

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Building on their vision – and their legacy – alumni Louise and Stephen Pahl gift the campus \$10.5 million for social sciences research in the interest of change

Driven to support scholarly research as a catalyst for solutions and change, Louise A. '77 and Stephen D. '77 Pahl in 2019, established UC Santa Barbara's Pahl Initiative on the Study of Critical Social Issues, which funds important interdisciplinary research and teaching on major social issues. It's been a remarkably successful endeavor that has grown into a showcase program for the Division of Social Sciences, for the campus and for higher education excellence across the nation.

The Pahls have just upped the ante.

Building on their vision, and on their longtime generosity to the campus, the Pahls have made a \$10.5 million gift to UC Santa Barbara to create the Pahl Center for the Study of Critical Social Issues in the Social Sciences. It includes an irrevocable \$10 million gift through their estate and \$500,000 in start-up funding for the next five years.

“By creating the Pahl Center, we can add novel generative components, raising the work to new heights and establishing a detailed framework to achieve ambitious goals set out by the Pahl Initiative,” said Louise Pahl, a trustee of the UC Santa Barbara Foundation.

The overall goal, added Stephen Pahl, remains steadfastly the same: to explore major societal issues using hard data and to develop potential solutions based on empirical evidence. “The purpose of the Pahl Initiative, and now the Pahl Center,” he said, “is to subject knee jerk dogma solutions to critical analysis to see if those reactions are authenticated or supported by quantitative analysis.”

“Our campus is immensely grateful to Trustee Louise and Stephen Pahl, both esteemed alumni, for their visionary gift to establish the Pahl Center on the Study of Critical Social Issues,” said Chancellor Henry T. Yang. “The Pahl family has supported our university’s upward trajectory for more than 20 years through a series of innovative gifts, and now they have made this momentous pledge and gift to create the Pahl Center, which will become a model — not just across the University of California but also across the country — of the transformative impact of publicly facing social science research. Through their passion and partnership, our campus will expand on our commitment to finding solutions for the most pressing social issues of our time.”

The Pahl Initiative is centered around four key principles: rigorous research of high-stakes social issues; data-driven solutions rooted in research analysis; publicly facing research that reaches beyond the walls and academia; and student involvement in the research process. It has worked perfectly, as the university’s first four Pahl Scholars — one is selected each year — are examining issues ranging from mass shootings, to the pandemic’s impact on the underserved, to the housing crisis, to communication in support of separated Latina/o/x families.

The Pahl Center will take these efforts, and social sciences scholarship, to the next level.

“It has been my enormous pleasure to work with Louise and Stephen in the creation of the Pahl Initiative which, after a four-year pilot, has proven the concept and now will inspire our efforts to build the Pahl Center,” said Charles Hale, SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences at UC Santa Barbara. “The founding premise of our Center is that for every critical social issue we face — from mass shootings, to climate change, to skyrocketing cost of housing and so many more — we need

rigorous data-rich analysis of socio-economic and cultural drivers of change, to find just, effective and durable solutions. Our deepest gratitude to Louise and Stephen for their generosity and vision, and for the trust they have deposited in us to raise the Division of Social Sciences to new heights of excellence.”

For the Pahls, themselves products of the social sciences at UC Santa Barbara, it’s all about fostering cutting edge research for real world solutions.

“Philanthropy allows us to dream big and to think outside the box with new ways of making systemic change,” Louise Pahl said. “The evolution of the initiative into a center reinforces the importance of applied research and plants a stake in the ground for how UC Santa Barbara can fill a unique niche on the national stage. We feel that this is a transformative gift for the Division of Social Sciences and will hopefully inspire others to give generously.”

“We’re trying to change the thought process,” added Stephen Pahl. “Our goal is that we’re not the only contributors to the Pahl Center. We want this to be the start of something larger, not something that starts and ends with our gift.”

Donors to the campus since 1990, the Pahls have focused their philanthropy on student support, endowing an undergraduate upper division “Making a Difference” award in social sciences and a graduate fellowship that rotates between the departments of political science, economics and sociology. They are members of the Social Sciences Dean’s Cabinet.

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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.