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UCSB Announces Winners of Thomas More Storke Award and Other Top Prizes for Outstanding 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.

- Adrianna Sylva Alexandrian, of Santa Barbara, is the recipient of the Thomas More Storke Award for Excellence, the campus's highest student honor, for outstanding scholarship and extraordinary service to the university, its students, and the community.
- Guadalupe Cruz, of Azusa, is the recipient of the Jeremy D. Friedman Memorial Award, which recognizes outstanding leadership, superior scholarship, and contributions to undergraduate life on campus.
- Nayra A. Pacheco, of Santa Barbara, is the recipient 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.

In addition, Alanna Peebles, of Fremont, will receive the Mortar Board Award, which is given in recognition of having earned the highest cumulative grade point average of the graduating class; and George Howard Jefferson and Nadim Nimer Houssain, of Moreno Valley and San Rafael, respectively, each will receive the Yonie Harris Award for Civility in Public Discourse. These awards, named in honor of the former dean of students, are presented to graduates who exemplify the principles of free speech and respectful dialogue, and who foster a campus climate of civility and an open exchange of ideas.

These and other student award winners will be honored at a University Awards Ceremony and Reception on Friday, June 14, from 3:30 to 6 p.m. in the campus's Corwin Pavilion. The winner of the Storke Award will also be honored at the Humanities and Fine Arts Commencement ceremony at 1 p.m., on Sunday, June 16, on the Commencement Green.

Adrianna Sylva Alexandrian, the Storke Award winner, is an honors student, researcher, and community volunteer with a passion for social justice. She will graduate with degrees in Feminist Studies and in English. A low-income, first-generation college student of color, Alexandrian is a Gates Millennium Scholar and a participant in the prestigious [McNair Scholars Program](#). Her faculty nominator cited her "outstanding interdisciplinary training, intellectual curiosity, public health research and volunteer experience, personal resilience, and mature dedication to a career in the field of public health, working to reduce women's health disparities in low-income communities of color."

Alexandrian's extraordinary service record reflects leadership roles in vital issues of education, policy, and health. During her time at UCSB, she has volunteered as a client advocate for Domestic Violence Solutions, a Santa Barbara shelter for women and children, and served as co-chair of End Fake Clinics, an organization that raises community awareness about crisis pregnancy centers by promoting advertising policies that call for accurate health information. In addition, Alexandrian served as the commissioner of public health and safety for UCSB's Associated Students Office of the President, was a student member of the Student Health Advisory Committee, and is a programming assistant for the Women, Gender, & Sexual Equity department.

As co-chair and external affairs coordinator of the Associated Students (A.S.) Food Bank, Alexandrian put her efforts behind a successful fee initiative campaign to generate ongoing institutional support for the program, and gave a presentation titled "The Impact of Hunger and Rising Tuition Costs on Students of Color at UCSB," at the campus's "Facing Race" conference.

Alexandrian's research interests complement and support her volunteer activities. The findings of her Feminist Studies honors project, "Restricted Choices: Childbirth Options for Low-Income Women in Santa Barbara County," advanced her motivation to research both the social inequities that shape women's reproductive health, and to design interventions that will enhance women's health knowledge and promote access to quality health care for women and her families. She will continue such research when she enrolls in the Master of Public Health program at UC Berkeley next fall.

Most remarkable is the fact that Alexandrian accomplished all this despite overwhelming challenges and disadvantages, not the least of which is 80 percent hearing loss in one ear, and mild loss in the other. Growing up in a working class family that lacked health insurance, Alexandrian recalls losing her home at age 10 and moving from a hotel to a trailer before her family found a place they could afford to rent. This experience, as well as what she describes as the "unimaginable loss" of her mother and sister to preventable health crises during her time at UCSB, have motivated her to serve her campus and community, and to create a legacy of hope for the future.

Guadalupe Cruz and her contributions to UCSB and the local community are nothing short of outstanding. Recipient of the Jeremy D. Friedman Award, she is described by one nominator as a "passionate, compassionate, and innovative leader." Cruz began her service as an active member of the Leadership Education and Action Program, and as the president of San Miguel Residence Hall. An impressive list of accomplishments followed, most notably, perhaps, her role in creating the [A.S. Food Bank](#).

Recognizing hunger as an unacknowledged issue for many students, Cruz used her extensive research experience to assess the situation and find a solution. With former A.S. President Paul Monge-Rodriguez, she established a fully operational food

bank available year-round. Now in its third year, the food bank has assisted more than 1,600 students. Cruz took her idea further, and with her A.S. Student Initiated Recruitment and Retention Center colleagues, created a student-run Book Bank that has an inventory of more than 2,000 textbooks.

After receiving her bachelor's degree in sociology, Cruz will continue her education at the University of Missouri-Columbia, where she will earn a master's degree in counseling psychology.

Nayra A. Pacheco, an undocumented student born in Oaxaca, Mexico, has demonstrated extraordinary determination and perseverance in overcoming unique obstacles resulting from her immigration status. The Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award winner, Pacheco has been a fearless voice for undocumented students in Santa Barbara, and a passionate advocate for immigration reform. When other students would have given up on the dream of attending UCSB, she worked tirelessly to reach her goal.

Financial hardship marked Pacheco's academic career, preventing her from living in a university-owned residence hall during her first year, and forcing her to withdraw for at least one quarter each year to find the means to continue her education. Despite these challenges, she is graduating with a bachelor's degree in the history of public policy with an emphasis in environmental studies.

While fulfilling her own aspirations, Pacheco helped others satisfy theirs. She served as the external affairs chair and as the advocacy chair of the student organization Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success (IDEAS). As an IDEAS officer, Pacheco worked tirelessly on immigration campaigns and issues, organizing training sessions, conferences, and fund-raising efforts. She was a leader in establishing an IDEAS conference for high school students, and saw the annual event grow from a dozen or so participants to more than 200 this year from around the tri-county area.

In addition, Pacheco has worked with Santa Barbara City College, the Mexican Consulate of Oxnard, and Casa de la Raza to educate local students and families about the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, coordinating a community forum of over 500 attendees, and three smaller workshops to provide assistance with applications. She has also worked with the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, the Fund for Santa Barbara, and the American Civil Liberties Union. She was coalition chair for a UCSB voter registration campaign, elections organizer for the

Third District supervisorial race, and a research assistant with several faculty members.

In the words of her nominator, "Nayra is an amazing student ... who is fearless, driven to help her community, and ... is an outstanding role model to every Gaucho."

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.