UC SANTA BARBARA

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The Best of the Best

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.

• **María Reyes**, of Los Angeles, 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.

• **Cassandra Olivia Nielsen**, of Thousand Oaks, is the recipient of the Jeremy D. Friedman Memorial Award, which recognizes outstanding leadership, superior scholarship and contributions to undergraduate life on campus.

• **Karely Hernández**, of Los Angeles, is the recipient of the Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award, which recognizes a nontraditional student's endurance, persistence and courage in the face of extraordinary challenges while pursuing an academic degree.

In addition, Dana Marin Hoffenberg, of Laguna Niguel, will receive the Mortar Board Award, which is given in recognition of having earned the highest cumulative GPA of the graduating class; and Kyley M. Scarlet, of Los Angeles, will receive the Yonie Harris Award for Civility in Public Discourse. This award, named in honor of the former dean of students, is 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 13, 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 Social Sciences II ceremony at 9 a.m. on Sunday, June 15, on the Commencement Green.

María Reyes, the Storke Award winner, is an honors student, researcher and community volunteer with a passion for social justice. She will graduate with degrees in Chicana/Chicano Studies and Latin American and Iberian Studies, with minors in education and applied psychology. A first-generation college student and the daughter of immigrant parents, Reyes was born and raised in South Central Los Angeles and overcame significant obstacles on her path to UCSB.

Having experienced childhood poverty and violence firsthand, Reyes has made it her goal to seek social change and bring about social justice to at-risk underrepresented adolescents and disadvantaged families. Her scholarship and service at UCSB have helped her give voice to the experiences of underrepresented communities. In her own research she has focused on the ways in which feminist reinterpretations of Our Lady of Guadalupe challenge the male-dominated discourse of the Chicano Movement.

Reyes has also collaborated with faculty members on their research projects, including that of Laura Romo, associate professor of education and director of the Center for Chicano Studies, whose current work explores Latina mother/daughter communication. Reyes was the lead trainer and coordinator for Romo's undergraduate research team. In addition, as part of Romo's work involving preschool children, Reyes collaborated with graduate students and elementary school teachers to co-teach nutritional lessons in pre-kindergarten classrooms. She also worked with Mary Bucholtz, professor of linguistics, on the collaborative academic outreach program School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society.

Reyes's community outreach has included mentoring high school students through Associated Students' Student-Initiated Recruitment and Retention Committee and enhancing the high school students' awareness of college opportunities, financial aid and campus life; tutoring sixth-graders in math and English as part of La Escuelita de UCSB; organizing the annual conference of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social; using her bilingual skills to help communicate with homeless adults at Casa

Esperanza; and serving as co-treasurer of the Chicana/o and Latina/o Graduation Committee.

After graduating from UCSB, Reyes will move south to the University of Southern California to complete her master's degree in social work.

Cassandra Olivia Nielsen, recipient of the Jeremy D. Friedman Award, transferred to UCSB in fall 2012 and quickly became a champion for students in recovery from addictive behaviors. With passion, initiative and long-term vision, she embarked on the challenging task of creating the Gauchos for Recovery program, and she was the first recovery peer intern.

Within the program, Nielsen has helped develop and facilitate Students for Recovery, a weekly 12-step meeting in which she assisted students along their paths to recovery by encouraging them to facilitate meetings. Through her leadership and innovative outreach strategies, she took the Gauchos for Recovery program from a three-person group to a growing and dynamic organization with its own space, several weekly meetings and additional fellowship programs.

Seeing the ongoing needs of students in recovery, she created innovative ways to engage that population with services such as study groups, carpool teams for the 12-step meetings and social gatherings.

Nielsen also has actively advocated for the establishment of recovery programs on campuses throughout the UC system, and she was honored as the distinguished speaker at the 2013 California Unified Collegiate Recovery Conference.

Nielsen's nominator described her as "passionate, creative and committed to serving others" and cited her greatest accomplishment as "helping students stay sober who may not otherwise have continued without her support." Through the creation of a sustainable support system for struggling students, the nominator continued, Nielsen leaves an important legacy that will help her fellow Gauchos for years to come.

In addition to her work with Gauchos for Recovery, Nielsen has demonstrated her commitment to transfer student success through her role as a discussion co-leader for Education 118, the transfer student success course. She also has served as a peer facilitator for Gaucho F.Y.I., a required seminar for all incoming students.

After graduating with her bachelor's degree in psychology, with a minor in applied psychology, Nielsen will continue her education at the University of New Haven, where she will begin a master's program in industrial organizational psychology.

Karely Hernández, recipient of the Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award, has demonstrated remarkable perseverance in achieving her goal of graduating from UCSB. While a senior in high school, she was left to care for herself and her 10-year-old brother after their mother, a single parent, was deported to Mexico.

While other students might have faltered under the weight of these circumstances, Hernández found energy and strength in her struggle to succeed and motivation in her commitment to care for others and the immigrant community. Recognized for her unique ability to take initiative and lead with her community rather than as an individual, she has positively impacted and empowered countless students — current and prospective — and their families.

While working toward her own goals, Hernández helped others achieve theirs.

She has held several leadership positions in the multicultural Lambda Sigma Gamma sorority. As an officer, she helped organize and host many co-curricular and educational events, such as self-defense workshops, academic nights and sisterhood retreats; she also served as a resource to other members by providing academic information and personal support.

In addition, Hernández was a passionate advocate for others through her involvement in United Students Against Sweatshops; as demonstration organizer for the "Hungry for Justice" event, during which students and community members freely and safely shared their struggles; and as a fundraiser for several local community organizations.

Recently, Hernández completed a term at the University of California Washington Center (UCDC), where she worked as an intern in the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy.

In spite of the obstacles she has navigated, Hernández has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to her education. As her nominator said, "She embodies true acts of leadership, service and scholarship that have made a difference in our community."

After graduating with bachelor of arts degrees in Chicana and Chicano studies and in global and international studies, Hernández will study abroad in Brazil for six months, then return to the United States and work until her younger brother enters college.

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.