UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

August 2, 2021
Jim Logan

Scholars of Distinction

Michael Furlong, a distinguished professor emeritus in UC Santa Barbara's Gevirtz School of Graduate Education, and Francisco Lomelí, a professor emeritus of Chicano and Chicana studies and of Spanish and Portuguese, have been awarded UC Santa Barbara's prestigious Edward A. Dickson Emeriti Professorships for 2021-22. The award provides $15,000 in funding for research-related activities for each honoree.

Furlong will examine the effects of distance learning on students using California Healthy Kids data, including the Social Emotional Health Survey-Secondary (SEHS-S) that he developed during his career. His Project Covitality team is collaborating with the California Department of Education and WestEd to examine distance learning effects on secondary school students' mental health and well-being.

"I have always considered being part of the UCSB and broader UC community, the No. 1 university system in the world, an honor," Furlong said. "Receiving the Dickson Professorship is humbling when one considers UC's vastly talented faculty, staff and students."

The project's overarching goal, he said, "is to produce reports that provide the California public and policymakers with information about the effects of distance learning (hybrid and remote) on various psychological and social quality of life indicators." These reports will draw upon student responses to the California Healthy Kids Survey for the past four academic years, examining response patterns before and after the broad implementation of distance learning in March 2020. A broader and more expansive aim is to formalize a CDE-UC school mental health

collaborative, he said.

“Given concerns about students’ mental health arising out of the impact that school closures and distance learning have had during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic,” Furlong said, “there is now broad awareness and consensus that we need to be attending more closely to students’ mental health needs. The Dickson professorship expands the opportunity to support this vital work.”

“Retirement has not stopped Mike Furlong from continuing his important work improving the social-emotional health of students throughout California,” said Jeffrey Milem, Jules Zimmer Dean’s Chair and professor of the Gevirtz School. “Always a leader, he continues to inspire educators and applied psychologists. His current project will not only provide a snapshot of student well-being, but also provide evidence-based steps to sustain that well-being through policy. We are thrilled he remains an active colleague, informally mentoring faculty, graduate students and alumni.”

Lomelí, a tireless researcher and prolific writer and editor, will use the professorship to take a deep dive into the writings of Próspero Baca, a New Mexican folk poet/songwriter who lived from 1875 to 1962.

“It is indeed a distinct honor because my research as a retiree is validated and appreciated,” Lomelí said. “It grants me the opportunity to pursue a project of my interest that I was unable to carry out while I worked full time even though I had it in the back burner for years. This also reminds me of how much I relish the process of conducting research from point zero.”

Lomelí has his work cut out for him. Baca mainly operated in folkloric circles for many decades, he said, leaving behind a legacy of writings that, for the most part, have not been documented systematically. A few notebooks exist, but most of his writings will have to be extracted from newspapers in the first half of the 20th century, he said.

“He was a celebrity in his Hispanic cultural milieu,” Lomelí said, “because he improvised many of his works by celebrating birthdays, baptisms, epic happenings, weddings, deaths or other tragedies, and generally lyrical renditions of community events, including many meditative contemplations about the social surroundings of his time.”

Lomelí's project, "Próspero S. Baca: A New Mexican Troubadour Creates a Popular Voice for Cultural Survival," will attempt to capture his spirit as well as document his voluminous production over decades.

"My ultimate goal is to put Mr. Baca in his proper place as a writer and composer who deserves greater recognition for his perseverance as a poet despite the few opportunities to publish his works," he said.

Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, professor and chair of Chicano and Chicana studies, said Lomelí's project will also help UCSB graduate students.

"Dr. Lomelí has extensively collaborated with UCSB graduate students from different departments across campus," Armbruster-Sandoval said. "These collaborations have helped facilitate these students' placements in tenure-track academic positions at colleges and universities all over the country.

"For this project," he continued, "Professor Lomelí will likely establish ties with past and current graduate students as co-editors on this future publication. Such collaborations — probably including academic conference presentations — are crucial for scholars seeking to buttress their overall academic profile and future job placement. In today's extremely tough market for newly minted Ph.D. students, having a publication with a senior, esteemed scholar such as Dr. Lomelí will undoubtedly enhance their prospects for securing stable employment."

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.