UC San Francisco Grad Slam Winner Yiqi Cao Wows Judges in UC-wide Contest

May 4, 2018 - Everyone in the Graduate Division traded high-fives yesterday, when UCSF Bioengineering PhD candidate Yiqi Cao took the 2nd-place prize in the annual UC-wide Grad Slam contest [1], held at LinkedIn headquarters in San Francisco. Repeating her winning research presentation about building a longer-lasting heart stent, Cao projected both enthusiasm and poise.

Cao’s PI, Dr. Tejal Desai [2], said, "The entire lab is so proud of Yiqi and her ability to communicate the excitement and passion she has for her research."

Reflecting on the experience of competing at the campus-wide level, Cao said, "I really enjoyed meeting the finalists from other UC campuses. It was a treat to learn about research from fields that I don't typically have exposure to." Grad Slam presentation topics reflected the rich diversity in graduate programs across UC, in the humanities and social sciences as well as physical and biological sciences.
UC President Janet Napolitano emceed the Grad Slam event and bantered artfully with the campus champions for a few minutes between each talk, this year asking students to name three people they'd like to have over for dinner. Cao didn't skip a beat in inviting Napolitano herself, who immediately accepted the offer. "It's not every day that you get to joke around with President Napolitano," Cao said.

Joseph Charbonnet, a PhD student in environmental engineering at UC Berkeley, took the top prize for his talk on using manganese oxide-enhanced soil to filter contaminants out of stormwater. UC Merced's campus champion Portia Mira was the 3rd-prize winner for her talk on a promising solution to antibiotic resistance. You can see all ten finalists' talks on the UC Grad Slam website [3].

The UC-wide Grad Slam contest has been held annually since 2015. All ten UC campuses hold their own Grad Slam competition and send their campus champion to compete for the top prize of $6,000 in UC Grad Slam. Cao is the first UCSF student to place in the UC-wide contest. As the 2nd-place winner, Cao added to her UCSF winnings an additional $3,000.

Grad Slam incentivizes UC graduate students to hone their communications skills and makes their research accessible to a wider audience. Participants have only three minutes to give a jargon-free research talk that is clear, engaging, and informative.

In addition to UCSF Grad Slam [4], the Graduate Division also organizes an annual Postdoc Slam [5] contest, based on the same model.