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2025 Grad Slam set for final showdown at Campbell Hall

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With \$5,000 on the line for first place, eight graduate students will showcase their research in three-minute presentations for the title of UC Santa Barbara 2025 Grad Slam champion. The popular annual competition will take place 4:30–6 p.m. on Thursday, April 3, in Campbell Hall. [The event](#) is free and open to the public.

The eight finalists advanced from preliminary rounds organized by research disciplines, and include the winner of UCSB’s first-ever [Second Chance round](#). This year’s contenders are Tiffany Ta (music), Yu Ting (statistics and applied probability), Michaela Sten (marine sciences and geography), Kirstin Rollins (molecular, cellular and developmental biology), Lisa Månsson (materials), Kylie Woodman (communication), Joseph Farah (physics) and Alexandria Muller (education).

In addition to the \$5,000 top prize, \$2,000 will go to the runnerup. There is also \$1,000 for the People’s Choice presenter, selected by the audience. The campus champ moves on to compete against winners from campuses systemwide at [UC Grad Slam](#), emceed by UC President Michael V. Drake, on April 29 at UC Center Sacramento. For her “Healthy Forests, Healthy Humans” presentation, UCSB’s [Kacie](#)

[Ring](#) (ecology, evolution and marine biology) won last year's People's Choice \$1,000 award and finished in second overall at the systemwide event.

"UCSB's 2025 Grad Slam cohort is truly inspiring, demonstrating their passion and dedication," said Anna Theogarajan, the division's director of professional development. "I highly encourage graduate students to get involved with Grad Slam, as it's a unique opportunity for them to take agency in their professional and personal development, push beyond their comfort zones and develop confidence in their public speaking skills. Grad Slam alumni say that the experience has given them an edge in their careers and landing their first jobs after graduation."

Theogarajan added that students can sign up for the competition throughout their graduate studies at UC Santa Barbara.

"I'm extremely shy," said Ta, who was a finalist in 2024. "But I worked so hard with my research. I really want a career in academia (and did not want) my shyness getting in the way of achieving my dreams. So I'm just going to work on it and take every opportunity that I can to get better."

The event, now in its 13th year, marks a milestone for Leila Rupp, interim Anne and Michael Towbes Dean of the Graduate Division, who will be retiring this summer. "This will be my fifth and final gig as emcee for Grad Slam" she said. "This is one of my favorite events because I have the opportunity to meet and interact with students from across campus who are passionate about the important research they are doing. I am always in awe of their courage and brilliance in getting up in front of an audience to explain what they do and why it matters."

More than \$17,000 in cash and prizes have been provided by local corporations and individuals, including this year's premier sponsor Yardi Systems Inc. Other sponsors include Carrie Towbes, John Lewis, Lopker Family Foundation, HRL Laboratories, Tri-Valley Trophies & Specialties Co. and the Santa Barbara Independent.

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