Autism Project Funded Here

A project for the development of materials and teaching methods for autistic children funded by a $400,000 contract from the U.S. Department of Education is under way at UCSB.

The contract has been awarded to Melynn Semmel, professor of education and program leader in special education, for a cooperative project with the Santa Barbara County Schools. It is part of a larger ongoing program at UCSB for research and demonstration projects to improve services for students with handicaps.

The autism project team includes Adriana Schuler, a specialist in neurolinguistics, and Cap Peck, who has taught handicapped children and been a consultant to hospitals, school districts and other agencies that deal with the handicapped. Both teach in the Graduate School of Education. Joe Pessanella is the Santa Barbara County Schools representative.

Researchers have been unable to discover an organic cause for autism, a severe condition which afflicts approximately one out of every 4,000 children.

Definitions of autism thus far have had to rely on behavioral observations. Autism involves a cluster of characteristics, two of which are delayed language development and the inability to interact with adults or other children in socially appropriate ways. It is these two characteristics which are central to the research and demonstration project.

"The materials we will be developing focus on what to teach autistic children in a classroom, in a social setting," Peck said. "The project is unique in combining these areas of concern."

Many of the problems commonly encountered in teaching children with autism, such as behavioral disruptions and poor generalization and maintenance skills, are a reflection of inadequate curriculum materials and lack of access to appropriate peer models, Peck said.

He ascribed the first gains in working with autistic children to the development of behavior modification techniques which provided teachers and therapists with tools to control the children's behavior and isolate skills.

This project, he says, is aimed at developing "what to teach rather than how to teach" autistic children in the areas of functional communication and social interaction.

Once materials are developed the project team will determine their effectiveness and disseminate them through existing policy development teams which include teachers, administrators and parents throughout the Santa Barbara County special education districts and more widely throughout the country.

Maya Angelou Here Feb. 1

"An Evening with Maya Angelou," the highlight of Arts & Lectures' winter lecture series, will be presented on Monday, Feb. 12, in Campbell Hall.

The author of five best-sellers including the recently published "The Heart of a Woman," Angelou was featured in early January on the opening segment of the Public Broadcasting Service series "Creativity with Bill Moyers."

Her UCSB visit being renamed "Mysterious Woman," this hour is to catalogue feature films which portray streetwalkers and call-girls.

According to Da, Theda Bara was the first fallen woman of film. "Until Bara, the women were all good, like Mary Pickford. But Bara was the vamp... out to destroy all the men in her way." The Vamp soon became a cliche, a mean-spirited brunette who wrecked marriages and took men for every penny they had.

Da has an M.A. in English literature and plans to do doctoral work on the theme of white slavery in silent films.
Solar Greenhouse Project
Construction Nearly Done

By JUAN RUIZ

Solar greenhouse construction begins in Winter Haven. For years, professor J. R. Winter has been working on the design of a solar greenhouse that will be constructed in Winter Haven. The greenhouse will be used to grow plants and vegetables in a controlled environment. The greenhouse is located on the campus of Winter Haven Community College.

The greenhouse is designed to use solar energy to heat the greenhouse and provide light for the plants. The greenhouse is also equipped with a ventilation system to control the temperature and humidity inside the greenhouse.

The greenhouse is expected to be completed in the next few months. The college is expected to use the greenhouse to teach students about sustainable agriculture and renewable energy.

The greenhouse is expected to be a major asset for the college, providing a unique learning opportunity for students interested in agriculture and renewable energy.