

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Erika Johnson

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Over 4,500 students attended the New Student Welcome Convocation & Lunch, the inaugural academic event of the year. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications.

Convocation Marks a Celebration of New Beginnings

Thousands of new first-year and transfer students welcomed as they begin their academic journey at UC San Diego

“It feels like we are in summer camp; it is easy to make friends” said Evan Cousar on how he clicked instantly with his Sixth College roommates, Bryant Dam and Ethan Sicoff. Among UC San Diego’s incoming first-year students, the three were drawn to the university with diverse dreams. As a math and computer science major, Cousar hopes to enter video game development. Dam is dedicated to making an impact as a physical chemist. And Sicoff, an aerospace engineering major, wants to design something that goes to space.

The trio took part in Convocation with more than 4,500 other incoming first-year and transfer students on Sept. 24, an annual event that welcomes new scholars into the academic community of UC San Diego. There were words of affirmation by campus leadership, an introduction to campus culture by Associated Students President Eleanor Grudin, a moving keynote by Biological Sciences Professor Gentry Patrick, as well as an opportunity for students to lunch with faculty members from across the campus.

Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla reminded students that they are right where they belong, and that they each play a key role in the university's historic expansion. "During your time here, you will see a great deal of transformation happening," he said. "Because of you, I guarantee you, we will be a better place between now and the day you leave. We will be there with you to make sure you are successful every step of the way in anything you choose to do."



Chancellor Khosla welcomed students, reminding each that they play a key role in the campus's transformation.

This fall, UC San Diego welcomes more than 9,000 new first-year and transfer students. The classes of 2021 and 2023 will be the first to enjoy the multitude of modern learning spaces, cultural centers and college living spaces that will sprout on campus over the next five years. Executive Vice Chancellor Elizabeth H. Simmons reminded all that this is a time of exciting progress for each individual and the university at large.

"This is a celebration of new beginnings, for you, and for all of us," said Simmons. "Convocation marks the start of an incredible period of growth and learning for students. And it's also an opportunity for the entire campus to feel renewed, to evolve. You are a source of new ideas, new perspectives and new challenges that will inspire all of us here to grow and learn."

She also emphasized the importance and fun in trying something new and getting out of your comfort zone. "Do something you wouldn't normally do; try out a subject you've never heard of before; broaden your horizons to make the most of your experience here," said Simmons, who shared that fencing is a sport she tried as a student and adopted as a lifelong hobby.

From Compton, Calif. to life as a neurobiologist

Neurobiology Professor Gentry Patrick was born in 1970 in South Central Los Angeles to a teenage single mother. Access to quality education was scarce—he was not exposed to neuroscience in school—and his neighborhood was riddled with violence and crime. Many of his peers succumbed to a different life trajectory. But Patrick was fortuitously connected to mentors in high school and college who set him on a path to success.



Biological Sciences Professor Gentry Patrick shared his trajectory as a first-generation college student to becoming a tenured neurobiologist at the university.

As the keynote speaker for Convocation, Patrick shared his experiences as a first-generation college student, and the many emotions that he experienced, including doubt that he belonged. His story centered on three key messages: access, mentorship and advocacy. It was access to education—a master’s degree from UC San Francisco, a doctoral degree from Harvard University and postdoctoral training at Caltech—that transformed his life. With fervor, he assured every new student that their acceptance to UC San Diego is the start of something great for their future.

Patrick said that it was the genuine commitment of mentors that helped him to counter feelings of fear and channel his energy toward innovation. The first two years of his college career were marked by a poor academic record until he was introduced to John Watson, at the time the only African American professor in biochemistry and biophysics at UC San Francisco. He began working in a laboratory, first washing dishware, then working his way up to an active scholar.

In 2018, Patrick created a new program to advocate for educational equity for students from historically underserved communities. Through the PATHS Scholars Program, co-led by Leigh Eck, more students have the chance to explore science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields at UC San Diego, changing their stories in the process. Patrick reiterated this message to the incoming class gathered before him.

“We see and hear each and every one of you,” said Patrick. “We are your partners who will help show you the extraordinary access you have here at UC San Diego. We are your mentors who will help guide your academic journeys in our classrooms. We are your advocates that will help clear the path ahead as you travel along your own journeys and as you write your own stories.”



Professor Patrick emphasized the importance of mentorship, and explained that there are a multitude of advocates at UC San Diego eager to support students on their journey to success.

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