UC SANTA BARBARA

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‘A Message of Inspiration’

UC Santa Barbara is pleased to announce that media executive, talk show host, author and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey will deliver the keynote address to the Class of 2021 at the campus’s special online commencement ceremony in June.

Internationally renowned not only for her many accomplishments, but also for her wisdom, her generosity of spirit and her gift of inspiration, Winfrey will address graduates Saturday, June 12, beginning a day of multiple virtual or small in-person celebrations arranged by the university’s schools, academic divisions and departments, as allowed by public health orders.

Current public health orders place restrictions on large public gatherings, so the campus is unable to host its traditional ceremonies. Even so, Chancellor Henry T. Yang wrote in a message to students and other members of the campus community, “we want to recognize all you have accomplished during your time at UC Santa Barbara. In this spirit, we will hold a year-end celebration with an extraordinary guest speaker.

“My wife, Dilling, and I spoke with [Winfrey] and invited her to deliver a message of inspiration in honor of our graduating class, and she graciously accepted,” Yang continued.

Winfrey is the chief executive officer of Harpo, Inc, overseeing Harpo Films, Harpo Productions, her television network OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network and the print and digital content of “Oprah Daily,” formerly known as “O, The Oprah Magazine.”

Winfrey hosts the award-winning series “Super Soul” on discovery+ and “The Oprah Conversation” on Apple TV+. She is an acclaimed actress, best-selling author and the recipient of numerous accolades and awards, most notably the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded by President Barack Obama in 2013.

Winfrey also is a dedicated philanthropist, building a school in South Africa that opened in 2007 and contributing more than $200 million toward providing education for academically gifted girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. She has donated $20 million to Morehouse College in Atlanta, and in 2020 donated over $12 million to various COVID-19 relief efforts throughout the country. Additionally, Winfrey is a founding donor of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture. In June 2018, the museum opened “Watching Oprah: *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and American Culture,” an exhibit exploring Winfrey’s life and her talk show’s impact, featuring artifacts from the set, costumes from her movies and interactive interviews.

To experience some of the pomp and circumstance of a traditional commencement ceremony, graduating students also are invited to participate in the campus’s in-person 2021 Grad Walk, which will take place during the week of June 7. Grad Walk will allow students to participate in a graduation processional that includes having their names read aloud as they cross a stage, and photographs taken with the campus lagoon as the backdrop. The event will be live-streamed so parents, guardians, families and friends can share in the celebration virtually.

Class of 2020 graduates, who were not able to have an in-person experience last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, also are invited to join the Grad Walk. Information on how to reserve a Grad Walk time and details about safety protocols are posted on the campus’s Commencement website.

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.