UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

April 18, 2025

Shelly Leachman

Continuing to enhance the physics community

The prestigious postdoctoral scholars program at UC Santa Barbara's Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics (KITP) has served as a career launchpad for scores of prominent physicists. The highly competitive program receives over 700 applications for the 3–5 positions that open each year.

Those few spots will likely be even more sought after when KITP unveils its new and rare means of support for its postdocs: a dedicated housing facility. With funding already assured from a consortium of donors, the institute will design, build and furnish a residence to house all 15-20 KITP postdocs, plus up to 12 visiting graduate fellows and 10-14 researchers-in-residence.

"In the landscape of postdoc positions across the world, very few places also offer housing arrangements that assist in establishing a lasting intellectual community," said KITP Director and Gluck Professor of Theoretical Physics Lars Bildsten. "So for our recruitment, mentoring and career launching of postdocs, this will make a huge difference."

On top of the benefit to recruitment, establishing permanently available housing for KITP's postdoctoral scholars, graduate fellows and researchers-in-residence will enhance the scientific experience of these early-career scientists by freeing them from the stress of procuring housing — and by putting them in close proximity to their peers and senior mentors. With postdocs employed for 2-3 years, the project

also brings more workforce housing to the university.

Working through a nonprofit foundation, the donor consortium funded the property purchase and will both fund and undertake the design, construction and furnishing of the building. This will enable the university to keep monthly rents at or below market rates, while providing the necessary funds (via rents and nightly fees) to responsibly operate and maintain the facility in the long-term.

Already, over $7 million has been gifted to UC Santa Barbara to acquire a vacant, 1.2-acre parcel for the project. The property — at El Colegio Road and Camino Pescadero near campus — sits across the street from the Munger Physics Residence, a 75,000 square-foot, $65-million facility funded by Charles T. Munger in 2014 to house most of KITP's visiting scholars.

"The proximity to the Munger Physics Residence will enable continuous engagement with the scientific visitors lodged there," noted Bildsten. "The opportunities for interactions are huge." Such interactions — and the research collaborations that frequently result — are a hallmark of KITP's programs and a cornerstone of theoretical science."

"The Charles T. Munger Physics Residence, generously funded by Charlie Munger, has been a tremendous benefit to KITP and to thousands of scientists from around the world," said Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "Providing more dedicated workforce housing that matches the quality of the Munger Residence will enhance KITP's ability to attract the best scientists from around the world and make KITP the preeminent international center for advancing theory in science."

The new facility will feature top-quality design and construction as well as landscaped outdoor space for private use and for social activities for those who live there. ZGF Architect's Los Angeles office is undertaking the conceptual design work.

"At this stage in their careers, most postdocs have just received their Ph.D.s and some are starting to have families. This is a time when they're defining their research, so they want to be as scientifically engaged as possible all the time," Bildsten said. "Removing that distraction of finding and furnishing housing, they can just show up and get to work — and that's what they want to be doing. We see this as a huge opportunity, as well as an opportunity to further enhance the intellectual community. We are very grateful to our donors."

Construction is projected to begin in 2026, with a planned opening date in mid-2027.

Media Contact
Shelly Leachman
Editorial Director
(805) 893-2191
sleachman@ucsb.edu

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.