UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

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A Seaside Celebration

It was a gray morning, but nothing could dim the excitement on the faces of those gathered for the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management Commencement Ceremony. In the courtyard of Bren Hall, colorful leis and stoles adorned the 88 graduates and the sound of acoustic guitar wafted through the sea air.

In all, 78 master's degrees and 10 doctorates were conferred.

"You will be tomorrow's protectors of our fragile and precious environment," Chancellor Henry T. Yang told the assembled graduates.

Steve McCormick, managing director of the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, gave this year's keynote speech. Among his varied honors and accomplishments, McCormick is the former CEO of The Nature Conservancy and a co-founder of The Earth Genome. Discussing the long arc of environmentalism, he noted that it came in three movements. "Since this is UCSB, I'm going to call them waves," he joked.

The first included the sentiments of figures like John Muir, and the idea that certain areas should be set apart from humanity to conserve their pristine beauty. Thus were born the national parks. The second wave came with Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring," which introduced the idea that our impacts spread throughout the natural systems. This wave produced the Environmental Protection Agency and legislation like the Clean Air and Clean Water Act.

Now the third wave has begun to crest with the realization that no part of nature is disconnected from, or untrammeled by, humanity, McCormick said. Likewise, human health and prosperity is directly tied to the services the environment provides us. We are beginning to see a surge of innovation and entrepreneurship intent on addressing the planet's growing environmental and resource challenges. "You have the opportunity to get on your boards and catch that third wave," he told the graduation class.

Master's student Danny Elkin delivered a humorous and heartfelt address on the experiences and skills he and his classmates have acquired during their time at Bren, both on and off campus. Elkin also co-led Brengrass, the school's unofficial band, this year. "Is Brengrass the real reason I came to the Bren School? Maybe not, but it didn't hurt my decision," he remarked. Elkin plans to promote environmental campaigns for nonprofits and NGOs.

Elkin and his co-class president, Molly Williams, presented the class gift: a wellness fund to promote social events and mental health activities for future Bren students. The class raised over $3,500, and the university's Health & Wellness Program pledged to match this year's contribution. In recognition of 100% student participation, Bren dean Steve Gaines and other faculty members donned grass skirts and danced to Hawaiian musician Israel Kamakawiwoʻole's rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

Amid much applause form the students, the school's Distinguished Teaching Award was presented to lecturer Emily Cotter. David Parker, director of career development and alumni relations, earned the Staff Excellence in Service Award for his boundless contribution to the school's students, past and present.

A surprised and gracious Vienna Saccomanno took the Academic Achievement Award for graduating masters. Graduating doctoral student Timothy (Timbo) Stillinger received the Student Teaching Award. His presenter, Alice Chang, thanked him on behalf of the entire class for guiding them through a difficult Earth systems class. He replied that sometimes explaining what it is you do is as important as your actual work. "So just remember how confused you were when you go out," he added, "there are other people who are just as confused as you were."

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.