UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

June 10, 2025
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# Jaz Gates graduates with a mission to uplift

As she graduates from UC Santa Barbara with a degree in sociology, Jaz'myne "Jaz" Gates leaves a legacy of leadership, advocacy and community-building.

"I am extremely passionate about making change in the world and having a direct positive impact on people's lives," said the Stockton native, who has been named a recipient of the Yonie Harris Award for Civility in Public Discourse. The award recognizes a graduating student who exemplifies the principles of free speech and respectful dialogue while fostering a campus climate of civility and open-mindedness. Throughout her time at UCSB, Gates has worked to promote inclusivity and empowerment across campus, particularly for Black students and communities of color.

A course taught by Black studies professor Omise'eke Tinsley proved transformative for Gates. In "Black Feminism and Pop Music," she explored the intersections of music, identity and resistance — gaining deeper insight into the cultural power of Black womanhood. "This course not only opened my eyes to the ways in which Black women have empowered themselves through Black feminism and pop music," she said, "but also allowed me to engage in self-exploration and embody what it means to me to be a proud Black woman in a world that has been against us."

Through her coursework in sociology, Gates developed a deeper understanding of systemic inequality and the structural barriers faced by marginalized communities. "It pushed me to think more critically about how to make the world a more

equitable, inclusive and diverse space for all," she said. "My goals are to advocate for the needs of and be a representation for these communities which have been historically silenced."

Her commitment to equity extended into nearly every corner of campus life. Gates held leadership roles in the Residential Housing Association (RHA), Residential & Community Living, National Residence Hall Honorary and the Office of Admissions' Diversity Initiatives, among others. She was an active member of the Black Student Union (BSU), Untitled Dance Company and the Multicultural Center, and participated in Black Graduation and cultural events across campus.

"These organizations have allowed me to serve the campus community on many scales," she said. "They've shaped my values, developed me as a leader, and helped me find my place here at UCSB."

It was in her first year that Nic Nesbit, a UCSB resident director, encouraged her to connect with the Black Student Union. "I was involved in RHA my first year, but felt like I wasn't as connected to the campus," Gates said. "So I started showing up to spaces like Sister Circle and BSU, which helped me find a deeper sense of community."

By her second year, Gates became a resident assistant and continued expanding her involvement to help others find belonging. She has since played a key role in programs including the Afrikan Black Coalition Conference, IVRPD x OBSD x BSU Forward Ever Backward Never, and the NSA x EASA: Taste of Africa Culture Show.

"The best piece of advice I've received in college was to take up space and show up as my authentic self," she said.

After graduating, Gates plans to work at UCSB, serving as an assistant resident director for the undergraduate apartments. In the future, she plans to pursue a master's degree and a career in student affairs.

"Through my major and courses, I've gained knowledge about the systems and people that shape the world we live in," she said. "And through my leadership involvement, I'm equipped with the skills to serve, advocate and proactively problem-solve in any setting."

In five years, Gates sees herself working in student affairs at a higher level, leading programs that empower students, support underrepresented communities and inspire others to lead with authenticity. “I also see myself still dancing,” she added, “and inspiring those around me to pursue their passions.”

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Commencement 2025
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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.