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Encouraging Tomorrow's Leaders

UC Santa Barbara's Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) reached out to some 300 high school juniors, welcoming them to campus for the third annual UCSB EAOP Education, Leadership, and Careers Conference.

"You are the architect of your own destiny," Mónica Gil, one of two keynote speakers, told the group of students assembled in a large lecture hall in the Chemistry building. "What is your call to action?" She exhorted the students to turn their uniqueness into a competitive edge, and to "learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, and know you belong here."

The students also heard from U.S. Representative Antonio "Tony" Cárdenas (a UCSB alumnus), who reminded them that "there comes a time when you have to understand that you need to take control of your life and future, even if it hurts, because it's the right thing to do.

"If you learn to do that and take it to heart, you will be powerful," Cárdenas continued. "And then temper that, and make sure you have humility to make sure you are the best you can be. If you do things right, respectfully and humbly, you can change the world."

An annual event, the conference aims to inspire college-eligible students (this year's group came from high schools in Santa Barbara, Ventura and Kern counties), to consider how education, leadership and careers are related and intertwined. "What better way than to show them role models who were just like them when they were

in high school?” asked UCSB EAOP Director Britt Ortiz. “We have these great speakers who have incredible stories about their paths to higher education and now they have these important, high-level professional roles. We are modeling this for our youth participants. It demonstrates that many successful people come from humble beginnings.”

In addition to hearing the keynote talks, the students participated in a series of breakout sessions featuring “leadership mentors,” as Ortiz described them, from a broad range of fields and professions; and panel discussions with UCSB students who answered questions about the college application process, the availability of financial aid and scholarships, residence hall and apartment living, and how to successfully juggle academics, a social life and sleep.

The majority of the students attending the conference are first-generation, low-income students who are enrolled in UCSB EAOP, a pre-college academic preparation program designed to increase college-going enrollment rates at all four of the higher education systems in California (UC, Cal State, California Community Colleges and private and independent schools).

The conference focuses on high school juniors to keep them motivated as they approach their senior years and get ready to tackle the college applications that will be due in the fall. “This is often a critical juncture for high school students and they sometimes begin to have doubts about going to college — whether they can afford it, if they’re eligible,” Ortiz explained. “So we want to keep them on the right track and show them it isn’t that far off and they could be these full grown professionals someday, and they will be college students in the near future.”

Clearly, students are getting the message. For Anel Gutierrez from Pioneer Valley High School in Santa Maria, the conference “makes you put it in perspective. Ever since you’re little you think you’re going to college, but now it’s actually happening. We’re on our way.”

Noted Cárdenas, “UCSB is the educational base for everything I have ever achieved, as a business owner and as a public servant. I think it is wonderful that my alma mater is doing everything possible to make sure that the incredibly important lessons taught here, both in academics and in life, are able to be accessed as early as possible, by as many students as possible in California. I could not have become what I am today without a great deal of help from the staff at UCSB. I can’t wait to see the incredible success enjoyed by kids, like me, that staff is able to help thanks

to the Early Academic Outreach Program.”

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.