

UC SANTA BARBARA

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[Nora Drake](#)

UC Santa Barbara Information Technology wins Zero Trust Award

UC Santa Barbara has been named the first-ever university recipient of the 2026 Zero Trust Champion Award at the Zscaler Public Sector Summit. The award recognizes organizations that are fundamentally redefining cybersecurity in the public and educational spheres.

This accolade highlights the success of the [Secure UCSB initiative](#). Launched to modernize how we protect our digital campus, the project has catapulted UC Santa Barbara to the forefront of higher education IT by proving that a robust, modern security model can actively support — rather than hinder — a thriving research ecosystem.

It's also a testament to the hard work of our information technology organizations, which manage the massive logistical challenges of a modern university network. UCSB's network spans more than 400 connected buildings, accommodates more than 125,000 connected devices, and welcomes a highly mobile population of students, faculty, staff and visitors

"I am incredibly proud of our team for receiving this award, which reflects our efforts to be cybersecurity leaders within higher education," said Josh Bright, Chief Information Officer. "By embracing Zero Trust, we are going beyond just upgrading our infrastructure. We are protecting UCSB's vital research and its thriving campus community. Secure UCSB positions us to operate securely in our rapidly evolving

digital future.”

In early 2024, the UC Office of the President issued a mandate requiring comprehensive network segmentation and rigorous vulnerability management. Legacy methods, which tie security to physical location, simply would not work in a sprawling digital environment where most of the population is BYOD (Bring Your Own Device).

So the IT team leaned into the future.

Partnering with cloud-security company Zscaler, the Secure UCSB initiative, led by Chief Technology Officer Shea Lovan and Chief Information Security Officer Jackson Muhirwe, decided to implement agentless device segmentation and zero trust application connectivity.

“We are fundamentally changing how UCSB has run their network for the last 40 years,” said Lovan. “But with this approach, our faculty, staff and students will have access to the systems, data, and services that they need to pursue their academic or research objectives — wherever they are on campus or in the world.”

By modernizing a network philosophy that had been in place for four decades, the Secure UCSB initiative has done more than just check a compliance box. It has established a blueprint for universities worldwide, proving that a world-class public research institution can be both radically open and profoundly secure.

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.