UC SANTA BARBARA

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# Ninety-nine Percent Perspiration

UC Santa Barbara's first crop of graduates took the Campbell Hall stage Sunday, June 5, for the College of Creative Studies (CCS) Commencement. Proudly referring to themselves as "the nerd herd," they celebrated their accomplishments with humorous and insightful speeches, original music compositions, special awards and encouragement from UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang, CCS Dean Bruce Tiffney and CCS alumna and guest speaker, molecular biologist Carol Greider (BA '83).

"The simple fact that I'm a Commencement speaker puts me on some sort of a pedestal, or behind the podium," Greider began. "And the fact that I'm a Nobel laureate would appear to set me apart. I want to be clear that I am also you." Greider outlined her experiences as a driven young scientist searching for the right field, and the series of rejections she received post-UCSB in her quest to find the right graduate program — rejections due largely to her dyslexia, which resulted in low test scores. She eventually found her place at UC Berkeley, where she went on to conduct research and make discoveries that would lead to the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2009.

Indeed, the quality of "genius" that has sometimes been associated with the high-achieving students of CCS is the result not of the occasional flash of inspiration (though that helps), but more the years of perspiration they put into their fields of study. Aided by their professors, the students embark on graduate school-style investigations, with personalized curricula and the goal of producing tangible results, such as published papers for the science majors, or musical compositions or exhibition-ready art works for those in the fine arts. Above-average passion and

focus are what characterize the CCS students.

“You Harry Potters, you Hermione Grangers, are all curiously disabled by being hyper-abled,” Tiffney said, making the first in a series of pop culture references that have become a staple of his commencement speeches for the last 10 years. “To live such a life would be like living in a closet under the stairs … to come to CCS is like having arrived at Hogwarts.”

But just as in those famous books about the boy wizard, arrival at CCS is not the end, but only the beginning, said Tiffney, donning his trademark wizard’s hat. He went on to refer to the movies that made appearances in his speeches over the last decade. This graduation was one for him too, he said, as he informed the audience that this was his last term as dean of the school before stepping down from his post.

Eighty-five students marched across the stage to receive their degrees from Chancellor Yang to the cheers and applause of family, friends and faculty. Of those 85, several received further recognition from CCS faculty. Timothy Aikin (biology), Claire-Alice Hébert (physics), Joseph Mann (chemistry/biochemistry), Ethan Nadler (physics) and Mark Ernest Rychnovsky (mathematics) were given the CCS Faculty Executive Committee Commendation of Excellence Award. Kuang Wei (physics) received the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research.

Many, if not most of the students have already been accepted into graduate programs at some of the nation’s top universities on the strength of work they did at CCS and the proof that they can manage the rigor of graduate and post-graduate work. Others have already entered industry or are on the cusp of doing so, choosing to intern, apprentice and network before launching their own creative professions. Yet others decided to go on a gap year to fill themselves with life experiences and explorations before diving back into their main passions.

But at least for the moment on Sunday, the 2016 graduates of CCS could rest on their well-earned laurels while thanking their friends and families for the faith, love and support throughout their years in the UCSB College of Creative Studies.

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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.