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Social psychologist Brenda Major wins mentor award, launches scholarship

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June 24, 2024

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For her lifetime achievements in teaching, advising and encouraging students and colleagues in the field of social psychology, UC Santa Barbara's Brenda Major has received the Association for Psychological Science 2024 APS Mentor Award.

"Advising and mentoring students is the part of being a professor that I have most enjoyed," Major said. "I believe that good mentorship is one of the most important assets one can have on the path to achieving one's goals."

Major, a Distinguished Professor Emerita in the Department of Psychology & Brain Sciences and a world-renowned expert and educator on the psychology of stigma, was recently elected to the National Academy of Sciences. She credits her career trajectory to mentors of her own.

"I was fortunate to have two outstanding mentors early in my career," she said. "Both of them were absolutely crucial to my success as a scholar and professor."

Major praised her PhD advisor, Kay Deaux, who mentored her through graduate school at a time when female academics were rare, and Dean Pruitt, a senior colleague at her first academic job, at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

"Most people know Brenda for her outstanding research on topics of critical societal importance," said Shelly Gable, professor and department chair. "We have also long known of her phenomenal record as a mentor to the next generation of stellar scholars in social psychology."

To honor Major's mentoring and contributions to science, along with those of her husband and colleague, Jim Blascovich, the department has established the Brenda Major and Jim Blascovich Fund for Social Psychology. The fund will support the research, mentoring and community building missions of UCSB's Social Psychology Program, one of the world's premier training programs, known for its contributions to methodological and theoretical innovation.

The fund also honors Major and Blascovich, two of the program's most celebrated faculty members; both have made important theoretical and methodological advances across their careers while mentoring future scholars.

A distinguished professor and former department chair, Blascovich founded UCSB's Sage Center for the Study of Mind and co-founded the Center for Virtual Environments and Behavior.

Major and Blascovich are matching gifts to the fund, up to $10,000 total.

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