

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Emily Perez and Johannes Steffens

New library exhibition celebrates 20th anniversary of UCSB Reads

UC Santa Barbara Library is celebrating the 20th anniversary of [UCSB Reads](#), the university's award-winning common book program, with a new exhibition, [Creating Community Through Books: 20 Years of UCSB Reads](#).

Since its launch in 2007, UCSB Reads has fostered a shared sense of belonging by bringing the UCSB campus and Santa Barbara communities together to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time. Highlighting the legacy and impact of UCSB Reads since its inception, the exhibition features original promotional posters, selected books, custom bookmarks along with testimonials and images of participants engaging with programming from throughout the years.

"The library both symbolizes and embodies the intellectual community that binds us in our common educational enterprise as a public research university," said current Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost David Marshall. "UCSB Reads exemplifies the power of books — indeed, the power of a single book — to bring us together and create community."

Conceived by Gene Lucas '73 — then UCSB's executive vice chancellor and today a UC Santa Barbara Foundation trustee — the program is led by the UCSB Library in collaboration with campus and community partners. UCSB Reads brings together thousands of people every year and demonstrates the power of literature to bridge divides, promote intellectual engagement and build community.

Each year, a committee of UCSB faculty, students, staff and community members selects a thought-provoking, interdisciplinary book written by a living author that encourages a wide range of readers to engage with contemporary social, political, cultural or scientific issues. Past topics have included climate change, racial justice, technology, memory, identity and democracy. The program kicks off each winter with a book giveaway for UCSB students, and culminates with a free public talk by the book's author at UCSB in the spring.

UCSB Reads authors have included [His Holiness the Dalai Lama](#) (2009), [Piper Kerman](#) (2015), [Bryan Stevenson](#) (2016), [Ted Chiang](#) (2022) and, for 2026, [Michelle Zauner](#).

That impact is evident in the experience of Mohsin Mirza '16 who participated in UCSB Reads as an undergraduate student in 2016, when the selection was attorney Stevenson's memoir "[Just Mercy](#)," which chronicled his tireless efforts on behalf of individuals who were wrongly convicted.

"I think everyone should read the UCSB Reads book because you never know what impact a book can have on you, especially at such a formative time in your life," said Mirza, who later became an attorney himself. "It can truly change the trajectory of your life and your career, and that's what did for me."

"Creating Community Through Books," on display until Dec. 11, 2026, in the library's first floor Ocean Gallery, also includes the [UCSB Reads Browsing Collection](#), which contains copies of all 20 UCSB Reads books as well as materials related to the themes of the UCSB Reads 2026 book, "[Crying in H Mart](#)." That collection is located in the Paseo Commons, also on the first floor. All items in the collection are available to borrow and visitors are invited to take home the custom bookmarks created for each edition of UCSB Reads.

Tags

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About UC Santa Barbara

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.