



## Celebrating the successes of UC San Diego's most dynamic grads

### Grad table

This year, UC San Diego's class of 2018 will be having the majority of commencement ceremonies on Saturday, June 16 and Sunday, June 17.

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Thousands of UC San Diego's best and brightest will take the stage this weekend as the Class of 2018 participates in the campus' various commencement ceremonies June 16-17. The momentous occasion will be celebrated with laughs, cheers and tears, as the journey to earning a college degree can be an emotional one.

Students such as Matt Morris, Leon Sanchez Reyes and Anika Ullah pushed boundaries, overcame obstacles and gave back while making their mark at UC San Diego. From surviving a deadly brain tumor, to earning a doctorate while working full time as a police officer, and combing a love of science, art and activism with cutting-edge research, this year's outstanding grads are truly inspiring. Here is a sampling of their stories:

## Avid sailor overcomes devastating brain tumor to graduate

Matt Morris has always been interested in engineering and physics, rushing home after school to rebuild and re-engineer a 1973 Jensen Healey race car rather than playing video games. At UC San Diego, he's studied engineering physics, furthering this childhood interest. "I chose engineering physics because it gives the best foundation for understanding system level problems and the ability to branch out into a wide range of technical disciplines," said Morris. His other passion is sailing, and the San Diego native has participated in races all over the world.



*Earl Warren College grad Matt Morris (right) pictured with his girlfriend on a backpacking trip.*

In 2015, Morris started suffering from severe headaches and began struggling, including with difficulty retaining information in class. With severe audio and photo sensitivity, any light or noise generated excruciating pain. "I went to the Warren College Dean of Student Affairs Dean Khalfani still not knowing what was wrong with me and fearing my academic career was over," said Morris. "He was incredible and helped me with my course schedule." On the way home from a regatta—a series of boat races—he found himself losing control of his muscles and pulled his car to the side of the road.

Morris learned he had a pineal gland tumor. "When I went back and explained this to Dean Khalfani, I thought for sure I was done. Why should a university keep me as a student when it has ten students waiting to fill my shoes?" said Morris. "To my amazement, he said, 'I don't care if you come back in a year or ten years as long as you come back. If you can do what you've done with a tumor in your brain, let's see what you can do without it.'"

After months of tests and doctors' appointments, Morris flew to Houston to be considered for surgery he desperately needed. Here was the only doctor in the United States capable of performing this type of surgery, and the idea that Morris wouldn't be a viable candidate was harrowing. Luckily, he qualified and underwent surgery a few months afterwards. Recovery was a long road ahead for Morris. He was completely blind for a day and suffered severe headaches. He had trouble remembering and eating, even vomiting for hours on end. From relearning skills as simple as walking and basic math, Morris persevered to come back to UC San Diego after only two months. With the support of Khalfani and his professors, he was able to recover fully, even attending a sailing competition in Europe the summer after his surgery.

After graduation, Morris will pursue competing in other boat races in Europe. As an avid outdoorsman, he also plans on backpacking and camping through Iceland with his girlfriend. "Right now, I'm focused on aiding in the development of a revolutionary infusion pump," he said of an engineering project he's

working on. “After this point, I hope to apply the knowledge I’ve gained to make the world a better place through technology and innovation. Regardless of where I end up, I look forward to continuing my studies and pushing the boundaries of what is possible.”

## **Student journalist Gabe Schneider gives peers a voice with *The Triton***

When Gabe Schneider co-founded the independent student-run newspaper *The Triton*, he wanted the UC San Diego campus to have more dialogue around student issues, especially issues that underrepresented students are facing on campus. In less than three years, the initial team of three staff has grown to 60, with a majority of members being women and people of color. The staff ranges from humanities majors to students who study engineering and biology. “The Triton is very much an attempt to make a student newspaper that’s representative of our student body and of our community,” said Schneider. The Triton has become the University of California’s third-most engaged news source on social media, after UCLA’s *Daily Bruin* and UC Berkeley’s *Daily Californian*. In addition, the media outlet’s coverage has been cited by *The New York Times*, *Quartz*, and others.



*John Muir College grad Gabe Schneider.*

Schneider never dreamed he’d become a journalist, as he didn’t have any experience working with a newspaper before *The Triton*. “I think I grew into journalism when I started *The Triton*.” Now, he plans on pursuing a career in the field after graduating. “I come from a policy background,” Schneider said. “I’ve worked for several non-profits and political organizations. I think that I’d like to spend my life in the journalism field working to fix policy issues that plague our society.”

