

History Graduation Celebration Remarks

I came to UCSC wanting to be a history major. And yet, I don't think I knew what it meant to study history in college. As a high schooler, I decided I would be good at it because I've always liked to learn about the past and I'm pretty good at memorizing things. Now, as a graduate of UCSC's history program, I find it funny to look back on what an 18 year old me thought were the attributes that made someone well suited to study history because my understanding of that has changed so much over the years.

UCSC has shown me that someone that is well suited to study history is a person who is excited by the complexities and contradictions of the past, someone with an interest in analysis and critical thinking, and someone who is committed to backing up their arguments with well organized evidence and presenting them in an intelligible and concise manner.

Before coming to UCSC and before becoming part of this history program, I would have never seen myself as someone with those attributes. It is because of the faculty and staff of this program that I can now confidently stand up here and say and believe that I am that kind of person. The professors here at UCSC have taught and guided me. They have believed in me and my abilities and have supported me in pursuing new and somewhat daunting projects.

Winter quarter this year, I walked into Greg O'Malley's office and said "I think I want to do an independent study. I think on Jamaica" and without much further persuasion he signed onto advise me. A week later I walked into Stephanie Sawyer's office and said "I want to do an independent study on Jamaica" and again without much further explanation she signed off on it. I truly cannot say how much being in an environment where undergraduates are so believed in and supported has meant to me and how much it has expanded what I see as possible for myself. While I think in many ways my experience here has been unique, I also believe that the commitment that the professors here have to teaching undergraduates has really had a huge impact on all of us. I am very grateful to have been able to learn in this environment and I feel like we, as students, have been lucky.

And yet, I stand up here truly terrified of what the future might hold. There is so much uncertainty that comes with graduation. Right now we could all do anything. We could be teachers or lawyers or musicians or cooks. The number of directions our lives can go from this point and the pressure to choose one of these directions is overwhelming. But I've been trying to, in order to keep myself calm, think about all the skills we have gained over the last four years.

As history majors, we've all put in so much time and effort learning how to best articulate ourselves and how to best present an argument, learning to value different perspectives and to understand and be comfortable with the complexities of life and of the past. Now we have the opportunity to go out into the world and use these skills to advocate for ourselves and for others, to approach situations thoughtfully and respectfully and with an understanding that real knowledge only comes from analyzing things with a critical and flexible perspective. To me knowing that I have these skills and that all of my fellow history graduates are leaving UCSC and going out into the world with these skills makes the uncertainty of the future and of graduation seem exciting and powerful and momentous. As a freshman, I would have never thought that this is what it meant to be a history major and I am leaving here so thankful and excited to know that it is.

Congratulations to all of the graduates and thank you to all of the faculty and staff!