The John R. Lewis College at the University of California, Santa Cruz (spring 2022)

The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) is one of the 10 campuses that make up the University of California system. UCSC was established in 1965 and is a public university like no other, combining the intimacy of a small liberal arts college with the depth and rigor of a major research university. Located along the shores of Monterey Bay and within the surrounding redwood forests, our idyllic location inspires the transformative nature of our educational and research missions. We are a community of scientists and makers, artists and creators, justice seekers and problem solvers. Our voices move ideas into action, and action into transformative change.
Creating and strengthening a gathering place, or collective crossroads, is hard—if not contentious—work. UC Santa Cruz is constantly evolving with the addition of new voices and perspectives, as well as expanding societal and intellectual boundaries, and is self-reflexively pushing to change existing structures and processes. The process ultimately yields a community that finds strength and confidence in these daily efforts to live up to our ideals and values.

Committed to providing its 16,255 undergraduates with a transformative and personalized educational experience, UCSC is organized into 10 colleges that each comprise a unique living and learning community within the larger university. These residential colleges have different themes, and they offer students the opportunity to participate in both academic and nonacademic activities and events that are meant to enhance their intellectual and social life and that of the campus. Each college is a hub of intellectual and social engagement—a microcosm of what the campus strives to do at a larger scale—so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Founded in 2002 as College Ten, John R. Lewis College (effective spring 2022) is the youngest and one of the most diverse of the colleges at UCSC. Of its 1,500 undergraduate students in John R. Lewis College, more than 60 percent grew up speaking another language either in addition to or instead of English, and more than 30 percent are first-gen students, the first members of their family to attend college. Despite its youth, John R. Lewis College already has some of the oldest and most robust programs designed to realize its theme of Social Justice and Community. That theme lies at the heart of John R. Lewis College, and its programs engage the community in and beyond the campus, empowering students to become justice- and equity-minded change agents.

Naming our college in honor of Representative John R. Lewis reflects the College’s status as a campus beacon in the struggle for justice and equity. John R. Lewis College is guided by five core principles: 1) standing up against injustice, racism, and discrimination; 2) centering youth leadership and voices; 3) recognizing the humanity and interconnectedness of all peoples; 4) being of service to others; and 5) finding recognition and joy in shared community. All of these principles resonate strongly with the legacy of Representative John R. Lewis, whose lifelong, praxis-oriented dedication to justice—from his early days leading the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to his 17 terms as a U.S. Representative—serves as both an inspiration and an aspiration for everyone at UCSC and John R. Lewis College. On the following pages, we provide an overview of some of our existing flagship programs, then sketch some ideas for potential new programs at the college that would embody the life work and legacy of Rep. Lewis.
Core Course: Social Justice and Community

During their first quarter at UCSC, all first-year students take a “Core” course at their respective college, meant to provide a foundation in intellectual exploration and academic literacy through the thematic focus of the college. At John R. Lewis College, the Core, which is taught seminar-style, focuses on the theme of Social Justice and Community. Students examine the roots of prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed at individuals and groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Through readings and films, students learn to think critically about privilege and inequality; the social construction of identity through categories such as race and class; gender, sexism, and misogyny; transphobia and transgender rights; racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration; immigration; and Indigenous knowledge and climate justice. Students also attend “plenaries”—keynotes by nationally and internationally renowned scholars and activists—and past plenaries have covered the topics of incarceration and abolition, the Black Lives Matter movement, immigration reform, and combating transphobia. The John R. Lewis College Core is the keystone on which students can build their college careers and beyond, and it provides students with the critical concepts and analytical skills to become the kind of change agents they want to be.

