

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Summer Program Combines Mesoamerican Cultural Studies and Computer Science

A two-week summer camp at UC Santa Barbara is combining two seemingly disparate areas of study: Mesoamerican culture and computer science. Funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, "Animal Tlatoque Summer Day Camp" is aimed at middle school students in the Santa Barbara area.

"Our overall goal is to increase gender and ethnic diversity in computer science and in higher education," said Gerardo V. Aldana, associate professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCSB and the program's co-director. "This year we have 38 students working in pairs."

Other co-directors of the program include Diana Franklin and Phillip Conrad, faculty members in the Department of Computer Science.

The students participate in a variety of activities, including one that involves endangered animals, Mayan art forms, and computer programming. Each pair of students is conducting research on an endangered species, and as part of that research they learn how to write the animal's name in Mayan hieroglyphs. Using a programming language called "Scratch," which was developed by the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the M.I.T. Media Lab, the students incorporate the hieroglyphs into visual poems that feature interactive computer animation.

Participants meet from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday in the computer science trailers behind the UCSB Library. The program continues through Friday, July 23.

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.