

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

February 19, 2016

[Sonia Fernandez](#)

UCSB Chemical Engineer to Receive Presidential Award

UC Santa Barbara chemical engineer [Michelle O'Malley](#) has been chosen to receive the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). The award is the highest honor the nation can bestow on a scientist or engineer at the beginning of his or her career.

"These early-career scientists are leading the way in our efforts to confront and understand challenges from climate change to our health and wellness," President Obama said. "We congratulate these accomplished individuals and encourage them to continue to serve as an example of the incredible promise and ingenuity of the American people."

O'Malley is one of 105 PECASE recipients for 2016. The award recognizes some of the finest scientists and engineers who show exceptional potential for leadership in advancing scientific knowledge in the 21st century.

The winners will receive their awards this spring at a ceremony in Washington, DC.

"I am delighted to congratulate Professor Michelle O'Malley on this very meaningful and high-profile award," said UC Santa Barbara Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "The Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers is highly competitive, and recognizes not only the excellence and significance of Professor O'Malley's research contributions, but also her potential for future leadership and research

impact. It is especially exciting that this honor follows so closely on her selection for an NSF CAREER Award just last month.”

Said Rod Alferness, dean of UCSB’s College of Engineering, “Our congratulations to Michelle on this extremely prestigious, well-deserved recognition. This award brings great honor to Michelle, her department, the College of Engineering and the entire UCSB community for which we are very grateful. We are all very proud and thank Michelle for the extraordinary achievements that have brought her this highly prized award.”

An assistant professor of chemical engineering, O’Malley joined the UCSB faculty in 2012. She received her Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of Delaware in 2009, and two undergraduate engineering degrees — one in chemical engineering and another in biomedical engineering — from Carnegie Mellon University in 2004.

Her current research focuses on the biotech potential of microbes, which may have significant applications in the realms of renewable energy and advanced chemicals. Her most recent work investigates the functions of relatively little-understood anaerobic gut fungi — a primitive microbe found mainly in large herbivores — whose unique functions and enzymes may offer new sources of biofuels and methods of producing next-generation pharmaceuticals.

“I am so grateful to the Department of Energy for nominating me for the PECASE, and for recognizing the potential that our research has to contribute to sustainable energy,” said O’Malley. “I am astounded that I was selected for the award, and I can’t wait to meet the President with the other awardees this spring.”

The PECASE award is the latest in a series of honors for O’Malley, who received the Department of Energy Early Career Award in 2013; the Hellman Faculty Fellowship in 2014; recognition as one of MIT Technology Review’s 35 Innovators under 35 in 2015; and the NSF CAREER Award in 2016.

Established by President Bill Clinton in 1996, the PECASE awards are coordinated by the Office of Science and Technology Policy within the Executive Office of the President. Recipients are selected for their pursuit of innovative research at the frontiers of science and technology and their commitment to community service as demonstrated through scientific leadership, public education or community outreach.

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.