Practical Activism Conference (PAC)

Much of our programming is anchored in student leadership, and every year, students organize the college’s flagship event, the daylong Practical Activism Conference, which features keynote addresses by national and international activists, workshops on various social justice issues, and music and other artistic expressions. Student organizers prepare for PAC by taking a student-taught course, “Social Justice Issues Workshop,” which brings together undergraduates from all backgrounds and majors to educate themselves and each other in how to take collective action for social justice. Students choose the keynote speakers—past speakers have included Dr. Angela Davis, Cesar Cruz, Bettina Aptheker, Darrick Smith, and Zahra Billoo—as well as the artists and praxis-oriented activities. Multiple teams of students co-develop a series of workshops designed to provide attendees with the tools to work pragmatically toward equity, inclusion, and justice. The Practical Activism Conference highlights multiple pathways for change, from voting and civic engagement to nonviolent protest.
Transcommunal Peace Making
(UCSC-Soledad Correctional Training Facility course)

In 2019, guided by Professor Emeritus of Sociology John Brown Childs, John R. Lewis College formed a partnership with the nonprofit organization Barrios Unidos and the Cemanahuac ("One World") Cultural Group at Soledad Correctional Training Facility to offer a course called Transcommunal Peace Making. The course gives UCSC undergraduates the opportunity to learn with and from incarcerated men at Soledad Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California, about 60 miles south of Santa Cruz. The course centers on peacemaking, solidarity, unity through difference, and finding liberation for ourselves through our efforts for others. Professor Childs, who is African American and Native American (Massashuset-Ponkapoag), coined the term “transcommunality,” inspired by the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois Confederation. This transformative course has left a lasting impact on many students. For example, one student, Alyssa Scarsciotti, now co-directs the organization Walls to Bridges, which supports families whose loved ones are incarcerated. The organization’s recent work includes a book project in which children receive books in the mail from their incarcerated family member.
(H)ACER: Apprenticeship on Community Engaged Research

For over 15 years, John R. Lewis College’s service-learning programs have offered students a variety of experiential opportunities, such as PRAXIS (a student club organizing daylong volunteer excursions), Alternative Spring Break (when students spend a week volunteering rather than vacationing), and placements at host organization like the Homeless Services Center and the Boys and Girls Club. In recent years, as the limitations of charity-centered approaches became clear, these programs have been revamped to emphasize university-community partnerships that enable undergraduates to develop as critically thinking, self-reflexive, justice- and equity-minded change agents. Through (H)ACER, the Apprenticeship on Community Engaged Research (hacer means “to do” in Spanish), the program now focuses on honing students’ research skills as a form of public service. (H)ACER trains students in decolonial, critical feminist, and ethnographic research methodologies, preparing them to engage in projects that address social, economic, educational, and environmental injustice through an approach that honors the cultural, social, and epistemological knowledges of community members. (H)ACER’s projects have focused on Latinx food sovereignty and educational equity in Watsonville, California, and equitable groundwater governance across the globe as part of an international team working in India, Tanzania, Peru, Morocco, Algeria, Zimbabwe, and the United States.

These are the flagship programs at John R. Lewis College; a number of other, smaller programs are offered as well, including: a yearly Storytelling Slam, in which students from diverse ethno-racial and socio-economic backgrounds narrate personal histories of struggle and overcoming, and Slug Stories, an online archive of these student stories; Multicultural Community Weekend, a retreat in the Santa Cruz Mountains where undergraduates learn about and embrace their own intersectional identities and those of others through facilitated activities and discussions; Rumi’s Field, a themed floor in one of the John R. Lewis College residential halls where students choose to learn about and practice the skill of nonviolent communication to promote compassion, mindful speech, and interdependence; and courses such as Expressive Arts for Social Justice, in which students share paintings, poetry, and other artwork with each other and the broader community, co-organize and attend the annual HOPE Spring Music festival, paint a mural, and cultivate a verdant space at the College Nine and John R. Lewis College Garden.
Future Growth via Philanthropy

Naming College Ten in honor of John R. Lewis is a privilege and an honor; it is also a responsibility that we take seriously. Our goal is to carry forward the legacy of Representative Lewis, through the students who will forever be identified with the college and who will actively engage in the ideals and values he professed and lived by; and through programming, courses, and initiatives that will instill the ethic and practice of social justice and equity generation after generation.

