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Nik Belle builds community, creativity and code at UCSB

As he graduates with a degree in computer engineering from UC Santa Barbara, Nik Belle reflects on an undergraduate experience shaped by hands-on research, music and community.

A native of Tustin, California, Belle was drawn to engineering from a young age. “I loved building Legos when I was younger and always told myself I wanted to be an engineer,” he said. A computer science class in high school solidified that interest and led him to computer engineering, a field he saw as combining problem-solving with hands-on work.

At UCSB, Belle found opportunities to apply that interest across disciplines. His senior capstone project — building a satellite with a team of peers — was among the most demanding and rewarding experiences of his academic career, he said. He credits his professor Yoga Isukapalli as a key influence on his development, both as a mentor and instructor. “His embedded systems course opened up my eyes to what’s possible with the skills I’ve learned,” Belle said. “He’s given me guidance on many projects and career decisions.”

Belle also had the opportunity to contribute to research in Professor William Wang’s Natural Language Processing group, working on projects related to multi-agent systems and artificial intelligence. “It’s helped me see how the skills I’ve learned can be applied in meaningful ways,” he said.

Beyond academics, Belle stayed active in multiple communities on and off campus. He played club soccer all four years, performed in a bluegrass band called Birchwood, and regularly participated in UCSB's vibrant music scene. "Having balance is really important to me," he said. "There's something unique to learn from each hobby or experience."

Those experiences helped him build lasting connections, Belle added. "There are so many things to do in Santa Barbara and so many interesting people, making it much easier to find a community than other places," he said.

His time at UCSB also reinforced the importance of collaboration. "College has taught me how essential a strong community is," he said. "You can't do anything meaningful without a team that works well together. UCSB stands out because the students here really support each other."

After graduation, Belle will remain at UCSB to pursue a master's degree in electrical and computer engineering. Looking ahead, he hopes to work in environments that emphasize teamwork and impact while progressing on solutions to significant problems.

"I don't know exactly where I'll be in five years," he said, "but I hope to be doing work that I find fulfilling, alongside people I respect."

Belle leaves UCSB with a piece of advice that has guided him throughout his college years — a reminder from his father: "Be curious."

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