

# THE *Current*

June 8, 2009

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## **Top Awards Presented to Three Outstanding UCSB Graduating Seniors**

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

- Jennifer L. Zapata, of Los Angeles, 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.
- Sara Blair, of Berkeley, is the winner of the Jeremy D. Friedman Memorial Award, for outstanding leadership, superior scholarship, and contributions to undergraduate life on campus.
- Ruben Salvador, of Guadalupe, is the winner of the Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award, which recognizes a non-traditional student's endurance, persistence, and courage in the face of extraordinary challenges while pursuing an academic degree.

These and other student-award-winners will be honored at a University Awards Ceremony and Reception on Friday, June 12, from 3:30 to 6 p.m. in the campus's Corwin Pavilion.

Jennifer L. Zapata, the Storke Award winner, is an honors student who double-majored in feminist studies and communication, while working multiple jobs to help finance her education. She was selected as a member of Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year, and holds a 3.74 grade point average. A first-generation college student, she was characterized by Mireille Miller-Young, assistant professor of feminist studies, as a "rare star," a "dynamic leader," and a "true scholar" with a passion for feminist concerns of political and social justice.

Zapata has made her mark on campus and in the local community, often making deliberate connections between her scholarship and leadership activities. She participated in WORD (Women of Color Revolutionary Dialogues), a performance art and political theater troupe, and has been an active member of the Associated Students Womyn's Commission, serving as editor of the feminist publication "Herstory." Participating in Mujeres Unidas por Justicia, Educación, y Revolución (MUJER), she collaborated with local middle and high schools to bring young Latinas to campus to help them learn about applying to college. She also served as a peer educator for the Educational Opportunity Program, as the coordinator for the Students Teaching Alcohol and other drug Responsibility (STAR) program, and as an Honors Program mentor in the College of Letters and Science, all while working as a resident assistant in San Miguel and San Nicolas Halls.

As a Dean of Students intern for two years, Zapata organized a "Spread the Love; Stop the Hate" campaign to help prevent hate crimes on campus, and she built a Judicial Affairs peer education program from the ground up. In the community, she volunteered with the PUEBLO Education Fund and traveled to El Salvador to serve in a delegation of pre-electoral observers in the run-up to the March 2009 presidential election.

Accepted into UCLA's Law Fellows Program, Zapata plans to teach elementary school with Teach for America next year.

Sara Blair, an honors student majoring in sociology, has a passion for social justice and is a consummate collaborator. She has intentionally directed her leadership activities to intersect with her academic work, residential life, and student affairs.

In response to social tensions and hate incidents in the community, Blair co-founded the student organization "Be the Change, Live the Dream" to unite her peers in working toward a common goal. She brought together a diverse group of students in

a collective effort that became the No Hate campaign and resulted in the White Elephant Project.

As a second-year resident assistant, Blair has impacted the community in many ways. "Get a Life," a program she created specifically for UCSB, received a Top Ten Programs Award at the Central Resident Assistant Programming Conference 2008. She has served as a member of the hall council, and as Multicultural Awareness Chair in the Residence Halls Association.

This summer, Blair will serve as an intern in the Office of Residential Life and the Dean of Students Office at the University of Vermont. She will return to UCSB to become an assistant resident director in the Office of Housing and Residential Life.

For Ruben Salvador, winner of the Whitted Award, achieving his academic degree in electrical and computer engineering has required a level of tenacity and determination unknown to most of his peers.

At 13 years of age, Salvador immigrated to the United States from Mexico with two of his sisters. Their goal was to reunite with their parents. Once here, he began working in the fields as a laborer and became one of the primary wage earners in his household. While in high school, he demonstrated a passion for learning and began dreaming of a college education. Upon graduation, he enrolled at Allan Hancock Community College in Santa Maria, but because of his responsibilities to his family, Salvador continued to work full-time while attending college when he could. At the end of eight years, he had earned five associates degrees: engineering, math, physics, chemistry, and liberal arts.

In 2005, Salvador was admitted to UCSB's College of Engineering. Because he received no financial support of any kind, however, he decided to continue working in Santa Maria and commute to UCSB. During his first quarter, Salvador worked longer hours on the weekends and in the evenings. Often, he slept in his car someplace near campus so he could make it to class without the additional commute. Eventually, however, the stress of this schedule took its toll, and he withdrew from the university.

While contemplating his future, Salvador achieved permanent residency status, which allowed him to apply for financial aid. He quit his job and returned to campus in spring 2006, but after two quarters, he again found himself in academic distress and was dismissed from the university. Undeterred, he enrolled at Santa Barbara

City College, where he successfully completed several transferable courses, and then enrolled in a summer session at UCSB. He returned to UCSB as a full-time student in fall 2007.

Salvador began working as a student employee in the Mathematics and Engineering Program, where he organized local and regional Science and Technology Days, and participated on outreach panels to underrepresented junior high and high school students. Empowered by his success in this endeavor, he sought out campus resources, continued to achieve academic success, and served as a math and science tutor to a small group of students.

Salvador's graduation completes a journey that began 17 years ago and was fraught with roadblocks and obstacles. After graduation, he will continue working through the summer for UCSB's Mathematics, Engineering, and Sciences Achievement (MESA) program; serve as a mentor to the Santa Barbara Team in Training through the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; study for the Fundamental Engineering Exam; and pursue a career in electrical engineering in the Santa Barbara area.

Issued: 6/8/09;

Updated: 6/9/09

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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.