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Postdocs awarded inaugural Graduate Division prize in excellence

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UC Santa Barbara's Graduate Division has launched a new award to spotlight the vital contributions of postdoctoral scholars, celebrating their excellence in mentorship and leadership. In its inaugural year, the [Awards for Excellence in Postdocs](#) honor two standout researchers for their impact as mentors, leaders and collaborators across campus.

Winning the Postdoc Award of Excellence in Mentorship, [Lauren Smith](#) is a postdoctoral researcher in the Froehlich Lab in the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology. As the first recipient of this award, Smith demonstrated a commitment to providing support and development for scholars at different stages of their educational journey and promoting a collaborative and respectful research culture that enhances the student experience. Kaamini Dhanabala, a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Chemical Engineering, received an honorable mention in the category.

The first awardee for the Postdoc Award of Excellence in Leadership, [Tamas Almos Vami](#) is a scholar in the Incandela High Energy Physics Lab. The award honors Almos for going above and beyond in his leadership role by positively influencing both the research and professional growth of his peers and for setting a high standard for future scientific endeavors.

“Postdoctoral scholars play a crucial role in research, but they are also teachers and mentors,” said Interim Graduate Dean Leila Rupp. “These awards reward the work postdocs do mentoring undergraduate and graduate students and taking leadership of the research process. Together with faculty members, postdoctoral scholars are nurturing the next generation of researchers.”

From nominees across campus during spring quarter, Smith and Vami were selected by a subcommittee of associate deans to receive the \$1,500 prizes.

“The awards represent an important step forward in recognizing the exceptional work and dedication of our postdoctoral scholars,” said Anna Theogarajan, director of Graduate Professional Development. “While we've long had mentorship awards to honor graduate students, these new awards fill a critical gap by uplifting and ensuring our postdoctoral community receives the recognition they deserve. The development of these awards reflects the collaborative spirit of our campus, bringing together the Graduate Division, Office of Research, and CSEP (Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships) to support our postdoctoral researchers.”

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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.