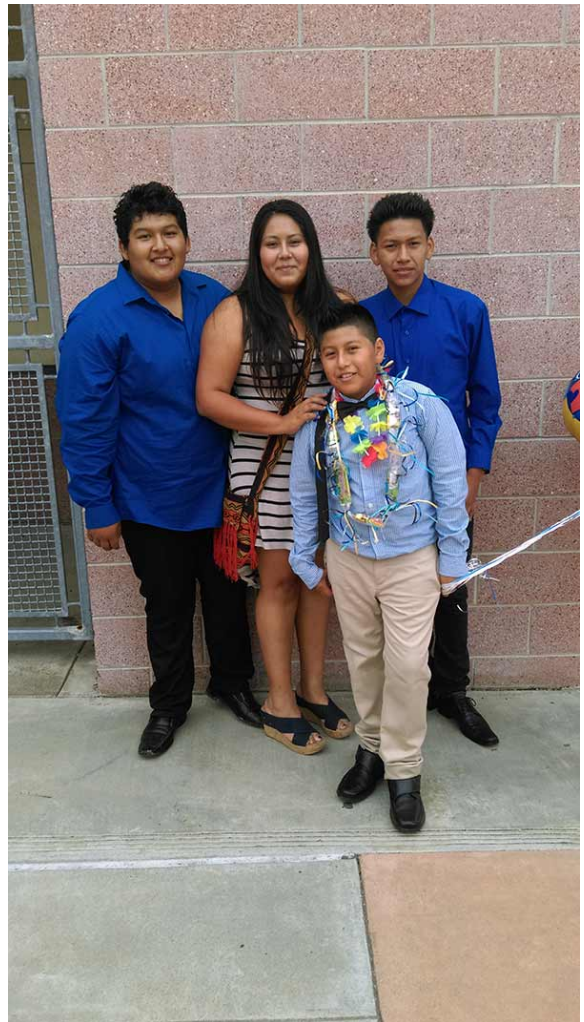
Graduating from Muir College with a B.A. in political science and urban planning, Schneider wrote his urban planning senior thesis on imagining local journalists as a type of civic infrastructure. “All of my interests merged at some point,” Schneider said of his love of journalism and city planning. “I came here as a political science major, but I think I was immediately fascinated by urban planning because I’m from Los Angeles and I grew up with a very distinct idea of what a city is supposed to be.” He added, “Professor Nancy Kwak’s class was my first introduction to understanding the systems of oppression that surround the development of cities like redlining. The major pushed me to ask myself how we can be more critical of those in power locally and the physical spaces that surround us.”

Schneider is currently deciding between job offers or graduate school in journalism at institutions that include Columbia, Northwestern and UC Berkeley. He hopes to work in nonprofit journalism and stay involved with The Triton on an advisory board, advocating for student, faculty and staff communities on campus.

## **Leon Sanchez Reyes perseveres to graduate, work and care for family after the deportation of his parents**

Two weeks before starting his first year at UC San Diego in 2014, Leon Sanchez Reyes' parents were deported. The immigration agents explained to him that his parents were going to be sent back to Mexico and nothing could be done about it. "I felt abandoned and full of anger. Not at my parents, not at the officers—they were only doing their job—but at the system for leaving four children without their parents," said Sanchez Reyes. The next night, Sanchez Reyes and his siblings met with their parents in Tijuana, discussing schooling and housing plans. Sanchez Reyes had secured housing on campus for his first year, but his parents and siblings had to relocate to Tijuana and then Rosarito. When the question about whether or not Sanchez Reyes would continue school came up, his parents and siblings encouraged him, the first in his family to enroll in a four-year college, to not give up on his dream of higher education. "I wanted to set [school] aside because I knew I would be the only source of income," he said. "I needed to take over my father's small landscaping business he had established in San Diego, but at the same time, I wanted to break from the cycle and earn a degree."

During his second year at UC San Diego, Sanchez Reyes, who majored in cognitive science, decided to move to Rosarito, and commuted to and from campus, so he could drive his sister and little brothers to school in the U.S., and help care for them. While juggling school and a full-time job, Sanchez Reyes had to wake up at 3:30 a.m. to leave Rosarito and cross the border, averaging a two-hour wait time, or longer, during holidays. He had to drop his siblings off at school by 7:15 a.m. and then head to work or attend classes beginning at 8 a.m. In between large gaps in his class schedule, Sanchez Reyes would have to go to work and come back to



*Sixth College grad Leon Sanchez Reyes (left) with his sister and two younger brothers.*

attend lectures, often covered in grass and/or dirt. Most days, he would not get home until 6 p.m., when he would squeeze in studying or homework before having to wake up early the next morning to doing it all over again. His busy schedule didn't halt Sanchez Reyes from exploring research opportunities though. He participated in UC San Diego cross-border initiative where he worked as an intern on mitigating trash and sediment that flows into the Tijuana Estuary. When asked how he managed to balance work and school in addition to caring for his family, Sanchez Reyes said he prioritized school over work, saying, "I decided that there will always be work; and I was not going to let my one shot at receiving an education from a prestigious university go down the drain."

