UC SANTA BARBARA

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Recognizing Excellence

Three graduating seniors and one faculty member have been honored for their outstanding contributions to undergraduate research at UC Santa Barbara.

The Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research for 2018 has been awarded to Victoria Melgarejo, who will earn a bachelor of art degrees in language, culture and society, and in Spanish; to Joseph Heide, who will receive his bachelor of art degree in sociology; and to Colin Kim, who has completed a bachelor of science degree in chemistry and biochemistry from the College of Creative Studies (CCS).

Professor Jeffrey Stewart, of the Department of Black Studies, has been recognized for his sustained commitment to developing and showcasing undergraduate research.

Melgarejo conducted three significant research projects in pursuit of her degrees, spanning several methodologies while retaining a core focus on Spanish-English bilingualism. Her yearlong study comparing representations of bilingualism television show "Jane the Virgin" to the practices of bilingual families earned Melgarejo a presenting spot at a prestigious sociolinguistics conference for graduate researchers, and publication of her paper in the conference proceedings.

A McNair Scholar and first-generation college student, Melgarejo has mentored Latinx elementary school students learning about linguistics research. As a peer mentor in the Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities, she also has helped other undergraduates advance on their own research goals.

In his nomination of Melgarejo, linguistics department chair Matthew Gordon described her as “an ideal candidate for the Chancellor’s Award.” Aspiring to a career in academics at a research institution, Melgarejo’s next destination is Stanford, where she will pursue a Ph.D. in education, focused on race, inequality and language.

A Navy veteran and transfer student to UCSB, Heide will graduate with distinction in sociology. He completed “a remarkable, self-designed, publication-quality honor’s thesis that employs computational science to analyze the changing character of the so-called alt-right in American society today … the first undergraduate honors thesis to employ computational sociology methodologies,” noted John Mohr, a professor of sociology, in his nomination of Heide. “The output is of publishable quality … [and] teach us something new and different that we didn’t know about the alt-right.”

Describing Heide, whom he mentored, as “possibly the best student I have taught in my 27 years as a professor of UCSB,” Mohr also cited his “intuitive feel for the material” and “clear but gentle way of helping to bring the other students along.”

Heide next hopes to pursue a graduate degree from a top-tier institution.

CCS graduate Kim is off to MIT in the fall, where he will study bioengineering. His acceptance caps off an impressive undergraduate career at UCSB, where he “excelled academically while immersing in research,” wrote Kathleen Foltz, interim dean of CCS and associate professor of biology.

Kim is a National Institutes of Health MARC (Maximizing Access to Research Careers) Scholar and an Amgen Scholar. He conducted summer research at Stanford that netted him second-author credit on a manuscript in preparation. Since his freshman year Kim has worked in the lab of Irene Chen, a professor of chemistry and biochemistry, where he made key contributions to a project on bacteriophages. He also is second author on a manuscript about phage methodology for the microbiome.

“Colin has top intellectual ability, enthusiasm, curiosity, creativity and technical skill,” Chen wrote of Kim. “He is already on his way toward a great future in science.”

Professor Jeffrey Stewart has received the Chancellor’s Faculty Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research Mentoring. Since arriving in 2008 to chair the UCSB

Department of Black Studies, he “chose to make the education of our undergraduates, and especially their emergence as research scholars, his first priority,” Vilna Bashi Treitler, current chair, wrote in her nomination of Stewart.

Stewart founded The Black Studies Review: An Undergraduate Research Journal, the first publication of its kind in the country, as a forum for research conducted by students in Black studies. He also revamped the department’s senior seminar to focus on research, resulting in published studies about environmental justice and racism, black entrepreneurship, and the built environment and social relations on the UCSB campus.

Stated Treitler, Stewart’s efforts have served to “reveal the scholarly capability of our UCSB students as knowledge creators, not simply knowledge receivers, in Black studies.”

“The curricular rubric for undergraduate research in the major is largely rooted in Jeffrey’s vision for the connection between inquiry, methods and writing,” added Stephanie Batiste, an associate professor of Black studies and of English, who also nominated Stewart. “The Black Studies Review has provided a goal towards which undergraduates can reach and a standard for them to emulate. Further, Jeffrey’s approach to research has rigorously linked the humanities’ disciplinary innovations to social sciences methodologies and rubrics emphasizing the complicated intermixture of these that constitutes Black studies as a field.”

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.