

Office of the President

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of September 18, 2024

**UC GRAD SLAM: MAKING UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RESEARCH
ACCESSIBLE TO ALL**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UC campuses address the professional development needs of their graduate students in various ways. This item highlights one particular effort, UC Grad Slam, which exemplifies a professional development opportunity that is offered across the system. Grad Slam is a research communication and professional development opportunity for graduate students designed to make their work, its purpose and its value accessible to the public. In this tournament-style competition, graduate students showcase their ability to present their research in three minutes in a way that enlightens and entertains a general audience. The annual UC Grad Slam features winners from each of UC's ten campuses competing for the systemwide prize.

This item supports the 2023 Regents Task Force on Institutional Growth recommendations for the University, by 2050, to advance UC's academic and research excellence and apply thought leadership to California's biggest challenges.

BACKGROUND

UC Grad Slam

Earning a Ph.D. has traditionally been closely aligned with careers in academia. However, UC's historic placement data attest to the fact that UC doctoral recipients have long pursued careers across a broad range of sectors. It is important that UC's academic doctoral education ensure the professional readiness of its students for the wide range of opportunities afforded by a globalized society.

All campuses share in the commitment to provide resources to support diverse careers and help students develop the critical skillset necessary for success. These careers build on and leverage the expertise acquired as part of a doctoral education. UC's campuses have been responding to changes in the national employment landscape for higher education and to the expressed interests and requests of Ph.D. students. That priority is being met in a variety of ways by initiatives involving university administrators, faculty and staff, graduate student leaders, alumni, business

and industry representatives, and local community members. UC Grad Slam has proven to be a valuable element of professional development.

UC Grad Slam is a fast-paced research communication competition that showcases research of master's and doctoral students from across UC campuses. Grad Slam helps elevate the value and impact of research, while also supporting student development. The competition and enhanced professional development training leading up to it help students develop many valuable skills. Some are integrated into curricular aspects of degree programs, while others align with key co-curricular benefits for students. Most notably, students gain important presentation and public speaking skills. They also improve their abilities, specifically communicating research to a non-specialist audience. Students also gain insightful perspective about their research. These are skills that will serve them well in all sorts of professions, including academia. Participation in the training sessions and competitions give students useful networking opportunities with their peers from various disciplines as well as with the broader University community and the public. It provides an avenue for their research to be shared with those outside of their academic area, which can facilitate other engagement and opportunities. Exposure from the competition has given some students opportunities to write articles in popular magazines, provide media interviews, and serve as consultants or contributors to various organizations and government agencies.

While Grad Slam has proven to be a valuable resource, there are challenges in maximizing the impact for more students, particularly facilitating greater participation of students from non-STEM disciplines. STEM disciplines have been well represented in these types of presentations, and campuses are working to find ways to engage more faculty and students from the social sciences and especially the arts and humanities, which have the fewest number of participants in the competitions. Given the significant value of the skills being developed, campuses want to do more to make sure students from all disciplines are taking advantage of this useful opportunity. Graduate divisions are creatively working to shift the culture of academic programs and disciplines currently not actively engaged in this professional development opportunity to be more receptive toward it.

A Best Practice Applied Systemwide

For UC, Grad Slam provides an opportunity to reach a broad audience and promote and publicize the remarkable work of its graduate students. It is an example of UC's effectiveness in identifying and expanding best practices throughout the system. In 2012–13, UC Santa Barbara was the first UC campus to hold a Grad Slam competition. By 2014–15, led by UC Santa Barbara Graduate Division Dean Carol Genetti, the event was put forward as a best practice, and the other graduate division deans and UC Office of the President leadership agreed it should be a systemwide professional development opportunity. The systemwide UC Grad Slam event helped facilitate greater research communication training, workshops, and awareness, and it served to showcase the tremendous scope and impact of UC research in a way that is broadly accessible to non-specialist audiences. The events are advertised in the community and across the campuses,

and the systemwide event is live-streamed and archived on the University of California website.¹ The UC Office of the President has partnered with LinkedIn to offer the systemwide event, which is hosted at LinkedIn's San Francisco office.

Students, whether they win or not, gain valuable communication and presentation skills, and sharpen their awareness of translatable skills, which is particularly important as UC works to prepare its graduate students, especially its academic doctoral students, for the multiple career opportunities available to them.

On May 3, 2024, the campus Grad Slam champions competed for the ninth annual systemwide UC Grad Slam competition. Each student presented their cutting-edge research in an engaging, accessible manner in three minutes or less, and one was crowned the 2024 UC Systemwide Champion. One additional student was awarded both second prize and Audience Choice, and a third student won third place:

- First place: Iris Garcia-Pak, UC San Diego, "The Brain: An Exclusive VIP Club"
- Second place: Kacie Ring, UC Santa Barbara, "Healthy Forests, Healthy Humans"
- Third place: Shannon Brady, UC Riverside, "Thinking Out Loud: Is Self-Talk a Secret to Success?"
- Audience Choice: Kacie Ring, UC Santa Barbara, "Healthy Forests, Healthy Humans"

Grad Slam is a unique opportunity to see, first-hand, the impressive array of research taking place across UC. The Regents are always invited and encouraged to attend the UC systemwide event, and one Regent is invited to serve as a judge for the competition. In 2024, Regent Nancy Lee served on the judging panel.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
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¹ "UC Grad Slam," University of California, <https://gradslam.universityofcalifornia.edu/>