

Dean of Graduate Studies Highlights Value of Graduate Students to University's Academic Mission



Kim Barrett was recently reappointed Dean of Graduate Studies after a successful five-year term providing outstanding leadership and making significant contributions to promoting the highest standards of excellence in graduate education at UC San Diego. As dean, Barrett oversees all academic and non-academic aspects of graduate education at UC San Diego, with responsibility for more than 4,000 graduate students.

Barrett, a native of the United Kingdom, obtained her B.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees from the Department of Chemistry at University College London. Following a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, she joined the faculty of the UC San Diego School of Medicine in 1985.

“What I liked immediately about UC San Diego was that there are very few barriers,” Barrett said. “People are interested in collaborating with each other. They want to work together to create interdisciplinary research.”

The number of graduate students at UC San Diego has steadily increased since Barrett has been dean and it's essential to the university that the number continues to grow, Barrett said.

“Graduate students are incredibly important to universities. Our students are in the trenches doing the research and collaborating with different academic departments to come up with innovative ideas that, in-turn, can attract research grants,” Barrett said. “Ideas that spur grant proposals often come from the collaborative efforts between graduate students and their advisors. And in order to attract research funds, you need to have preliminary data and graduate students often gather the data that allow advisors to write proposals.”

Barrett has been working with Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Suresh Subramani on a plan to grow the size of UC San Diego's graduate student population from 15 percent currently to at least 25 percent of the university's overall student population in the next decade.

“Outstanding graduate students are vital to a university's quality, reputation and capabilities,” said Subramani. “Achieving this goal will require an expanded commitment to fundraising for graduate fellowship support. Barrett has played an integral role in the Invent the Future Student Support Campaign, which raises essential funds to advance the university's effort to grow UC San Diego's graduate student population.”

The Invent the Future campaign was launched in 2009, and since then, more than \$28 million has been raised to support student scholarships and fellowships.

According to Barrett, graduate students, in addition to their contributions to the UC San Diego campus, have a tremendous impact on our local economy.

“These students add to San Diego's skilled workforce,” Barrett said. “Students studying in fields, such as engineering and life sciences often get lucrative offers from San Diego's high tech companies even before they graduate. These local companies need employees with these skills to continue to thrive.”

In addition to her duties as Dean of Graduate Studies, Barrett is an internationally recognized physiologist, well known for her research in abnormal biology of the intestinal epithelium and its relevance to a variety of digestive diseases.

Barrett is highly active in professional societies and in scholarly editing. She is also the author or editor of several books and monographs and almost 200 peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and reviews.

Barrett teaches a variety of School of Medicine courses in addition to mentoring a diverse range of students.

“It’s great to teach graduate students; it makes you understand the material better,” she said. “Our students raise such smart questions. We have such bright students. They really inspire me.”

She serves as a member of the Graduate Council of the Academic Senate, oversees the Center for Teaching Development, and coordinates the reviews of individual graduate programs.

As researchers in Barrett’s lab, graduate students Harrison Penrose and Taylaur Smith have found Barrett’s mentorship and support incredibly helpful. “Without any hands on research experience, it’s tough to excel in the science world,” said Penrose. “Dean Barrett was so welcoming that I decided to join her lab where I am getting the experience I need for my career.”

Both Penrose and Smith study aspects of intestinal barrier function associated with inflammatory bowel disease.

“She gives great guidance, yet she promotes your own learning and developing your own research,” Smith said. “She is also the busiest person I know, but she is there for her students 100 percent.”

Barrett strives to keep UC San Diego’s graduate programs at the highest level of academic excellence while providing graduate students with professional skills they can apply outside the classroom.

“Not every student plans on going into academia after they obtain their doctorate,” Barrett said. “We design programs that are scholarly intense, yet they give students skills very applicable in the professional world. We enhance students’ communication and financial management skills.”

Barrett said she is thrilled to embark on another five-year term as Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies.

“There are so many students here doing amazing things,” Barrett said. “The knowledge base and mind-set of innovation at UC San Diego are amazing. Students here are very optimistic and they want to accomplish so much. They want to change the world; they really want to make life better for everyone.”

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