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Sonia Fernandez

UCSB’s College of Creative Studies leads 2026 Commencement ceremonies

Seventy-four of UC Santa Barbara’s finest undergraduates are now its newest alumni, after crossing the stage at Campbell Hall on Sunday, June 7, 2026 in UCSB’s first commencement ceremony of 2026. Cheered on by an enthusiastic crowd of family and friends, the College of Creative Studies (CCS) students marked this milestone in their lives with a ceremony that celebrated their hard work, highlighted their talents and accomplishments and reminded them to take care of themselves and others.

“I am confident the College of Creative Studies has prepared you with the capabilities and the habits of mind that will take you on unimaginable voyages of discovery,” said Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost David Marshall in his remarks. “At a time when the value and the values of higher education are being questioned and the public support for science, social science, the arts and humanities is threatened, we look to you to be the ambassadors and advocates for the principles of a liberal education and a public research university.”

With a formidable combined portfolio of 38 original works, 11 published poems and 14 prose pieces, the new graduates are off to a good start. Joining those works are 17 concerts, seven computer applications, 16 first-authored peer-reviewed publications and 36 other peer-reviewed publications. If that wasn’t enough,

members of the cohort also participated in 58 small group art exhibitions, organized and showed in 36 group exhibitions and 13 solo exhibitions. In addition, members also presented 71 posters and 59 oral presentations across 28 international gatherings, while also completing 66 internships, secured 41 grants and led 13 student colloquia.

The ceremony featured several musical and multimedia art works from CCS music composition majors, including Lillian Wiechelt's "Performance Anxiety," Kai Jenkin's "To Sleep," Cameron Kennedy's "Chaos," and Hudson Rose's "Surfaces."

"I've watched you take genuine care in building up not just your own educational experiences, but the educational experience of those around you that will come after you," said CCS Dean Timothy Sherwood. "You surprise me weekly with insights about your work, about the nature of the world and our place in it and indeed the very universe. And not just how it exists now, but how it might better exist in the future."

Established in 1967, the College of Creative Studies' mission has been to recruit imaginative and driven undergraduates who demonstrate talent for original work in art or science, and give them the environment to allow their creativity to flourish. Students take classes within CCS and also in other colleges at the university, and, guided by a faculty advisor, create original works of research and art.

It is this environment of learning that led CCS alumnus and commencement speaker Ronald Vale ('80) to forgo the full scholarship he received to attend Stanford University and opt for UCSB's "graduate school for undergrads" instead.

"And indeed, CCS, with its specialized, personalized learning and camaraderie, made me realize that success depends on one's environment and not just on school ranking or classroom achievement," Vale said. Vale said. It's a lesson, he added, that continued to reveal itself throughout his career. After receiving his degree in chemistry and biology at UCSB, Vale went on to obtain his Ph.D. in neuroscience at

Stanford. He then worked at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., where he discovered a type of motor protein called kinesins, which move materials around in a cell and ensure proper cell division. Disruptions in the motor protein's transport process have been linked to diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's

disease. Vale is currently a professor of biology at MIT and a member of the Whitehead Institute, as well as a professor at UC San Francisco, and he holds an appointment as an investigator at Howard Hughes Medical Institute

In addition to congratulating the graduates on their accomplishments, Vale exhorted them to remember to be kind, as it provides a foundation for trust.

“In my lab, I have seen people who are personally invested in the success of others and not just in their own successes, are able to work together and crack really tough scientific problems that very smart and hardworking individuals could not do on their own,” he said.

The importance of one’s environment was a theme echoed in the speech given by student speaker Haowen Deng (chemistry and biochemistry), who came to CCS from his native China.

“CCS offered us something rare,” he said. “It gave us the freedom to think independently and the courage to pursue research and the opportunity to build close relationships with faculty and talented peers.”

For Lakshmi García (writing & literature), who also received the 2026 Sara Sterphone Student Service Award, the key to navigating the speed and chaos of the world lies in noticing one’s environment.

“We are graduating into a world that is rewriting itself faster than we can read it,” she said. “It would be comfortable to fall into a shape that someone else drew and call that living, but presence is not a small virtue; it is a form of responsibility.

“As long as you’re present,” she continued,” I promise you, you will become the light that flutters through the trees, nourishing the buds of tomorrow.”

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Media Contact
Sonia Fernandez
Senior Science Writer
(805) 893-4765
sonia.fernandez@ucsb.edu

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.