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Winner of Second Chance round advances to Grad Slam campus final

Keith Hamm
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The stage is set for UC Santa Barbara's final round of Grad Slam, an annual event that challenges graduate students to finetune their research, hone their public-speaking skills and take home some cash.

Now in its 13th year, Grad Slam has always been marked by friendly competition and a wide variety of disciplines. This year, presentations have ranged from child marriage in Africa and homelessness in the U.S. to macrophage phagocytosis and explorations of the Earth's mantle, among many other topics.

The format gives each presenter three minutes and one static visual aid to unpack the details of their research in front of an audience and a panel of judges made up of faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduates and members of the greater Santa Barbara community. Presenters are judged on accessibility, organization, delivery and engagement.

"I love seeing our students on stage, explaining their complex research with passion and flair and making clear why it is important," said event emcee Leila Rupp, interim

Anne and Michael Towbes Dean of the Graduate Division. “It's a wonderful learning experience for both the students and the audience. And at this particular moment, when universities are under attack from so many angles, it is a pleasure to come together to celebrate the beauty and importance of research across a wide range of disciplines.”

New for this year, the competition’s Second Chance round, held on March 14, called in runners-up from preliminary rounds for another opportunity to qualify for the final. With her presentation on seaweed farms, Second Chance winner Michaela Sten, a climate scientist in marine sciences and geography, will join Joseph Farah (physics), Yuting Ma (statistics and applied probability), Lisa Månsson (materials), Alexandria Muller (education), Kirstin Rollins (molecular, cellular and developmental biology), Tiffany Ta (music) and Kylie Woodman (communication) for a shot at the campus crown.

“For many people, climate change is a huge, scary thing that feels difficult to understand and even more impossible to prevent,” Sten said about her research. “I cannot stress enough how important it is to present the science in a way that makes people feel like they have agency. I love my science, and I believe that it can do a lot of good in respect to giving people options to mitigate climate change. However, good science does not translate to good practice or good policy unless it is explained in a way that people find accessible.”

Sten won $750 for her Second Chance victory and $250 for her runner-up finish in the prelims. All preliminary winners received $1,000.

With $5,000 on the line for first place, the campus final will be held 4:30–6 p.m. on Thursday, April 3 in Campbell Hall. The event is free and open to the public. The winner advances to the systemwide UC Grad Slam, where the champions from all 10 campuses will make their final presentations on April 29 at UC Center Sacramento.

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