

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Charmaine Chua is named a 2023 Freedom Scholar

“You can’t wait for other people or hope that other people will shift the balance of power for you. We’ve got to do it ourselves.”

So said [Charmaine Chua](#), an assistant professor of global studies at UC Santa Barbara, in acknowledging her [2023 Freedom Scholar](#) award from the Marguerite Casey Foundation.

Chua was recognized for her leading research and organizing that nurtures social movements for justice and freedom. Now in its fourth year, the Freedom Scholars initiative provides a one-time, unrestricted award of \$250,000 to each honoree to advance their work. The foundation this year named six Freedom Scholars from across the country.

“I am incredibly honored to be selected as a Freedom Scholar alongside such a powerful and inspiring cohort of scholar-teacher-activists,” Chua said. “Receiving this award has emboldened and energized me to continue building our collective capacities to demand a more just world.”

Chua’s scholarship and organizing confront the global regimes of production and distribution that configure race and class inequalities, with a focus on how these inequalities are lived, contested and overcome by anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and abolitionist freedom struggles.

“This Freedom Scholar award affirms publicly and resoundingly what so many in our university community who know Charmaine already know: her core values, current commitments and future trajectory as an activist scholar are deeply inspiring and truly exemplary,” said Charles Hale, dean of social sciences at UCSB. “Her practice of rigorous scholarship predicated on sustained collaboration with frontline protagonists of social change sets a high standard for publicly engaged social science, and makes a compelling, much-needed intervention in the broader dialogue on the value and purpose of higher education. We are proud and honored to count Professor Chua as a member of our stellar divisional faculty.”

Chua’s interdisciplinary research focuses on political economy, postcolonial development and technological change, with a specific interest in maritime and hinterland logistical systems. She is currently writing two books, “The Logistics Counterrevolution: Fast Circulation, Slow Violence and the Transpacific Empire of Circulation” and “How to Beat Amazon: The Struggle of America’s New Working Class.” The latter, co-authored with Spencer Cox, examines Amazon.com’s corporate expansion strategy. Building on collaborative research with Amazonians United, the independent union, Chua and Cox discuss Amazon’s effects on class composition in the U.S. Chua also writes about and organizes around police and prison abolition.

Prior to arriving at UC Santa Barbara, Chua taught at Oberlin College, Macalester College and the National University of Singapore. She received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Minnesota, and a B.A. in English from Vassar College.

The Freedom Scholars awards were created in 2020 as part of Marguerite Casey Foundation’s commitment to scholarship focused on shifting the balance of power in society to those who have long been excluded from having it and benefiting from its rewards.

“The 2023 Freedom Scholars are at the forefront of teaching, researching and writing about shifting the balance of power in society,” Marguerite Casey Foundation president and CEO Dr. Carmen Rojas said. “Marguerite Casey Foundation’s Freedom Scholars award is committed to providing social and economic justice scholars room to deepen their relationship with movement leaders fighting for a multiracial democracy and just economy.”

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