LEAPS program to again bring Santa Ana middle school students to UCI

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Picture Credit:
Tiffany Kuo

Starting in 2012 and happening twice a year, the Laboratory Experiments and Activities in the Physical Sciences (LEAPS) brings middle school students from Santa Ana to UCI for a “Day at College” event that sees the students do real experiments in the labs here on campus. LEAPS stopped running in 2019 because of the pandemic — but this year, barring pandemic restrictions, LEAPS will leap back into form on March 1 and May 13, when eighth-graders from Sierra Preparatory Academy and Mendez Middle School will visit the university.

“We’re looking forward to upcoming LEAPS outreach visits,” said Liz Jarvo, a professor in the UCI Department of Chemistry whose lab was a popular stopping point for students in previous years’ LEAPS. “In my laboratory, students learn about catalysis, metals, and green chemistry. We perform experiments to reinforce these concepts, including a hands-on elephant toothpaste experiment, an example of a catalytic reaction. We also perform ever-popular flame rainbow and flaming gummy bear experiments.”

One of the key aims of LEAPS is to help Santa Ana kids, many of whom come from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged schools with limited facilities for teaching science, picture themselves as real-life scientists.

"I’m really excited to help bring the LEAPS outreach program back to the School of Physical Sciences,” said Kara Ward, who’s the new Program Coordinator for the Office of Access, Outreach and Inclusion, and who’s spearheading the comeback of LEAPS. “I hope it offers the visiting middle school students the opportunity to visualize themselves studying at UCI one day and increases their awareness of STEM concepts and career paths."

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