By naming College Ten in honor of John R. Lewis, visionary donors honor and celebrate his powerful legacy through a coupling endowment. Their generosity provides a new, permanent stream of funding that enhances existing programs and supports emerging ones. Indeed, the naming of John R. Lewis College provides us with a critical opportunity to rededicate our College at an especially fractured time in American politics and society to promoting social justice and equity, to ending anti-Black racism and other structures of oppression and discrimination, and to educating students to become agents for real social change. We are fully invested in robust new programming that would build on the life and legacy of Representative Lewis. Some preliminary ideas include:

- **Good Trouble Academy**: Working for justice often entails pushing against entrenched structures and practices, often negatively labeled as troublemaking. Representative Lewis famously advocated for the need to get into “good trouble, necessary trouble.” Preparing students to take up his call necessitates mindful, intentional training and preparation to critically engage as members of civil society. This includes teaching students about positionality, strategy, collective action, and the discourses of rights and citizenship and their limitations. Imagined as a regular course or an intensive summer program, the Good Trouble Academy would invite a diverse group of community organizers, political representatives, and scholars to share their expertise with students. Students would also examine various past movements in their historical and political contexts and identify what strategies worked and why, in order to imagine and implement action in the present and future.
• **A Social Justice track within the University of California in DC (UCDC) program:** UCSC already participates in a UC-wide semester-long internship program in Washington, DC, which aims to introduce students to careers in government and politics. A Social Justice track would be aimed specifically at John R. Lewis College students from minoritized backgrounds and/or students committed to social justice work, placing them as interns in the congressional offices of progressive U.S. Senators and Representatives. Students from historically marginalized communities are often unable for financial reasons to participate in internship programs like this—which can be significant career opportunities for many students—so simply providing stipends for under-resourced students would create meaningful pathways for our students to pursue careers in progressive politics.

• **Partnerships with Fisk University via UCSC’s existing UC-HBCU initiative:** UCSC participates in a UC-wide UC-HBCU program that enables graduates from historically Black colleges and universities to attend Ph.D. programs at UC Santa Cruz. The initiative also provides summer research grants for HBCU undergraduates to come to UCSC to conduct research with our faculty. That program could be expanded to create research teams of HBCU and UCSC undergraduates, led by John R. Lewis College faculty affiliates. In addition, the program could work with Fisk’s new John R. Lewis Institute for Social Justice to create a pipeline for UCSC undergraduates to pursue master’s degrees there, and to incentivize the Institute’s master’s graduates to pursue doctoral study at UCSC.

There are many smaller, yet no less impactful, ways in which gifts to John R. Lewis College could enrich students’ experience. For instance, by expanding programming to serve even more students; increasing scholarships and stipends for under-resourced students who otherwise have to work while studying; providing honoraria to visiting scholars and organizers; and allowing for greater engagement of faculty—particularly junior faculty of color—through research workshops, student research assistants, networking and more. Supporting the Center for Racial Justice and launching a Transcommunality Initiative through the CRJ would bolster our campus-wide dialogue on race and racial justice. Expanding the People of Color Sustainability Collective would put UC Santa Cruz on the map as a leader in mainstream sustainability and environmental justice. We anticipate hiring a full-time director for the Co-Curricular Programs office, who will work with the College’s provost and senior director to plan and develop these new programs, and who will oversee their implementation and administration.
At this historic moment, we are invested in furthering the legacy of Rep. Lewis and we are doubling down on our own dedication to justice and equity. We remain committed to our existing programs as we imagine new ones that will expand opportunities for our students.

We are inspired by the life of Representative Lewis—his determination to struggle against all forms of injustice and inequity; his commitment to nonviolence even in the face of extreme brutality; his belief in youth and student leadership to lead us forward into a new and better future; his determination to be of service; and his joy in working his compatriots in the name of justice—and we are honored and humbled that our college bears his name. We invite you to partner with us in amplifying the call for justice, and to take a stand with us against racism and discrimination.