Commencement Celebration 2018

On June 6, the Graduate Division’s annual commencement celebration returned to the Nourse Theater in San Francisco’s Hayes Valley neighborhood for the third year in a row, as graduates celebrated this milestone in their lives with family, friends, faculty members, and the Graduate Division community.

This year, a record 188 graduate students from 24 degree programs participated in commencement, joined by over 1,200 family and friends. The academic procession also included over 60 faculty and distinguished guests who were present to mark the occasion. The photo series above gives a glimpse into the festivities.

Professor Patricia Babbitt, PhD, gave this year’s Commencement Address, entitled “Relax? Nobody Else Can See around the Bend in the Road Either!” She began her meditation on accepting the unknown on one’s journey with a discussion of rites of passage: “Today, we meet to mark that public part of your rite of passage, the recognition of your achievements before a community of friends and family, your colleagues and your mentors, bearing witness to the last primary achievement of your education, the completion of your graduate training...Besides the rewards it brings with it, every rite of passage is followed by a lot of changes as well. In getting to this point, you’ve been following a path that’s pretty straight. Even though there have been digressions here and there, you’ve been able to see ahead to the endpoint in the distance...Now, with this rite of passage, you are facing a bend in the road ahead that you can’t see around until you get there.”
Dr. Babbitt concluded her remarks with a request: "I'd like to personally encourage you to get involved in another role, let's call it the scientist as citizen. The society we live in in this country seems deeply fragmented and lost at the moment, with divisive viewpoints hardening and pushing us further and further apart. It's true that we already look to you to lead the scientific enterprise into the future, but we also need your skills in critical thinking and fair-minded appreciation of evidence to help turn this dark phase around, to stand up for science, and to make the world a better place, even though it may only be one step at a time."

The Associated Students of the Graduate Division and the Graduate Division Alumni Association honored Sophie Dumont, PhD, with the 2018 Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award. Graduating PhD students Christina Hueschen and Jonathan Kuhn, both members of the Dumont lab, presented the award to Dumont, an assistant professor in the departments of Cell & Tissue Biology and Cellular & Molecular Pharmacology. In presenting the award, Kuhn noted, "[Sophie] gives us a lot of freedom to explore and develop the scientific questions we're most excited about, and always pushes us to be the best scientists we can be. She's also dedicated to having us go out and establish ourselves in the community. Sophie is more proactive than anyone I know in getting her students to go out and present their work at meetings and other institutions."

Hueschen remarked, "Students see Sophie as an ally and advocate as someone they can trust and she makes every effort to help them. That's a critical role for the health of a community and it's a role that takes time and emotional energy, and which largely goes unseen."

In her own remarks, Dumont mirrored the appreciation: "I feel so, so lucky to get to work with the students I work with every day. Thank you to these students for helping me become a better mentor and scientist and for your trust. I'm very excited to be hooding my first two PhD students today. It takes a special kind of student to work with a brand new faculty mentor, with a track record of exactly zero students, and these two students are indeed special. I'll miss you when you leave and you still have a few minutes to change your mind if you don't want to graduate!"

Many thanks to the staff and volunteers who made this special event run so smoothly, and to the participating faculty and guests. But most of all, hearty congratulations to the Graduate Division's 2018 graduates!

Unless otherwise noted, all photos above are by Student Financial Aid staff member Derek Tong.

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