

# THE *Current*

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[Harrison Tasoff](#)

## **Bren's class of 2025 is ready to face a challenging world**

High spirits radiated through the coastal clouds as a jubilant crowd gathered in Bren Courtyard. The school's bluegrass band, Brengrass, strummed chords as the graduates marched in. This year marks the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management's 28th cohort.

Exactly 100 masters students comprise the class of 2025: 31 in the Masters of Environmental Data Science (MEDS) program and 69 in the Masters of Environmental Science and Management (MESM) program. These budding scientists, resource managers and entrepreneurs are joined by 10 doctoral students.

In an exciting milestone for the school, Bren's 2,000th graduate crossed the stage this year, prompting a roaring applause from attendees.

Dean Steve Gaines welcomed the assembly to the celebration, emphasizing the Bren School's focus on practical and applied solutions driven by its students' ingenuity and determination. "We are proud," Gaines said. "We are excited to turn their innovations and talents loose for the next part of their exciting careers."

Chancellor Henry T. Yang shared Gaines' sentiment. "As graduate students, you are the heart and soul of a research university," he said.

"You have amazed us with your creativity," he added. "You will be the stewards of our fragile and precious environment."

## Remembering those we lost

Chancellor Yang recognized Emeritus Professor Jeff Dozier, who tragically passed away this past year. “I had the honor of appointing Jeff Dozier as the first dean of the Bren School.” Dozier was among the faculty who established the school in the early 1990s.

Words from Dozier’s close friend and colleague, Professor James Frew, brought his spirit into the commencement ceremony. Dozier was a “climber who just wanted to get back on the rock,” Frew recalled, but also a “true scientist that didn’t suffer fools.” He treated students as intellectual peers, and “most of his students and colleagues became lifelong friends.”

To honor his legacy, the Bren School has established the annual Jeff Dozier Memorial Seminar, which will feature prominent scientists who share his dedication to interdisciplinary environmental problem solving.

The faculty and students also remembered 2019 Bren graduate Mario Colón, who passed away this past year. “He reminded us that environmental stewardship is inseparable from social responsibility,” Gaines said.

## The next cohort of environmental problem-solvers

Former Deputy Secretary of the Interior and UCSB alumna, Lynn Scarlett, delivered this year’s keynote speech, in which she urged the graduates to apply their brilliance and creativity despite the challenges they face. “It is science, management and innovation [...] that will decide whether many animals survive through the 21st century,” she said.

Image



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Lynn Scarlett tells the graduates that their skills, ingenuity and dedication are crucial to overcoming the issues society currently faces.

“The world needs your knowledge and skills” to address these challenges in a system awash in uncertainty, Scarlett continued. It requires navigating a shifting social and political landscape by leveraging diverse networks of people who care about the Earth and an equitable society. Human societies are interconnected and interrelated, much like the planet’s ecosystems. “Nature itself knows no jurisdictional boundaries,” she said.

“Challenges exist,” Scarlett acknowledged, “[but] I have been inspired by the quality of work of so many smart and eager students who will shape our futures.”

## **Recognizing outstanding individuals**

This year, the students selected Professor Arturo Keller for the Distinguished Teaching Award. “This professor has left such a lasting presence on us,” said MESM graduate Tulsi Mistry. “He goes out of his way to support students, even when it’s inconvenient,” she added, praising the intellectual curiosity he inspires and the cheer he brings to all of those around him.

The Bren Faculty awarded the Staff Excellence in Service Award to Kat Le, the school's technical applications manager. "MEDS simply wouldn't be the same program without Kat," said Professor Ruth Oliver.

Marina Kochuten and Haylee Oyler shared the honor of the MEDS Academic Achievement Award. Class of 2025 MESM Academic Achievement Award winner, Thuy-Tien Bui, presented the Student Teaching Award to Zoe Sims, a teaching assistant who "inspires us to dig deeper into our curiosity and learning," she said. Sims also earned the academic teaching award this year from UCSB's Academic Senate.

## **Changing of the guard**

Dean Gaines announced his retirement after 15 years leading the Bren School. Throughout his career, the school's students and faculty have kept him optimistic, "despite the environmental challenges that we all face," he said.

Professor Ben Halpern reflected on Gaines' leadership, sharing observations and anecdotes. In celebration of Gaines' "completion of tenure as dean," Halpern hooded his former Ph.D. committee member with a blue fish beanie crocheted by one of the Bren doctoral students. Steve quickly understands problems and "shares his insights freely and with enthusiasm," he said. "What surprises me is he brings the same creativity and enthusiasm to administration."

Image



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An unconventional hooding ceremony.

Gaines also announced the retirement of Assistant Dean Satie Airamé, who is stepping down after 23 years at UCSB. To honor her deep love of birds, surfing and dancing, the faculty donned avian headgear and boogied to “Surfin’ Bird” by the Trashmen. Gaines thanked her for her “unwavering support of the school.”

## Peer leaders

MESM 2025 Class Cochair Rence Balitaan and MEDS 2025 Class Co-Chair Eva Newby shared their experiences of the Bren school with those gathered in celebration. When polling his fellow students about what Bren meant to them, Balitaan heard the same refrain: “Community.”

Newby recalled the class’s first-semester polar plunge, saying, “We dove into not just the water, but the world of environmental science.”



MESM student Sabrina Molina Ramos gave the student address, urging her classmates to dream big, lead boldly and take space. She reflected on how nervous she was joining Bren, and the challenge of working in another language. “I’m not talking about English, but coding in R,” she quipped. But she soon found a supportive community at the Bren School. “We had a group of 110 [...] committed to



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Sabrina Molina Ramos.

Ramos recognized that her class faces a different world than when they entered their program. “We are being told that our passions and dreams aren’t necessary,” she said. “Don’t choose to be silent; don’t choose to be a bystander,” she exhorted.

She also acknowledged the hard-working international students who now face an uncertain future, and her own mother and father, who worked tirelessly so she could attend school in the United States. “It’s a privilege to be able to pursue my dreams, and a privilege to dream big,” she said.

Ramos sent off her classmates with the advice, “Remember the person you were when you started this program [...] because the world needs more people like [...] you, the class of 2025.”

Brenggrass serenaded the crowd with “Wide Open Spaces” by The Chicks. Then the new graduates processed from the courtyard to the sound of classics like “Love Potion Number Nine” and “Wagon Wheel.”

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