ways we can forge it is through what we’re calling ‘a love-driven resilience stance toward the world,’ which we hope will imbue this campus with the

possibility to make better things come to pass.”

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.