

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Beyond the Classroom: The Research Experience and Education Facility (REEF)

Welcome to UC Santa Barbara's REEF, where the starfish are sassy, the urchins are ornery, the sharks act like sea puppies and if you kiss a sea cucumber, you're in for some good luck (allegedly). Short for Research Experience and Education Facility, The REEF is a hands-on introduction to marine and environmental sciences, taking advantage of its location just steps from Campus Point. Its state-of-the-art touch tanks, with seawater fed directly from the nearby ocean, feature local creatures — denizens of tide pools and the nearshore giant kelp habitats — while its aquariums recreate scenes from UC Santa Barbara's two Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) sites, the [Santa Barbara Coastal LTER](#) and the [Moorea Coral Reef LTER](#).

Established about 25 years ago, The REEF has seen thousands upon thousands of visitors (>250,000) from near and far ignite and explore their fascination with the marine environment, a fascination that has led directly to careers in the marine sciences for many, while fostering a better understanding of and connection to coastal and marine environments for all.

Director [Scott Simon](#) understands well the fascination that can arise when dealing with the ocean up close. In "Beyond the Classroom: The Research Experience and Education Facility," he takes viewers through a tour of the teaching aquarium and

gives a little bit of its history, while UCSB undergraduate and student educator Summer Baars gives us a look at the colorful personalities of the marine life on display. The “heart and soul” of The REEF, according to Simon, the undergraduate student educators do not only engage with the community over a shared love of ocean life, they also gain real-world science communication and practical aquarist skills that can lead to jobs at major marine research institutions and public aquariums. They can also bring the diverse skill sets and ideas they develop in their own fields of study to marine science.

In addition to the displays, UCSB students and visitors alike could see marine research in progress as faculty, researchers and students use the facility for their own work. Projects have included investigations of the effects of underwater heat waves, a phenomenon that occurred in local waters between 2014 and 2016, and experiments in aquaculture. The REEF is one of the few [captive breeding locations](#) for the White Abalone Restoration Consortium, a group of institutions led by UC Davis’s Bodega Marine Laboratory that has been working toward the recovery of the endangered white abalone and create sustainable populations in the wild.

A subunit of UCSB’s Marine Science Institute, The REEF has developed educational programs to engage with all levels of learning, from K-12 to college, from marine science beginner to ocean enthusiast. In addition to interactive experiences, the facility also provides live distance learning, citizen science opportunities and professional development programs for teachers. And the learning doesn’t stop when the school year ends, The REEF also offers a [weeklong summer](#) camp aimed at young learners.

The REEF is free and open to the public, with open door hours generally on Fridays 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. To confirm open door times or schedule a visit, message outreach@msi.ucsb.edu, or call (805) 893-8765. Visit [The REEF’s website](#) for more information and its [YouTube page](#) for some web-based educational content.

Tags

[Ocean and Beaches](#)

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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.