

UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Feminist First

Five years after the first cohort of Ph.D. students began their graduate work, the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara will award its first doctor of philosophy degree Sunday, June 15.

The recipient is Carly Thomsen, who will move on from UCSB to a two-year postdoctoral appointment at the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Rice University in Texas.

Thomsen has also been honored with UCSB's Winifred and Louis Lancaster Dissertation Award for Social Sciences. Her dissertation, "Unbecoming Visibility Politics and Queer Rurality," explores the tension and estrangement among and between LGBTQ women in the Midwest and mainstream gay rights groups.

"It bodes well that our first Ph.D. is recognized by the larger academic community through the postdoctoral appointment and through the Lancaster Award," said Eileen Boris, Hull Professor and chair of feminist studies.

"I feel extraordinarily grateful to all the people who made it possible for me to be the first person to complete a Ph.D. in feminist studies here," Thomsen said. "Mostly, I thank my advisor, Leila Rupp. She's a huge name in the area of sexuality studies and she recruited me in a way that made me think we would have a stellar relationship. And I was not wrong about that."

Rupp is a professor of feminist studies and associate dean in the social sciences division of the College of Letters and Science.

Established in 2009, the feminist studies graduate program has three areas of emphasis: race and nation, genders and sexualities, and productive and reproductive labors. All are approached from intersectional and transnational perspectives, with a focus on social justice and public policy.

With more than 50 core and affiliate faculty members, UCSB's feminist studies department is one of only three within the UC system and one of only 15 or so at public universities across the country.

A truly interdisciplinary effort, the feminist studies program has faculty associations across the social sciences and humanities, including sociology, counseling psychology, anthropology, Chicana and Chicano studies, black studies, political science, linguistics, history, English, film and media studies, history of art and architecture, music, Asian-American studies, religious studies, East Asian languages and cultures, French and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, and Germanic, Slavic and Semitic studies.

"The significance of our program is twofold," said Boris. "First and most important, it allows for the production of new ways of knowing and interpretations and knowledge. The program trains students in mixed methods and creates knowledge that is not imagined prior to the making."

The presence of the graduate students also helps create a richer undergraduate program, according to Boris. "They're superb teachers dedicated to teaching," she said. "As they advance from becoming teaching assistants to offering their own upper division courses as associates, they share their new perspectives. It's one of the ways in which research and teaching reinforce and advance each other."

Thomsen, who completed her undergraduate degree at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota and her master's degree at the University of Arizona, has a few words of wisdom for the graduate students who follow after her. "For most of us who have gotten a Ph.D., we didn't do it alone. So ask for help when you need it," she advised. "And make yourself vulnerable in the ways that are required to produce new knowledge."

"The feminist studies department at UCSB has provided me with immense support, encouragement and inspiration," Thomsen said. "It's been an amazing place to grow into a scholar."

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.