UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

October 17, 2017
Jim Medina

‘Crossings + Boundaries’

They are all faculty members in humanities and fine arts at UC Santa Barbara, yet their professional paths have never crossed. Until now, that is — and for what more appropriate purpose.

With an inaugural public panel, four UCSB scholars from diverse disciplines will launch “Crossings + Boundaries,” a new yearlong event series from the campus’ Interdisciplinary Humanities Center exploring social, political, cultural and institutional forces that shape boundaries.

History professor Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, film and media studies assistant professor Laila Shereen Sakr, theater and dance assistant professor Brandon Whited, and Jeremy White, an architectural historian and continuing lecturer, will discuss the relationship between interdisciplinary research and teaching, as well as approaches to negotiating common boundaries, according to IHC Director Susan Derwin.

“I don’t know what’s going to come out of this alchemy, which is really great,” Derwin said. “What we do know is that they are all passionate about their work.”

Noting the speakers “didn’t know one another until we introduced them at a preview meeting,” Derwin said all were eager to participate in what she hopes will start a dialogue that generates further conversations among scholars, researchers and students.

“I tried to develop a theme that reflects the present moment in our culture and speaks to the work being done on campus through an interdisciplinary approach,”

Derwin said of “Crossings + Boundaries.” “Much of the work is directly engaging with the broader world even as it reaches back to histories of diverse cultures and peoples.”

The series will feature some 15 events with renowned scholars, authors and artists covering a wide range of topics, including the Mexico border wall, refugees, military incursions, drug trafficking, gender issues and Iraq.

IHC Associate Director Erin Nerstad noted how strongly the interdisciplinary nature of the series is reflected in the second offering: a talk by Yale University anthropologist Lisa Messeri, who will discuss how scientists and graphic artists create images of worlds and beings in other solar systems. The event also ties in with a UCSB anthropology course by associate professor Jeffrey Hoelle.

“Messeri poses the notion that people have to fill a vacuum with images in mind, which almost become templates of what is to be discovered,” Nerstad said. “It’s such a beautiful project for a humanist. She’s interested in how we build worlds through language and image, and how the imagination doesn’t only respond to the world around us but informs us about the world we live in.”

Other events in the series include presentations by journalist Sam Quinones, who will discuss his National Book Critics Circle Award-winning book “Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic,” and Dexter Filkins, a writer for The New Yorker, on “Exodus: The Largest Movement of People Since the Second World War.” A complete listing of events is available at the IHC website.

The series begins at 4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 19, at the UCSB McCune Conference Room at IHC. All events are free and open to the public.

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.