UC SANTA BARBARA
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Shelly Leachman

Once and Future Scholars

The youngest of three siblings, Jessica Lopez was the first of the trio to move out and the first to go to college. And before she'd even begun her undergraduate years, she already had her eyes on a bigger prize: graduate school.

She's well on her way.

Now in her fourth year at UC Merced, Lopez is a scholar with UC LEADS (University of California Leadership Excellence through Advanced Degrees), which readies promising students for advanced education the STEM disciplines.

The two-year program expressly targets upper-division undergraduates who show potential but are somehow disadvantaged, whether by economics or lack of access to education. And it all culminates in a summer research experience on another UC campus. Lopez spent her summer working in an organic chemistry lab at UC Santa Barbara.

"It's just exciting knowing you can create something new," Lopez said of her experience in the lab. "It doesn't happen overnight, it takes a long time, and the process isn't easy. You may fail multiple times but eventually you'll find the answers. And it's really fulfilling to know that you figured something out."

Lopez was among 11 UC LEADS scholars from across the UC system, two CSU Sally Casanova Scholars and one Academic Research Consortium scholar conducting mentored research alongside UCSB graduate students and faculty from diverse disciplines, courtesy of robust, annual summer outreach efforts of the UCSB

Graduate Division.

It’s all about creating opportunities for promising students who need extra support. It’s also about recruitment. By showing these visiting undergraduate scholars what UCSB has to offer, maybe they’ll think of Santa Barbara when it comes time to apply for grad school.

“These programs are important because UC Santa Barbara provides mentored research experiences in all disciplines to these talented scholars who not only have the potential to succeed in graduate study, but who also have experienced situations or conditions that have adversely impacted their advancement in their field of study,” said Walter Boggan, director of admissions, outreach and diversity initiatives in UCSB’s Graduate Division.

“UCSB faculty and graduate student mentors benefit as well by being matched with these scholars to assist them with an excellent opportunity for them to explore their discipline, experience research, and improve their opportunities for future study in their chosen field,” he added. “And hopefully their future graduate studies will take place here at UCSB.”

If their summer-ending research presentations are any indication, they’d make an impressive group of applicants. From genome editing, to paleoethnobotany, to microbial ecosystems; from “Space in the Poetry of Claribel Alegría and Sandra Cisneros” to “The Effects of Familial Support on Rejection Sensitivity and Belonging in Ethnic Minority First Generation Students,” their projects were as high-level in execution as they were diverse in focus.

“The second summer spent at a UC campus other than their home campus is incredibly important, and one of the program components that sets UC LEADS apart from other graduate preparatory programs,” said the program’s statewide director, Michele Johnson, who also is assistant director for diversity initiatives in UCSB’s Graduate Division and a UCSB alumna. “It gives students the opportunity to engage in a variety of research and make connections with programs and mentors who can advocate for them during the admissions process — either through letters of recommendation or in the admissions process.

“For campuses including UCSB,” Johnson added, “hosting second-summer UC LEADS scholars is a great way to recruit diverse students to their labs as future graduate student researchers.”

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.