Now, he is graduating with a B.S. in cognitive science with a specialization in human cognition. Sanchez plans to enter the workforce in the mental health department, becoming an Applied Behavior Analysis therapist to help children with autism develop better motor and communication skills. Sanchez Reyes has always been interested in giving back and helping his community. As a San Diego native, he's long been involved in a community organization, Latino Youth Council—now referred as ACE—a youth council to help change the perception of drugs and alcohol among teens. Moving forward, he plans to work in the private sector for the next few years and wants to return to school for his master's degree. "Family is my motivation, especially my siblings, because despite the drastic changes in lifestyle, they have not given up on their plans and dreams," he said. "I want to be their role model despite the difficult hardships. One needs to always look forward towards the ultimate goal. A barrier cannot define whom we want to be."

### **Fulbright scholar combines passion for media and medicine to help others**

Anika Ullah is graduating this year with as a double major in human biology and interdisciplinary computing and the arts (ICAM). The Fulbright Scholar already has an impressive and lengthy resume at 22 years of age. Combining her love of arts and media with her passion for medicine and charity, Ullah established the intersectional Health Project San Diego (IHPSD). "I founded IHPSD on the principles of using multimedia storytelling as a method for understanding and raising awareness for the issues going on in neighboring communities," said Ullah. Because San Diego is just 18 miles from the busiest land border crossing the western hemisphere, she wanted to bring awareness to UC San Diego students about the environmental, urban and political issues in the region that often seem much farther away than they actually are. "I always felt that we have a duty to use the things we learn here at UC San Diego to benefit underserved populations," she



*Thurgood Marshal College grad Anika Ullah.*

said. IHPSD works with border communities to investigate, report and co-produce knowledge regarding overshadowed public health issues and to mobilize collaborative student-community activism and problem solving. In just one year, their work has already been recognized by the San Diego Housing Commission, UC President Janet Napolitano and the Clinton Global Initiative University.

After graduating, Ullah will be researching the betel nut in Taiwan as a prestigious Fulbright scholar. Working with Taiwanese Vice President Chen Chien-Jen's research team and the Taiwanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, she will lead a multidisciplinary study on the link between carcinogenicity and cultural preparation strategies of the betel nut in Kaohsiung, Taiwan and Xiangtan, China. The betel nut, or paan as it's known in certain countries, is a fruit that is consumed in many areas throughout Asia. There are many cultural practices surrounding its consumption—a hallmark of entering womanhood, hunger suppression, a social lubricant, a pick-me-up after long hours of manual labor. Ullah had grown up seeing her grandmother eat them and had always thought it was a harmless snack eaten during Bangladeshi festivals. Growing up in a predominantly Taiwanese town and learning Chinese in school, she was interested when she found out Taiwan had the highest rate of betel nut linked to oral cancer globally, while China had the lowest. Thus, she applied to the Fulbright Scholarship with the idea of undertaking a comparative study on betel nut consumption, carcinogenicity and cultural practice in Taiwan vs. China.

When Ullah comes back from her research in Taiwan and China, she hopes to spend a few months next summer making a documentary film about the impact of climate change on women laborers in Bangladesh's coastal communities. In September 2019, she'll start her master's degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab. After that, she hopes to attend medical school and enroll in a dual degree program to also earn a master's in global health policy. "I aspire to become a physician-scientist, activist documentary filmmaker and global health policymaker," said the multi-talented student.

### **Police chief earns doctorate, uses research to free wrongly-accused prisoner**

As chief of police in Simi Valley as well as a doctoral student studying history at UC San Diego, David Livingstone strives to bridge the gap between law enforcement and academia. In working full time as a police officer and serving as chief of police for the last two years, he learned how his analytical and critical experience in the humanities could be beneficial in investigative and detective work as well. In fact, Livingstone's skills in archival research allowed him to reopen a cold case where an innocent man was accused of murder and imprisoned for nearly 40 years. Just last November, this man was pardoned by Gov. Jerry Brown after a new investigation proved he was wrongly convicted. "David's historian's skills allowed him to get the man out by proving investigative missteps and errors in the testimony of a key witness," Livingstone's professor and mentor, Frank Biess, said.

