UC SANTA BARBARA

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The Beloved Community

The aim: To build a collective understanding of Isla Vista and nurture a commitment to the community itself.

The means to make it happen: A broad cross-section of residents and stakeholders coming together to share perspectives, talk issues and ideas and cultivate a shared vision for the community's future — all while celebrating what makes Isla Vista great now.

Welcome to the second annual "Isla Vista Conference: The Beloved Community," taking place May 19-20 in multiple venues around Isla Vista. With a focus on learning through community engagement, the free, public conference will cover a range of topics of importance to the Isla Vista community.

And all will be explored through the lenses of equity, inclusion and activism, according to Diana Collins Puente, Isla Vista Community Advisor with Associated Students at UCSB and co-chair of the conference organizing committee.

"There is a dominant narrative about Isla Vista that is often negative and/or one dimensional," Puente said. "And while there are many real challenges that the community faces, it is important to recognize the multifaceted beauty of this community and the incredible efforts underway that are often not seen or honored. We have the opportunity to nurture a different narrative that recognizes and builds on the tremendous assets that we have have — individually and collectively — that supports the self-determination of Isla Vista, and that creates spaces where this

collective work can be done.”

The event will kick off with an art exhibition and reception 4-7 p.m. Friday, May 19, and continue 8:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Saturday, May 20, with a variety of presentations, talks, workshops and recreational activities to showcase the people, the history, the ideas and the places that make up this “beloved community.”

The simple end goal, said organizer Paola Dela Cruz, is for participants to walk away with a “written manifestation of what they commit to do over the next year to engage in Isla Vista through those principles of equity, inclusion and activism.

“This conference is significant because it allows students to engage in activism that fosters honest and meaningful community engagement,” said Dela Cruz, a UCSB student and Puente’s committee co-chair. “We will have the unique opportunity of learning and working side-by-side with diverse groups in Isla Vista, such as children and youth, elders and houseless community members. These experiences will help broaden our understanding, as students, of past, current and future areas of importance in Isla Vista. Ultimately, this knowledge will provide us with the necessary tools to engage with other groups in Isla Vista and continue strengthening and uniting our beloved community.”

Launched in 2016, the initial idea for the conference stemmed from a broad desire to engage the Isla Vista community in dialogue, education and action. Coming at a pivotal time in local history, after the tragedy of May 2014 and subsequent culture shift in Isla Vista, Beloved Community was — and is — meant to serve as a tangible expression of what such a community can and should be. The idea has resonated so deeply, said Puente, that it is being expanded beyond the conference into a year-round initiative.

“What we should be talking about is what it means to be a good community member and what our obligations as citizens are, living in close proximity to one another in a less-than-one-square-mile, largely unincorporated village,” said Rick Benjamin, director of student learning and engagement initiatives in UCSB’s College of Letters and Science. “In terms of trying to uphold values of a beloved community, ones that recognize always and primarily compassion, interconnectedness, being of benefit, among other benchmark community assumptions, this might mean introducing yourself to your neighbors.

“The same values might apply to simply looking after each other in more compassionate, consistently caring ways,” Benjamin added. “All of the challenges of living together in any diverse community — poverty, hunger and houselessness, sexual violence, addiction and substance abuse — also exist in this small, densely populated ‘village.’ If values of beloved community could go viral in such a place, at times like these, it would be transformative, exemplary, a truly noble human experiment. I think most of us are both working toward and desiring such outcomes.”

More information about the conference, including a complete schedule and registration details, can be found at https://ourislavista.as.ucsb.edu/.

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