

New UCSC residence hall teaches nonviolent communication

By TOVIN LAPAN

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SANTA CRUZ — College kids just don't feel the pain of others like they used to.

At least that is what a University of Michigan study presented to the Association of Psychological Science in 2010 revealed.

The study, which followed 14,000 people for 30 years, found that college students today are much less empathetic than those from two and three decades ago, and the largest drop in empathy came after the year 2000.

"Many people see the current group of college students — sometimes called 'Generation Me' — as one of the most self-centered, narcissistic, competitive, confident and individualistic in recent history," Sara Konrath, a researcher at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research and one of the principal authors of the study, said in a statement when the study was released.

At UC Santa Cruz an innovative pilot program launched this term for a small group of students may just reverse that trend and boost the Banana Slugs' empathy levels.

UCSC students live in one of 10 colleges, each with its own scholastic or social theme. This term a brand new theme was created for a floor in one of the residence halls that focuses on training in nonviolent communication. The 24 students in the program are all living on one floor in the Ohlone House at College Ten, which has a social justice theme.

The program, which College 9 and 10 Director of Academic Programs and Cocurricular Programs Wendy Baxter said is unique in the country, received more than 80 applications.

"I don't know if there is a greater need right now for this training," Baxter said. "But it certainly imparts an important set of skills to students needed to communicate across differences. It's a fantastic model to give students skills that facilitate relationship building and good communication for the rest of their lives."

The students will participate in a one-credit course each term and are expected to practice nonviolent communication skills in their daily lives.

Christine King, who already teaches a class at UCSC and works with Nonviolent Communication Santa Cruz, is the instructor.

"The training is about trying to understand, from other people's perspective, where they are coming from," King said. "It's learning to get what motivates other people, to get that we are all coming from a place where we are trying to meet some vital human need."

Saturday, when many of their fellow students were enjoying the beautiful weather during the

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first weekend after fall classes started, the students in the new residence hall participated in their first workshop from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

“I was amazed,” junior UCSC student Javier Aguirre, who is serving as community advisor for the residence hall, said of the workshop. “People came out who have only known each other for two weeks or less and they opened up about how they felt. It was an amazing bonding moment that I didn’t expect at all ... I fell in love with NVC [nonviolent communication] that day.”

The new residential community has been dubbed Rumi’s Field, from a poem by the 13th century Persian poet Rumi.

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
/ there is a field. I’ll meet you there./ When the
soul lies down in that grass,/ the world is too full
to talk about./ Ideas, language, even the phrase
‘each other’ doesn’t make any sense.”

IF YOU GO

INAUGURAL EVENT FOR NEW UCSC RESIDENCE HALL

WHAT: Students, staff, faculty and the Santa Cruz community celebrate the start of Rumi’s Field, a new themed residence hall at UCSC with the goal of teaching students nonviolent communication skills. There will be poetry readings, music, tea and cookies. **WHEN:** 6:30-8 p.m., Oct. 13 **WHERE:** Cafe Revolucion, College 10

DETAILS: For information visit nvc-santacruz.org or email chlking@ucsc.edu or wbaxter@ucsc.edu



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