

UC SANTA BARBARA

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OXNARD GRAD RECEIVES UCSB'S HIGHEST ACADEMIC AWARD

Gladys Limón Perez, who dedicated countless hours to steering fellow students through the financial aid process, has won the Thomas More Storke Award, the University of California, Santa Barbara's top graduation honor.

The Storke award is given to one senior who has demonstrated outstanding scholarship --- earning a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or above --- and extraordinary service to the university, its students and the community. The Storke winner is a person of courage, persistence and achievement. An awards ceremony will take place at 3:30 p.m. June 18 at the University Center's Corwin Pavilion.

"I'm very proud to be the first Chicana to receive this award," Limón said. "Yet, I do not consider it just 'my' award as this award is representative of our student communities of struggle. "Many of us have worked especially hard these past few years to combat the many political attacks against our communities. There are so many of us that live and fight in this struggle everyday, and the only real way to do this is as a community."

"I want to give thanks to our creator, to my mother and father, to my sisters, Brenda and Syndia, and to my companion, Lu's," Limón added. "Thank you for your love, support and faith in me even in the hardest of times. Gracias."

"I also want to give special thanks to all those faculty and staff at UCSB who have struggled and fought before us, and who continue to do so. Thank you for your guidance. La lucha sigue."

A candidate for bachelor's degrees in Chicano Studies and sociology, Limón, will be among some 3,700 undergraduate and graduate students participating in commencement ceremonies on June 19 and 20.

The first of her family to attend college, Limón lived the challenge of financing a university education. She worked and relied on financial aid, a system she sought to make easier for others. But more than improving accessibility, Limón wanted to preserve it.

Several years ago, she and other students organized a grassroots awareness campaign that prompted the formation of the Chancellor's Financial Aid Task Force to protect financial aid for those most in need. Limón was selected subsequently to serve on the university's standing Financial Aid Advisory Committee.

The senior mastered an understanding of the complex financial aid system and then translated that knowledge into a student manual. This manual will remain as a legacy to help future students understand the complexities of the system, its history, and the important role it plays in the lives of nearly 8,000 students each year.

"Her commitment is unparalleled in my experiences on any committee," said advisory committee chair Geoffrey Wallace, who was one of several people who nominated the senior. "Gladys is incredibly bright and dedicated to ensuring that the financially poorest students' needs are appropriately addressed.

"I don't believe anyone on the committee gave as much time in real hours as Gladys. This is particularly impressive since the rest of us are employees and she is a student volunteer."

Limón also volunteered with the university's Office of Relations with Schools, serving on student panels and helping organize conferences for high school students. She was a role model to many, encouraging them to pursue higher education. Limón worked for the campus Educational Opportunity Program and participated in several student groups that endeavored to eliminate obstacles to people of color.

A member of El Congreso since her freshman year, she made sure that fellow students learned about her Latino culture during Culture Week and that Latino youth were exposed to the university on Raza College Day.

She served on M.U.J.E.R., a campus program that brought attention, support and consciousness to Chicana/Latinas/Mexicanas on campus and in the community and advocated for their needs. She organized community workshops on rape prevention and health issues, planned outreach activities for local high school women and helped put together cultural events.

With her busy schedule, Limón never lost sight of her academic studies or family, willingly taking on responsibilities that eased her parents' load.

She earned a 3.69 grade point average, including at least five A-plusses. Professors called the senior a highly sophisticated and original thinker who demonstrated unusual social insight and critical awareness.

Her keen interest in social justice led her to Capitol Hill in 1997. She was one of 30 interns selected nationwide to intern at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute in Washington, D.C.

The senior thrived among the people who worked to make changes at the federal level.

Limón plans to enter law school after graduation. She hopes to either practice civil rights/public interest law or enter politics.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.