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Marge Perko

UCSB Graduate Division marks milestone year

More than 600 students in the UC Santa Barbara Graduate Division crossed the commencement stage on the afternoon of June 11 to collect their diplomas. The 290 doctoral candidates and 333 master's degree recipients represented the division's largest graduating group in a decade.

"As I celebrate my first commencement at UCSB, I am filled with pride and optimism as I witness the launch of this extraordinary group of scholars into the world," said Janine Jones, who came aboard last summer as the university's Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Affairs and Anne and Michael Towbes Graduate Dean. "It truly is an honor to celebrate their achievements and the limitless possibilities ahead of them."

Newly inaugurated Chancellor Dennis Assanis, also officiating his first commencement at UCSB, thanked "the parents, family members, grandparents, friends, mentors, teachers and loved ones who travel from near and far to be part of this moment. I welcome you to our campus," he said. "Thank you for providing endless support, encouragement and wisdom to our graduates."

The ceremony's alumni keynote was delivered by the Honorable Marc Nathanson (MA `69), a communications entrepreneur, environmentalist and public servant who served as the U.S. ambassador to Norway during the Biden administration.

Nathanson shared stories from his own educational and professional journey and public service, encouraging graduates to expect the unexpected, learn from history and nourish relationships made along life's long road.

"The bonds you cultivate will be your lasting legacy," Nathanson said. "Stay close to your classmates, to your professors, and prioritize relationships (and) stand together in a world that often feels divided. Carry forward the sense of purpose, civility and good will that you found here in Santa Barbara."

Alden Benjamin Lopez-Hernandez Jr., a newly minted M.Ed. with a multiple-subject credential in the Teacher Education Program, was this year's student speaker.

"I want to be able to express to every one of my fellow graduates that I am very much someone just like them who struggled and fought and persevered and had a lot to give and just didn't know where to go," he said. "And now I'm here. I'm very happy and very humbled."

Lancaster Awards

The ceremony also featured this year's two Winifred and Louis Lancaster Dissertation Awards, honoring completed dissertations that have made significant methodological and substantive contributions in their respective fields.

The Lancaster for Math, Physical Sciences, & Engineering went to mechanical engineer Alexander (Sasha) Davydov for his dissertation, "Contraction Theory in Control, Learning, and Optimization."

"I hope to bring new tools from control theory, optimization theory and machine learning to better understand them and design strategies for them to operate safely and reliably," said Davydov, who will next be pursuing his research goals as an assistant professor at Rice University.

A Lancaster was also awarded to technology management Ph.D. Sienna Helena Parker for her dissertation, "Retiring From, Working Through: Retirement–Work Orientations and Organizing Later-Life Careers on an Online Labor Platform." Parker will relocate to the United Kingdom in July to join the University of Cambridge's Judge Business School as an assistant professor, she said. "My immediate plan is to

develop the chapters of my dissertation into journal articles to share with my scholarly community, while also translating insights into forms that are useful and accessible to practitioners, workers and organizations."

Mentoring Awards

With the close of the academic year, Graduate Division also honored nine recipients of its annual Mentoring Awards: Lexxus Edison, an English Ph.D. candidate pursuing an emphasis in Black studies, is the sole recipient of this year's Carol Genetti Graduate Mentoring Award in the social sciences, education, humanities and fine arts; in the division's social sciences and humanities field, the winners were sociology Ph.D. student Sara Tyberg, philosophy graduate student Jon Charry and communication MA and Ph.D. candidate Karla Vazquez. Five STEM students received the Fiona and Michael Goodchild Graduate Mentoring Award: computer science Ph.D. student Parker Carlson, bioengineering Ph.D. candidate Renata Dos Reis Marques, geography Ph.D. student Livia Costa Machado, neuroscience Ph.D. candidate Elle Murata and electrical engineering Ph.D. student Indra Boving. Each awardee received a $1,000 prize.

"It is a joy to celebrate graduate students who not only pour themselves into their own academic journeys, but who also take the time to invest in the growth of those around them," said Anna Theogarajan, director of Graduate Professional Development. "They lead by example, fostering confidence, sharing their research skills and a sense of belonging among undergraduate students in our academic community. It's this kindness and generous nature that is a true reflection of the professionals they are becoming, and we are grateful for the care and dedication they bring to mentoring. It is an honor to recognize them."

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Media Contact
Keith Hamm
Social Sciences, Humanities & Fine Arts Writer
(805) 893-2191
keithhamm@ucsb.edu

About UC Santa Barbara

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