

UC SANTA BARBARA

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

‘America to Me’

In his unscripted documentary series “America to Me” filmmaker Steve James take an academic yearlong look at racial, economic and class issues in contemporary American education.

The 10-part series offers a glimpse into the world of suburban Chicago’s Oak Park and River Forest High School. Students, teachers and administrators from one of the country’s most high-performing and diverse public schools are profiled in the face of decades-old racial and educational inequities. The series delves into the experiences of the racially diverse student population, sparking conversations about what has and has not succeeded in the quest to achieve racial equity and to overcome bias in education.

The series, which a year ago made its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and was then acquired by the Starz television network, comes to UC Santa Barbara this week. Episodes one and two will screen at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6, in the campus’s MultiCultural Center Theater. A panel discussion with educators and scholars will follow.

Subsequent episodes — two per evening — will be presented February 21, March 7, March 21 and April 4 at the Center for Black Studies Research, 4603 South Hall. Each screening and associated panel discussion is free and open to the public.

“A colleague of mine at another university sent me the information and thought it was an interesting film that talks about the struggles students face in schools

around issues of race and acceptance,” said Sharon Tettegah, director of UC Santa Barbara’s Center for Black Studies Research, which is co-presenting the series with the MultiCultural Center, the Department of Black Studies and the UC Santa Barbara Library.

Tettegah reached out to both the MultiCultural Center and the UC Santa Barbara Library and asked if they were interested in co-sponsoring the series. They were, and when the screenings conclude in April, Tettegah plans to donate the series to the library so it remains available to students. “I think any institution of higher education or high school should understand the issues of identity,” she said. “I felt it was really important that we show the series to students just so they see the struggles of their peers in everyday life at these very diverse schools.”

What does Tettegah hope audiences learn from the series? “Awareness, empathy and compassion for our differences,” she said. Important lessons for everyone.

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.