UC SANTA BARBARA

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Julie Cohen

Fighting the Good Fight

Only one commencement at UC Santa Barbara features a bluegrass band. In what's become an annual tradition, the Bren School for School of Environmental Science & Management graduation exercises opened with music by Brengrass. Their rendition of "America the Beautiful" was especially apropos. Dean Steve Gaines introduced it as "a musical tribute to America's environmental inheritance."

When members of the ensemble put down their instruments, the majority donned robes and walked down the aisle in the Michael J. Connell Memorial Courtyard to receive their degrees. This year, Bren graduated 92 students, awarding six Ph.D.s and 86 master's degrees in environmental science and management (MESM), each integrating science, management, law, economics and policy as part of an interdisciplinary approach to environmental problem-solving.

Chancellor Henry T. Yang told the graduates they would become stewards of the sometimes fragile and always precious environment. "There is one thing I want you always to remember and that is how you have helped our campus to become a better place," he said. "For that I say, 'Thank you.'"

Tom Steyer, founder and president of NextGen Climate, delivered the keynote address. Steyer's TomKat Foundation recently gave $300,000 to launch the UC Santa Barbara-led TomKat UC Carbon Neutrality Project.

In his speech, Steyer likened the Bren class of 2016 to the point of the spear in the fight to save the environment. "The Bren School has armed you with the knowledge,

the passion and the ability to change our world for the better," he said. "This will be a struggle. There are powerful interests fighting for the status quo, which is why you must remember for what and for whom you are fighting.

"You are fighting for the ultimate human rights, the right to clean air and clean water, the right to good jobs and healthy families, the right to hope for a better future," continued Steyer, who paused as he became visibly emotional. "You never know what you can accomplish until you try. Always take on more responsibility than you think you're ready for."

A student and a faculty member were recognized for their outstanding achievements. Leah Fine was awarded the MESM Academic Achievement Award. She in turn presented Bren Professor Hunter Lenihan with the Distinguished Faculty Teaching Award.

Following the presentation of the class gift — which consists of funds to purchase standing desks — Dean Gaines joined class chairs Tova Handelman and Stephanie Karba, Professor Lenihan, Assistant Dean Satie Airamé and Academic Programs Coordinator Casey Hankey in a dance to the tune of "Call On Me" by Eric Prydz.

Amanda Silver-Westrick delivered a personalized student address, "Working Together for Change," in which she thanked staff and faculty members and many of her classmates by name. "Bren students are a treasure trove of knowledge, experience and ideas," she said. "And collaborating with them has made me stronger, smarter and better equipped to solve environmental challenges."

Tags
Commencement

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.