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Summer Expansion

Talk about a growing season. To help students make up for lost time, explore new academic avenues and reconnect with the campus as the pandemic continues to relax its grip, UC Santa Barbara is expanding its summer programs and introducing some new options — all of which will be available in person.

Based on registration numbers to date, more than 10,000 students are expected to take courses this summer. The majority will participate virtually.

“That will make it one of our biggest summers ever,” said Leesa Beck, director of Summer Sessions. “Some of the things we’re doing this year are designed to address needs that are specific to the situation created by COVID-19, but it all fits in well with our larger vision to expand summer opportunities and accessibility. We really want to make sure that we’re providing opportunities to benefit every student in summer. The current situation is pretty unusual, but we’re hoping to make the most of it.”

One way they aim to do so is with Second Year Summer. The residential program for students heading into their second year will offer a taste of the freshman year experience — dorm life and all — that they likely missed due to the pandemic.

“Students will have the opportunity to live in our beautiful, beachside residence halls, to meet other students and participate in lots of fun activities, and to make progress toward their degrees,” Beck said.

Participants in Second Year Summer also will learn about research opportunities and other ways to make the most of their next three years, plus be paired with peer mentors to counsel them on any challenges they're having and to help connect them to campus resources. Aid-eligible students will have access to a program-specific scholarship pool, making the program affordable for all students.

Scholarships will also be available for eligible students participating in Freshman Summer Start and Transfer Edge — existing programs that for summer 2021 will be offered in both remote and in-person formats.

"We realize that after such a strange year-and-a-half, our incoming students may be in a lot of different situations. Some may be really excited to come to campus and start connecting with their new community, but others may not be ready for that yet, or may want to leverage their summer in other ways," Beck said. "However they choose to participate, they'll have lots of course options, opportunities to meet other students, workshops to help them get to know the campus and its resources, and opportunities to connect with faculty."

For students having trouble keeping up with coursework or facing other difficulties in navigating university life, summer can be an ideal time to get back on track. Classes tend to be smaller and less impacted, campus resources are more readily available; and the absence of the unit requirements that are a factor during the regular academic year means students can focus on select subjects.

With those things in mind, Beck and team are collaborating with other campus partners to expand programs that support students facing academic or other challenges. That includes the Undergraduate Mentorship Program (UMP), based in the College of Letters & Sciences, which connects struggling first-year students with a peer mentor and programming to help them succeed.

"Normally UMP runs only in spring quarter," Beck said, "but a lot of new students struggled this year, between adjusting to remote learning and not having the same opportunities they normally would to build a support network. So, for the first time ever, we're expanding the program into summer quarter so that we can serve as many students as possible."

Also undergoing a big expansion is the Scholar Retention Program (SRP) run out of the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. Targeted to students who have had to leave the university for academic, financial, personal or other reasons with the intent

of bringing them back to complete their degrees, SRP is growing significantly this year — thanks in large part to the advantages of remote instruction.

“Many students aren’t able to stay on campus to take courses in summer, either due to other obligations — work, internships, travel, time with family — or because it’s simply cost prohibitive,” Beck said. “The SRP students always break my heart, because they’re often so close to the finish line, and I hate seeing students who have worked so hard for so long fail to earn a degree. Because students who left often have complex situations, coming physically back to campus isn’t always feasible, and finances are often a challenge. But with the option to do the program remotely, and additional scholarship support from the campus, we are expecting the program to grow from around 50 students to around 300 this year.”

On top of all of that, the entire suite of summer courses is being expanded, with more courses to be held in person during Session B. New options include more first- and second-year Discovery courses to help students explore the campus’s many academic disciplines, new academic exploration courses for incoming international students and incoming transfer students, and new offerings from departments that focus on topical areas, such as social justice, health and wellness, and the environment.

“This is actually something we’ve been talking about for a while, and part of a larger vision that predated COVID,” Beck said of the expansion. “Since summer study isn’t required, it opens up options for students to explore a bit, and maybe try some things they wouldn’t have time to do in fall, winter or spring. In summer they can participate in unique, immersive experiences like field studies courses, a film studies storytelling program, or the theater department’s ‘Naked Shakespeare’ course. They can take courses outside their major that might be impacted during the academic year.”

According to Beck, campus data shows that students who participate in even one summer during their time at UCSB are significantly more likely to graduate on time.

“So, we’d love to see summer become a part of every student’s academic plan, and are working to provide opportunities that will meet a broad range of student needs and goals,” she said. “The needs and opportunities this year are pretty unique, but I’m hoping that we can learn from what we’ve seen and experienced, and carry forward the best parts to support an even broader range of possibilities in future

years.”

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.