UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

June 15, 2018
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Future Thought Leaders

While most graduating students march to the tune of “Pomp and Circumstance,” those at UC Santa Barbara’s Bren School of Environmental Science & Management walk to the beat of Brengrass, a band comprised of current students and faculty. This year, the majority of the 71 graduates who earned master’s degrees and doctorates entered the school’s courtyard to the group’s cover of “Better Together” by UCSB alumnus Jack Johnson.

Dean Steve Gaines gave a shout out to Brengrass, led this year by now-graduates Cooper Tamayo and Amanda Kelley. Commenting on the band’s rendition of “America the Beautiful,” Gaines called the song “a musical tribute to our nation’s environmental heritage.” He added: “The words of this song inspire us to work diligently towards a better world from sea to shining sea.”

In his remarks, Chancellor Henry T. Yang told the Bren School graduating class of 2018 how special they are and that they are tomorrow’s leaders and stewards. “There is one thing I always want you to remember, and that is how you have helped our campus to become a better place,” he said. “For that I say, ‘thank you.’”

The keynote address was delivered by Bren alumnus Das Williams, Santa Barbara County First District Supervisor, who stressed the importance of “living your values.” That carries more weight, he said, with “people who do not share our environmental priorities.”

“You will be the environmental consultants, the business leaders, the nonprofit directors, the researchers,” Williams said. “People will look to you to be thought leaders. In fact, you already are.

“Do not buy into the cultural lie that a small group of people cannot change the world,” he continued. “This institution’s mission is at odds with that. It says, we can. A relatively modest shift per year can shake the halls of power. The hard part is that a relatively modest shift by society means a radical shift for thought leaders.”

Awards were given to faculty and staff members, and to an outstanding graduate for academic achievement, Gokce Sencan, who delivered the student address. Her speech, “Bren Community Lifts You Up Literally,” referred to the ongoing help she receives from a fellow “Brennie” when they go climbing together. Sencan, who hails from Turkey, emphasized that Bren provides a special community of passionate people who “try to make the world a better place.”

“Strength lies in community spirit,” she said. “Our small actions create a ripple effect. If we nurture our passion, we can achieve the impossible.”

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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.