

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Campus never sleeps: UCSB Conference & Hospitality Services celebrates 50 years of summer programming

After commencement, as many UCSB employees checked their calendars to plan a vacation, Whitney Morris and her team are geared up for their busy summer on campus.

Morris, a '00 UCSB grad, is the director of Conference & Hospitality Services, which hosts an average of 120 programs, including professional and academic conferences, outreach programs, religious retreats and sports and leadership gatherings, just to name a few. Over the summer, approximately 17,000 visitors are on campus for conferences and events, keeping Morris and her full-time staff of eight -- plus 80 student workers -- plenty busy.

As this year's summer programming starts to wind down ahead of the fall quarter, The Current checked in with Morris to see how her summer was going.

The Current: The hosting and hospitality services you oversee have a long history with summer programming at UCSB — can you fill us in on that?

Whitney Morris: Conference & Hospitality Services is proudly celebrating 50 years of planning and executing successful summer programs. Our summer conference guests stay in university residence halls and apartments, eat in the dining commons, enjoy Campus Catering, and utilize spaces across campus, including The Club & Guest House, University Center, recreation fields and campus classrooms.

We host a diverse range of programs with longstanding partnerships. Groups that have called UCSB their summer home for decades include the International Association of Cryptologic Research, Varsity Spirit Corporation and the UCSB Alumni Association Family Vacation Center. On a personal note, I have been working in this office for 21 years. I started as a student, and moved to conference manager, to assistant director, and then became the director in 2019.

Tell us more about the regulars who are on campus this summer and what are some of your new conferences?

It's exciting to think about how many people we bring to campus each summer as well as how many repeat clients we have. Approximately 75% of our conferences return to UCSB every summer, including the ever growing Orange County Leadership conference with more than 2,300 exuberant high school students, UC-HBCU initiatives, freshman and transfer-student orientations, migrant education programs, and the Western Association of College & University Business Officers annual professional development conference. We're also thrilled to welcome new conferences like UC Riverside Science to Policy, Evergreen Community College TRiO Upward Bound, College of the Desert Upward Bound and Beckman High School Football.

How many of the conferences that you handle are related to UCSB itself and how many come from outside?

A little under half of our conferences are hosted by UCSB departments, while the remaining involve external organizations. This summer, campus-related conferences have included [HFA/Tuskegee University](#), Earth Research Institute's Equitable Agriculture and Environmental Management Training Program, Earth Science's PALSEA's working group to improve understanding of ice-sheet responses to rapid climate change, Marine Science's FUERTE undergraduate research institute, and PaCE's ISG-RH Human Resource Management program.

What makes you the most proud about your job?

My team and our work directly benefits the UCSB community. Summer conference revenue contributes to reducing student housing costs and improving residential facilities. I love seeing all the people enjoy our beautiful campus. We build the foundation for so many happy memories. It is a unique opportunity to showcase our campus to thousands of prospective students, many experiencing UCSB for the first time. Fun fact: two of our career staff members attended conferences that we still host today.

Sounds as if you're not getting much rest.

Managing a high-volume operation like ours certainly keeps us busy! I'm incredibly fortunate to work with a dedicated team of professionals and students. Their commitment to providing exceptional hospitality is the backbone of our success. With managing three 24-hour front desks, handling unexpected situations, coordinating the delivery of over 450 packages and tracking 324 lost and found items, they consistently rise to the challenge. Still ahead is a week-long conference where we'll be running the registration desk, sorting swag, distributing name badges and ensuring all sessions and evening events happen without a hitch.

What's your favorite part of your job?

We spend months working with our campus partners and clients to create experiences that leave a lasting impact on our guests and the university. There is so much anticipation, and then the guests arrive and all that planning and collaboration comes to life — which is the true reward. Suddenly a quiet summer campus is buzzing with activity and that's my favorite part. There is never a dull moment, and this keeps me passionate about the work that we do year after year.

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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.