UC SANTA BARBARA

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Jim Logan

Cream of the Crop

For their scholastic achievement, their extraordinary service to the university and the community, and their personal courage and persistence, three graduating seniors at UC Santa Barbara have been named winners of the university's top awards.

• **Yucheng** (**Stephen) Chih**, of San Diego, 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.

• **Christian Ortiz Gonzalez**, of Paramount, is the recipient of the Jeremy D. Friedman Memorial Award, which recognizes outstanding leadership, superior scholarship and contributions to undergraduate life on campus.

• **Cynthia Marin** 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.

These and other student award winners will be honored at a University Awards Ceremony and Reception Friday, June 15, from 3:30 to 6 p.m. in the campus's Corwin Pavilion. The 2018 recipient of the Mortar Board Award, which is given in recognition of having earned the highest cumulative GPA of the graduating class, will be announced at the ceremony.

Chih, the Storke Award recipient, will also be honored at the Mathematical, Life & Physical Sciences I commencement Saturday, June 16 at 9 a.m. on the Commencement Green. Graduating with a bachelor's degree in cell and developmental biology and a minor in music (cello), his academic achievements at UCSB have made him what his nominators say is among the most accomplished students they have ever seen.

One of his nominators, Stuart Feinstein, a professor in UCSB's Department of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology (MCDB) and co-director of the Neuroscience Research Institute, noted that Chih's GPA of 3.99 includes just one A-, with the rest being A+ and A grades. His coursework included some of the most rigorous classes at the university, including six quarters of honors organic chemistry, physics, upper-division genetics and a cancer/oncogenesis course. "This is nothing short of phenomenal," Feinstein wrote in his nomination.

Another of Chih's nominators, Kathleen Foltz, an associate professor in MCDB and interim dean of the College of Creative Studies, said one the most impressive aspects of his time at UCSB was working in both her and Feinstein's labs researching the anti-cancer drug eribulin and its interactions with urchin and mammalian cells.

Chih later picked up a second project in the Feinstein Lab focused on how the protein tau affects microtubules during the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Both Feinstein and Foltz said they expect him to be a co-author on a peer-reviewed paper on that research. He plans to attend medical school and become a physician/scientist.

Chih, who came to the U.S. from Taiwan at 16, has excelled as a mentor to other students as well, serving as a peer adviser, a tutor in the campus's Campus Learning Assistance Services, and as a learning assistant in both chemistry and MCDB courses. Outside the university he serves in the Santa Barbara-based Doctors Without Walls, which provides health service and more to the homeless.

"Stephen is the real deal — he is well rounded, smart, has a great sense of humor and is very kind," Foltz said.

Friedman Award recipient Ortiz Gonzalez, a fourth-year undergraduate double majoring in sociology and German, became a Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) peer advisor shortly after arriving at UCSB. Noticing a need to destigmatize mental health issues among first-generation and low-income student, he created a

pilot program that allowed EOP students to receive help in a comfortable environment.

In his time at UCSB Ortiz Gonzalez has served as a career peer, a Community Service Officer, a Student Resource Building Governance Board secretary and as vice president of Theta Nu Kappa Multicultural and Academic Fraternity. In his third year, he was selected for the prestigious Goodspeed internship in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. As the Goodspeed intern, Ortiz Gonzalez served in a number of leadership roles. He also led the Student Affairs Council.

In recent weeks Ortiz Gonzalez achieved a major goal: UCSB’s convenience stores will now accept CalFresh, known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Discovering that many students struggling with food security were eligible for CalFresh, he worked closely with campus administrators to bring the program to UCSB.

After graduation, Ortiz Gonzalez plans to study in Berlin, Germany, and pursue a career in higher education.

Whitted Award winner Marin, who will graduate with a bachelor's degree in theater, overcame a sea of obstacles in her four years at UCSB. She faced financial hardship, family immigration issues, death of a close family member and her own illness — all while maintaining a full course load, working part time and serving in a number of theater productions on campus. During the most recent spring break she underwent surgery to remove a failing kidney. With just a week's recovery time, she was back in classes for the start of spring quarter and ready to lead her peers as the costume designer for the "Spring Dance Concert."

After graduation, Marin plans to move to Hollywood and work for the company Street Lights as a production assistant.

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.