UCI faculty create curricula for kids worldwide confined by coronavirus

U.N.-sponsored Earth School will help children learn about environment
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UCI faculty are contributing learning modules to the new United Nations-sponsored Earth School program to help the world's 1.5 billion young people learn about the climate and environment during COVID-19 lockdown measures.

Picture Credit:
Maria Stenzel for UCI

Irvine, Calif., April 22, 2020 – On this Earth Day, the United Nations is announcing the start of a new environmental education program for the world's 1.5 billion youth who are confined to their homes to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and unable to physically attend school.

Earth School – sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme and TED-Ed and supported by numerous global organizations such as UNESCO, the National Geographic Society and the World Wildlife Fund – will include teaching modules developed and delivered by faculty from three University of California, Irvine schools. The modules are designed to help kids learn about Earth's natural resources, sustainable design and what they can do to protect nature.

“With its leadership in sustainability, climate science and educational innovation, the University of California, Irvine is uniquely capable of responding to this call from the United Nations Environment Programme to help children continue learning during this unprecedented crisis,” said UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman.

UCI’s involvement in Earth School dates back several months, according to James Bullock, dean of the School of Physical Sciences. “An interdisciplinary team of faculty had been holding regular Friday meetings to build on a sustainability project we call UCI Solutions that Scale,” he said. “When we learned of this U.N. program to help kids in coronavirus lockdown learn about climate and the environment, we quickly saw ways to use concepts and content we had already created to contribute to learning modules.”

UCI faculty involved in crafting the curricula, which is to be delivered to the U.N. within the next week, include Richard Matthew, professor of urban planning & public policy and faculty director of UCI’s Blum Center for Poverty Alleviation; Steven Davis, associate professor of Earth system science; and Bill Tomlinson, professor of informatics. Doron Zinger, director of UCI’s CalTeach program, is assisting with input and expertise in science, technology, engineering and math instruction for high school students.

Earth School comprises best-in-class materials curated into a series of 30 “quests” to be combined with learning activities that can be completed either indoors or outside. Elements of the program are tailored to serve the diverse needs of parents, teachers and students 5 to 18.

“This global experiment in education,” said Matthew, who has been collaborating with the United Nations Environment Programme for more than decade, “will bring the hope of a brighter future into the lives of children around the world who are living through an unprecedented moment of crisis.”

Earth School starts today – Earth Day – and will continue through World Environment Day, on Friday, June 5.

“UCI is one of the select few institutions of higher education involved in this U.N. initiative,” Bullock said. “It’s a great opportunity for our faculty – from many diverse parts of the campus – to pitch in on one of the most important endeavors imaginable: helping our children grow, learn and prosper during these challenging times.”

About the University of California, Irvine: Founded in 1965, UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. The campus has produced three Nobel laureates and is known for its academic achievement, premier research, innovation and anteater mascot. Led by Chancellor Howard Gillman, UCI has more than 36,000 students and offers 222 degree programs. It’s located in one of the world’s safest and most economically vibrant communities and is Orange County’s second-largest employer, contributing $5 billion annually to the local economy. For more on UCI, visit www.uci.edu.

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