UC SANTA BARBARA

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Community, Reunited

And we're back.

After 18 months largely deserted and devoid of activity, the campus is again buzzing as in-person instruction resumes and the fall quarter gets underway.

And should move-in be a bellwether for the new academic year, the future looks bright — because the operation that in 2020 was canceled due to COVID was this time a runaway success.

"This year more than 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students moved into UCSB's residence halls and apartments. The multiple day move-in process was further complicated by the need for each resident to be tested for COVID prior to receiving a key to their housing space," said Willie Brown, associate vice chancellor for Housing, Dining & Auxiliary Enterprises. "Through the efforts of our dedicated Student Health and Residential & Community Living staff, the move-in was a successful reawakening of the campus. Parents and students were clearly excited to newly join the campus or to return after an 18-month hiatus."

"The energy and enthusiasm were wonderful for staff to see, and at the end of a busy summer readying for everyone's arrival," Brown added. "Our campus was able to show why UCSB is a very caring and unique place to call home."

Those 10,000+ students are each calling it home after being tested and cleared for COVID — an undertaking mandated by the University of California mere weeks before move-in when the Delta variant heightened concerns. The UC also has

mandated that students be vaccinated for COVID, or else apply and be approved for an exemption; the student vaccination rate at UCSB is currently 97%.

“The appearance of the Delta variant led to a major change in the testing strategy for the entire UC system, as specified by the UCOP Fall Planning Committee,” explained Stu Feinstein, coordinator of UCSB’s COVID Response Team and a professor of molecular, cellular and developmental biology. “At the very end of August, the COVID-19 testing strategy was altered to mandate testing of everyone moving into campus housing regardless of vaccination status. For UCSB, this meant testing approximately 10,000 new campus housing residents, most of whom would be arriving over a stretch of only 5 days. This turns out to be one test per 15 seconds for 8 hours per day for 5 days straight. This presented an enormous logistical challenge.”

Working with a newly established COVID testing lab on campus, plus a COVID testing facility at UCLA and a Goleta-based COVID testing company named Aptitude, the team was able not only to conduct 10,000+ tests in only 5 days, but to quickly get the data into UCSB’s electronic medical records system so the results would be quickly available. More than 60 staff volunteers from across campus assisted the campus’ regular COVID-19 clinical staff to get it done, Feinstein noted.

“In the final analysis, the entire operation proceeded remarkably well,” he said. “Additionally, the testing results were great. Out of ~10,000 tests, we found only 11 people testing positive for COVID-19. Some of these students are now in isolation in campus housing reserved for this purpose, and some chose to return home until their recovery and subsequent return to campus.

Safety was the goal and celebratory was the mood, as Student Affairs boosted move-in operations with activities and events meant to welcome students back or, in many cases, welcome them for the first time.

Student-staffed “Ask Me: I’m Here to Help” kiosks opened across campus during move-in weekend to answer questions, provide directions and share resources. Campus tours were offered to both completely new and returning yet also new students. There was special lunch for second-year students — most on campus for the first time — and a resource fair featuring myriad departments and services, including ONDAS and Transfer Student Centers, CARE, the Disabled Students Program, Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities and many others.

“Most of our second-year students have never been to campus in person, won’t have had the opportunity to live in the residence halls, and made few, if any, social connections in their first year,” said Emma Parker, coordinator of student success and community standards in the Office of the Dean of Students, which organized multiple welcome events. “We wanted to be sure that these students didn’t get lost in the shuffle as we returned to campus.”

And what a shuffle it was, replete with music, as UCSB Arts & Lectures presented two free concerts outside at Storke Plaza — one the first day of classes and a second a few days into the quarter.

“The work that went into getting us to this place was no small feat,” said Jennifer Ja Birchim, manager in University & Community Housing Services, noting that 60+ staff members from Residential & Community Living worked each day of move-in. “I am so proud of our assignments team for their incredible work; our residential operations team for adding triples at the last minute; our administrative team for preparing keys and managing all the logistics of everything from parking, to COVID testing, to check-in stations; our COVID Response Team for their work thinking through all of the QI housing; our Student Health partners who worked tirelessly to COVID test all of our students; and Parking Services for keeping the traffic flowing and for all of the signage across campus.

“I feel like this was a big win for all of us, for the whole campus, after what we’ve been through the past year and half,” Birchim added.

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.