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Four undergraduates and one professor receive Chancellor's research awards

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As the UC Santa Barbara Class of 2024 nears the end of their time on campus, four graduating seniors and one faculty member have earned special recognition for their contributions to undergraduate research from Chancellor Henry T. Yang.

The Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research has four student winners: Jasmine Gao (social sciences), Cole Grissom (humanities and fine arts), Guy Wilks (engineering) and Ashley Yeh (mathematical, life and physical sciences).

Simon Todd, a professor in the Department of Linguistics, has received the Chancellor's Faculty Award for Undergraduate Research Mentoring.

Gao, a communication major, developed an independent research project that nominating Professor Norah Dunbar said was "theory-driven, timely, and provided a novel approach to understanding relational cues on social media in the age of misinformation." She won a top paper award for her study from the Western State Communication Association.

Grissom, a history major, conducted research and completed an honors thesis centered on imperial women of the Roman Empire that nominating Professor Elizabeth DePalma Digeser characterized as “the best I’ve experienced in over 25 years of teaching undergraduates.” In the fall, he will move on to law school at Cornell University.

Wilks, a computer science major, built a novel and complex hardware-software system where software and hardware responsibilities can be migrated while the chip is running live. Nominating Professor Jonathan Balkind said the work “blew away my expectations.” Wilks, graduating one year early, will start a Ph.D. program at Carnegie Mellon in the fall.

Yeh, a biology major, led a project focused on retinal organoids that resulted in a first-author publication. In his nomination letter, Professor Dennis Clegg described her as a “truly exceptional undergraduate researcher ... at the very top 1% of the over 100 undergraduates I have mentored over the last 35 years.” She is moving on to Stanford Medical School.

Professor Todd was cited by his nominator, Matthew Gordon, department chair of linguistics, for his “productive and successful ... [and] prolific track record of mentoring students.” This year alone, Todd supervised three students completing an honors capstone project and has overseen 14 research assistantships. He has co-authored multiple papers with undergraduates, and has frequently invited his undergraduate advisees to present their research at his lab meetings. Todd also has demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusivity through his mentoring and teaching.

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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.