

# THE *Current*

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## **Top Awards for Three Outstanding Graduating Seniors at UCSB**

Three remarkable graduating seniors at the University of California, Santa Barbara, have been named winners of the university's top awards for their scholastic achievements, their extraordinary service to the university and the community, and their personal courage and persistence.

- Benjamin A. Thomas of Hawthorne is the winner of the Thomas More Storke Award, the campus's highest student honor, for outstanding scholarship and extraordinary service to the university, its students, and the community.
- Peggy Lee of Glendale is the winner of the Jeremy D. Friedman Memorial Award for outstanding leadership, superior scholarship, and contributions to undergraduate life on campus.
- Margaret Whitney O'Malley of Concord is the winner of the Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award in recognition of endurance, persistence, and courage in the face of extraordinary challenges.

These and other student-award winners will be honored at a University Awards Ceremony and Reception on Friday, June 13, from 3:30 to 6 p.m. in Corwin Pavilion on campus.

Benjamin A. Thomas, the Storke Award winner, is an honors student majoring in biological sciences with an emphasis in molecular biology. The recipient of a

Research Grant for Undergraduates from the National Science Foundation, he has been working alongside David B. Low, a professor of molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, to identify the cellular receptor for contact-dependent growth inhibition, a phenomenon discovered in Low's laboratory in which bacteria contact one another and shut down growth and metabolism in a reversible manner.

"Ben is one of the top two undergraduates I have had in my laboratory over my 25-year tenure as a professor," said Low, who nominated Thomas for the Storke Award. "He has all of the skills necessary to become an outstanding physician--he's applying to medical school--as well as a top research scientist. Add to this his passion for research and for life and you have one incredible person with unlimited potential."

In addition to his impressive record of research and scholarship, Thomas has shown himself to be an extraordinary student volunteer and campus leader. While working two jobs--as a resident assistant in the residence halls and as a clerk at the UCSB bookstore--he served as an outreach volunteer introducing local elementary school children from diverse backgrounds to the disciplines of chemistry and biochemistry. In addition, he was chair of health for the UCSB chapter of the NAACP and was active with Street Health Outreach, helping the organization raise over \$3,000 to provide food and other assistance to the homeless in Isla Vista. He also served as president of the Black Pioneer Renaissance Organization, which brings together African American men from the UCSB campus to work on community service projects, hold diversity and academic workshops, and mentor minority youth in the Santa Barbara area.

During the summer of 2005, Thomas traveled to Tanzania on a medical volunteer trip with 19 other university students. The group traversed the country, visiting rural villages, hosting medical clinics in churches and schools, dispensing medications, making house calls, and teaching villagers about nutrition and sanitation.

For Peggy Lee, the Friedman Award winner, leadership and activism in student organizations and in her academic career have been defined by creativity, innovation, and collaboration. Through her significant efforts, she fostered an increased campus awareness of the difficult topic of sexual violence, and generated new interest in how sexual violence affects underrepresented communities.

Lee, who is graduating with a degree in women's studies, served for two years as the outreach intern to student groups of color in the Rape Prevention Education Program. During her tenure she created a popular street harassment workshop for the residence halls that gave participants the opportunity to discuss the everyday sexual violence they had experienced.

As a peer educator with Students Stopping Rape, she facilitated workshop discussions, helped organize events and campaigns, and educated her peers on the topic of self-defense. Understanding the importance of using the arts to convey positive messages around difficult topics, Lee was responsible for bringing several traditional dance organizations to perform at the final night of the annual "I Want a Truce" campaign and during the "It Affects Me" campaign.

An active participant in the performance group WORD: Women of Color Revolutionary Dialogues, Lee was the first student commissioned by UCSB's MultiCultural Center to develop a performance piece as a spoken word artist. In addition, she has been asked to perform her poetry at events such as Take Back the Night and IDEAS (Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success). She also worked with Celine Parreñas Shimizu, an associate professor of film and media studies and Asian American studies at UCSB, on "Birthright," an experimental documentary film about mothering in Santa Barbara.

Margaret Whitney O'Malley, winner of the Whitted Memorial Award, overcame enormous obstacles to pursue her dream of graduating from UCSB. Her story is truly inspirational.

Just two weeks before she was to begin her freshman year in 2003, O'Malley was diagnosed with agnogenic myeloid metaplasia with myelofibrosis, a disease that normally affects people over 60. She finally arrived at UCSB a year later and began working on a degree in linguistics. Despite setbacks related to her illness, O'Malley demonstrated tremendous courage, persistence, and optimism. She performed research for the Department of Linguistics, was a member of the National Society of Success and Leadership and the sorority Alpha Epsilon Phi, and was a volunteer for two UCSB Move-In Weekends. In addition, she was an usher for the music department at UCSB and was part of the production crew for Associated Students Program Board. She served as a volunteer for the Dedicated Animal Welfare Group (DAWG) and Animal Shelter Assistance Program (ASAP), and was a gymnastics instructor during the summer. Last year she participated in UC's Education Abroad Program and spent a year at the National University of Ireland.

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## **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.