

UC SANTA BARBARA

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New fund supports student projects connecting Indigenous studies and environmental action

A new fund at UC Santa Barbara will help students transform ideas at the intersection of Indigenous studies and environmental action into projects with community impact.

The Kenneth Robert Lincoln Indigenous Environmental Projects Fund will make grants of up to \$1,000 available to students enrolled in the Environmental Leadership Incubator, or ELI, a nine-month program housed within the Greti U. Croft Center for Undergraduate Environmental Leadership (CUEL).

ELI combines interdisciplinary training, mentorship and hands-on project development to help students identify environmental challenges, design practical responses and move their ideas toward implementation.

“Many of our students want to build projects in partnership with Indigenous communities or explore Indigenous approaches to environmental stewardship, but they've lacked a funding source designed specifically for that work,” said Erika Zollett, executive director of CUEL. “This fund fills an important gap by giving students the resources to move promising ideas beyond the classroom and into meaningful community impact.”

ELI students may seek funding from programs such as the Coastal Fund, The Green Initiative Fund and Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities, but none is specifically dedicated to Indigenous environmental studies or initiatives.

Previous ELI projects demonstrate student interest in this work. They have included a native plant garden created in partnership with UCSB's American Indian and Indigenous Student Association and signage at Coal Oil Point Reserve identifying native plant and animal species in English and Chumash.

The new fund, being developed in partnership with American Indian and Indigenous Studies at UCSB, honors Kenneth Robert Lincoln, a scholar and teacher whose career helped advance the study of Native American literature and American Indian studies.

Lincoln grew up in Alliance, Nebraska, near Pine Ridge and Wounded Knee. As a young adult, he was adopted into the Oglala Sioux by the Mark Monroe family and received the Lakota name Mato Yamni.

Lincoln taught Native American literature and contemporary American literature at UCLA during a career spanning more than four decades. He helped develop the university's American Indian Studies curriculum, chaired the nation's first interdisciplinary master's program in American Indian Studies and published widely on Native American literature.

His books included "Native American Renaissance," "The Good Red Road: Passages into Native America" and "Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America," among others. He also edited nine titles in the UCLA Native American Poetry Series. Lincoln died in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2024.

Rachel Lincoln Sarnoff, Lincoln's daughter, is a UC Santa Barbara alumna, writer and climate communicator who has lectured and mentored through CUEL and ELI.

"Growing up, I watched my father work to amplify Indigenous voices and challenge people to think differently about our relationship with the natural world," Lincoln Sarnoff said. "As a UCSB alumna, I can't imagine a more meaningful way to honor him than by investing in young people whose ideas have the potential to strengthen both communities and the environment."

The Kenneth Robert Lincoln Indigenous Environmental Projects Fund was established with generous support from Caprock, a donor-advised fund at Tides Foundation, to

advance student-led projects at the intersection of Indigenous studies and environmental action.

ELI is open to undergraduates in any major who have completed their first year of studies. Applications for 2026-27 are open and reviewed on a rolling basis.

Students interested in developing a project at the intersection of Indigenous studies and environmental action are encouraged to apply to ELI with their project idea. Students admitted to the program will receive information this fall about applying for up to \$1,000 in project support through the Kenneth Robert Lincoln Indigenous Environmental Projects Fund.

[Apply to the Environmental Leadership Incubator](#)

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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.