

UC San Diego

# UC San Diego News Center

---

By Erika Johnson

Jun 01, 2017



*Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications*

## **All Campus Commencement Student Speaker Ricky Flahive Honors Common Bond of Setbacks and Success**

Everyone has a story to tell. Struggles and triumphs, setbacks and sweeping successes. It is human experience that motivates this year's UC San Diego All Campus Commencement student speaker, Richard "Ricky" Flahive, a peer mentor and aspiring community leader whose own narrative is one of happy persistence despite countless hurdles. As a first-generation, low-income student who wasn't sure he would even graduate high school, Flahive had to restart multiple times to defy the odds.

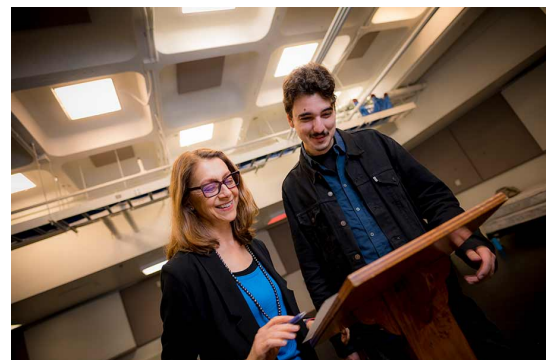
“I am excited and also terrified—but in a great way,” said Flahive on being this year’s undergraduate speaker. “It is beyond my wildest dreams and expectations to share the stage with the Dalai Lama. I am very humbled, considering I didn’t always see myself going to college.”

The All Campus Commencement celebration will be held at 9 a.m. on Saturday, June 17 at RIMAC Field. At the ceremony, Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla will officially confer degrees by academic division upon more than 9,000 graduates gathered as one student body from all across campus. The event will feature a keynote address by His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, who will speak on the topic of “The Value of Education, Ethics and Compassion for the Well-Being of Self and Others.”

With a childhood that included living in a motel for seven years, Flahive largely missed out on elementary school—attending second and third grades, then not consistently again until the last three months of sixth grade. Later, at San Diego City College, he made up for lost time, becoming immersed in student support programs like the First Year Experience program. He was pushed to do better, get involved and believe he was capable of achieving anything. He was on the Dean’s List his last two years before transferring to UC San Diego.

For the past several weeks, he has been preparing his speech with guidance from Eva Barnes, a professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. “He is a hardworking and joyful person, and that comes out in his speech,” remarked Barnes, who has helped Flahive convey a message that is personal and from the heart. “He has a compelling story to tell, a personal message of perseverance through hardships to make your dreams a reality.”

During the past three years at UC San Diego, Flahive developed his passion for peer mentoring and advocating for transfer students. He became a student counselor for incoming first-generation, low-income students with the TRIO Student Support Services Program, led the All Campus Transfer Association as president, served as an Associated Students senator and held numerous orientation leader positions at Muir College.



“Students seem to gravitate to Ricky because of his sincerity, maturity and contagious enthusiasm,” said Dean of Student Affairs at Muir College Patty Mahaffey, who has worked with Flahive in his student leadership roles over the past two years. “Through his dedication to enriching the student experience and sharing his own story, he has inspired other transfer students to be engaged meaningfully with the campus community.”

Connecting with peers on a deep level is important to Flahive. He is fascinated by each unique life chronicle, whether a tale of hardship or happiness. Regardless, he makes himself available for conversations with new students. “I am an open pair of ears,” he said. “I check in, find out what’s going

on in life, how students are doing beyond the surface.”

Flahive will earn degrees in both political science and sociology. These fields have influenced his desire to explore and make positive changes to educational pathways, especially for first-generation and low-income students. Also a theater minor, Flahive has a passion for performance art as an expressive outlet. He is involved with Triton TV, and has starred in numerous short films. Next week, he will take part in his first live performance as part of MENDing Monologues, a space for men to take a stand against gender violence through sharing their stories.

In addition to delivering the All Campus Commencement student speech, Flahive was also chosen to speak at the Muir College commencement ceremony. At both events he wishes to convey the beauty in overcoming obstacles, honor the unique journey of each individual and celebrate the shared bonds that all students at UC San Diego have in achieving academic goals.

Flahive’s goal after graduation is to develop and lead a student success program. First, he will help coordinate the peer mentor program this summer for a new pilot program called Preparing Accomplished Transfers to the Humanities (PATH). A collaboration between UC San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities and the San Diego Community College District, the program provides guidance and peer mentors to transferring community college students who plan to study humanities.

In the long term, Flahive plans to attend graduate school to pursue a doctoral degree in sociology to study educational pathways, poverty and crime and its connection to music and the arts. He would like to be an educator and local change maker while working to impact the world through elected office.

“My identity at UC San Diego has been defined by being a first-generation transfer student; I want to advocate for these communities,” explained Flahive. “I’d like to utilize knowledge of educational pathways to implement positive changes as a community leader.”

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*