Livingstone chose to attend UC San Diego seven years ago for its proximity and the opportunity to work with Biess, an expert on modern German history. “My mother was an immigrant from Germany who had been there as a child during the Cold War,” said Livingstone, on why he chose to study West German policing, focusing on the border police, for his dissertation.

It was difficult for Livingstone to balance working a fulltime job while studying for his Ph.D. He had to commute 300 miles roundtrip while working on his dissertation and serving as a teaching assistant. “I suffered from a lack of sleep at times, but I used my weekends staying current with studying and grading...I also used the downtime in between classes to do as much as I could,” he said.

Now a full-time police chief, Livingstone hopes to use the education he’s gained at UC San Diego to bring the humanities discipline into the law enforcement profession. “Studying history, which made me better at critical thinking, which makes me a better police officer because I have to analyze complex problems and keep an open mind to many possible outcomes,” said Livingstone. “History and police work share many characteristics. Both fields rely on interpretation and factual evidence to find the truth.” Livingstone uses his humanities training to promote implicit bias training in his force, requiring police officers to read key humanistic works, like Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. “There is so much police officers can learn through the liberal arts and humanities that will make them better police officers. History teaches you to weigh the facts and to avoid biased judgments. Now more than ever we need police officers who can do the same thing,” he said. “We are asking so much of the men and women who choose law enforcement as a career, but yet we often fall so short when it comes to preparing them to make difficult, life and death decisions.”

In the future, Livingstone wants to teach at a university or community college level, but for now, he hopes to increase Simi Valley Police Force’s positive and transparent relationship with their community. “My seven years at UC San Diego as a Ph.D. student have done more to prepare me for the challenges of leading a police department than anything else,” said Livingstone.



*Simi Valley chief of police David Livingstone is earning his doctorate in history.*

**School of Global Policy and Strategy grad dedicated to eradicating human trafficking in war-torn countries and beyond**

Born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon, Ashley Halabi has always been aware of human rights violations in the region. Now as she's graduating from UC San Diego's School of Global Policy with her master's degree in international affairs, Halabi's compassion for helping the world's most vulnerable populations, has remained a core part of her identity.

While working with Syrian refugee schoolchildren in Lebanon, she was able to gain experience in field work. "After realizing that English lessons weren't effective for the young students, I developed a peace education program that was successful and well received by the students," said Halabi. "This taught me the importance of listening to the people we were trying to help."

Working as an intern for Physicians for Human Rights in New York last summer, located close to the Lebanon/Syrian border, she was responsible for conducting Arabic searches on social media to find videos of attacks against healthcare facilities in Syria and Yemen, as civil wars plague both countries. At the same time, she also worked at the Justice Rapid Response as a communications intern, compiling reports documenting the human rights violations committed against civilians in Iraq and Syria by the terrorist organization ISIS (Islamic State) and by the Bashar al-Asad Syrian regime.

While at UC San Diego, Halabi established Ceasefire, a student organization for monitoring human rights violations in war-torn countries. "Through this organization, I raised awareness on neglected and vulnerable populations and encouraged my classmates to engage with communities in need," she said. "I learned how to connect and engage with local NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and refugee communities." For her work with Ceasefire, Halabi was encouraged to present at the first annual Intercollegiate Convention against Modern Slavery at the Harvard Kennedy School. After her positive experience at the conference, she proposed to bring it to UC San Diego the following year as well, becoming the regional leader of the organization Collegiate Leadership in the Fight for Freedom (CLIFF) in California. "As a team leader, we faced many challenges but were still motivated my team to continue recruiting experts, survivors and student leaders from the U.S.," said Halabi. She led the second annual Intercollegiate Convention against Modern Slavery, which received wide praise and was even interviewed and featured on CNN International.

"As student leaders, our duty is to understand the source and the details of these trafficking networks, and then learn the different ways we can break the silence and raise awareness to save as many lives as possible," Halabi said.

Along with other research and job opportunities at UC San Diego, Halabi hopes to pursue a career in global business, diplomacy, nonprofits, regional development and more.



*Ashley Halabi (right) pictured with Alisar El Rayess, friend and classmate at the School of Global Policy and Strategy, pictured at the second annual Intercollegiate Convention Against Modern Slavery, held at UC San Diego in March of 2018.*



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