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Leading By Example

As a young police officer just starting his career, James Brock walked a beat in Alameda. The city still had a Navy base then, and he spent a lot of time managing conflicts between sailors coming into town on leave, and the people who lived there day-in, day-out.

“You have to listen, you have to,” Brock says now. “Walking that beat, talking to sailors, to the merchants, I learned a lot about what policing is supposed to be, about transparency and connection. You have to stay connected to what the community wants, and you have to be malleable.”

Three decades on from his early days with the Alameda Police Department, where he rose through the ranks — officer, detective, sergeant, lieutenant, captain — Brock still prioritizes connection as central to his approach to law enforcement.

And he brings that walking-talking cop’s sensibility, along with a commitment to transparency, a belief in the benefits of change and a mentorship mindset, to his role as Interim Chief of Police in the UC Santa Barbara Police Department.

He also comes with 37 years of law enforcement experience, including in academic communities. Brock, who started at UC Santa Barbara April 29, has been with the UC San Francisco Police Department since 2011.

“Law enforcement is a noble profession,” said the fourth-generation police officer. “It’s a difficult job but it’s harder now because the expectation for perfection is so great. That’s why you have to rely on your policies, your procedures and your

training.”

With a rich background in policing in both municipal and university settings, Brock is keenly aware of the contrasts between the two. Serving a constituency comprised mostly of students, he said, presents a unique — and welcome — challenge.

“The context is different because the community is different,” said Brock, since 2016 a captain in the UCSF Police Department’s security services division, managing its day-to-day operations. “In a college setting, and particularly in the UC, you’re bringing the brightest young people in the country and the world to come here to learn, and you’re asking them, in their course of studies, to question. That’s how innovation happens. You can’t have innovation without questioning. So we can’t be surprised when these bright young people question me and question law enforcement.

“One of my early priorities is to understand what the community needs and wants from UC Santa Barbara law enforcement,” Brock continued. “I know how policing has been done in my experience, but there are particular nuances here. It’s my intent to connect with the community, with students, faculty and staff, with other departments, with all our partners in the university structure, to get a sense of how well we work with everyone else.”

Brock has hit the ground running, with a comprehensive review of police department policies and procedures — “trying to get a baseline” — as task number one. That includes sitting down with various units, and individuals from Community Service Officers to captains, to better understand what’s working, what isn’t and where there needs to be improvement.

Indeed, Brock is looking to build on existing strengths in the department. “They’ve done some good work here — that is evident by their efforts within the community,” he said. “That doesn’t just happen. They’ve done great work. I think internally we have to redefine the focus a little, and I come in with fresh eyes.

Brock previously served a captain in UCSFPD’s Professional Standards and Support Services Division, where his responsibilities included overseeing all aspects of departmental operations. As UCSF’s accreditation manager for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, he has specialized training in review, assessment and implementation of policy, procedure and best practices in the pursuit of excellence. Brock also was accreditation manager for the International

Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators.

“I have a background in policy, procedure and ensuring there are proofs that we’re actually doing what we say we’re supposed to do — and there are some growth opportunities here in that regard,” he said.

Among Brock’s goals within the UC Santa Barbara Police Department is to cultivate leaders who embody best practices in transparency, documentation, accountability and mentoring. While acknowledging recent allegations against some current and former members, he noted the department’s overall professionalism, commitment and dedication. He also asserted that the complaints reflect negatively on the many officers who work tirelessly in service to the community.

“There are competent, passionate, enthusiastic people here and I have an obligation and responsibility to them, to the majority of the organization that is doing great work each and every day,” Brock said. “We have to move past this. It is being handled by the appropriate authorities and entities, as it should be, and it doesn’t impact our ability to move forward and do the work we’re supposed to be doing in the community.”

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.