

Rock wall on campus near the lagoon during the CUCRC.

## Making Waves in Santa Barbara

*The 2015–2016 academic year marked milestones in large events, commendations and student successes at the University of California, Santa Barbara.*

There has been a lot of buzz at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), this year. To start, last fall it hosted the fourth annual California Unified Collegiate Recovery Conference (CUCRC), which brought together approximately 200 students in recovery, allies, advisors and community members to network and discuss new, emerging and established collegiate recovery programs.

Having the conference hosted at the university — home to a thriving collegiate recovery program — was the culmination of the latest cause championed by Angie Bryan, the school's recovery specialist in the Alcohol & Drug Program who tirelessly advocates for students who wish to pursue sober lives.

This spring, Bryan was honored for her efforts with the 2015–2016 Staff Citation of Excellence Award from the UCSB Staff Assembly, which acknowledged her dedication to collegiate recovery on campus and off. Bryan, a licensed marriage and family therapist who has been at the university for over a decade, has been working in the Alcohol and Drug Program in Student Health since 2011. In 2012, she founded Gauchos for Recovery, a program that provides support and social activities for students in recovery; it is one of the first programs of its kind in the University of California system.

In her nomination of Bryan, Jacqueline Kurta, director of the UCSB Alcohol and Drug Program, notes that Bryan “has dedicated herself to providing care to students, particularly those who are



By **PATTI ZIELINSKI**

struggling with issues of alcohol and drug addiction. She has championed the needs and rights of students in recovery, advocating on the UCSB campus as well as at the University of California Office of the President, for services that will allow students in recovery and those seeking recovery to have the opportunity to thrive on campus."

By bringing the CUCRC conference to campus, Kurta says Bryan attracted the support of local and national treatment providers for the work of Gauchos for Recovery. "It brought much-needed attention to the critical issues of decreasing stigma around addiction and co-occurring disorders and increasing the commitment to supporting recovery services on the UCSB campus and other campuses throughout the country," Kurta notes. "Angie's passion and support for students in recovery has immeasurably changed the lives of the students she has already touched and has paved the way for countless more students for whom the UCSB college experience would not be possible."

Bryan, though honored by the commendation, keeps her eyes to the horizon and continues to seek ways for the program to improve and grow. For example, she is currently looking to bolster the

university's recovery peer intern program in which UCSB students in recovery share their experience, strength and hope with other students in recovery as well as those who are struggling with substance use. "We have two new peer recovery interns, and I am working to get them trained as certified recovery specialists," Bryan says.

She is also pleased to announce that this past spring, the Student Fee Advisory Committee and Student Health Service recently granted a \$2,500 financial award to Gauchos for Recovery that has allowed them to install cutting-edge audio/visual equipment in The Lounge at Embarcadero Hall, a safe space for students in recovery to study, relax and socialize. "The improvements will include a large flat-screen TV/computer, video conferencing capabilities and a video game console that should be ready for use by the fall quarter," she says.

In addition to Gauchos in Recovery, the recovery peer intern program and the on-campus lounge, UCSB has partnered with the Recovery Grads organization to offer a residential recovery housing option called The Haven in the nearby community of Isla Vista, with support services, live-in-staff and social activities. The University also assists students with sober roommate pairings both on campus and in the community.

Bryan and ADP Director Jackie Kurta, are also developing a campus-wide program to provide training to departments on the importance of language around substance use and addiction. The goal is to help create a "recovery-informed campus." They are hoping to offer some kind of certification, similar to a Safe Zone training. Recovery language and messaging have already been highly integrated into the training of all student leaders in the Division of Student Affairs

### TRUTH IN FICTION

UCSB's collegiate recovery community is also celebrating the accomplishments of Mack B.,



Angie Bryan, winner of the 2015-2016 Staff Citation of Excellence Award from the UCSB Staff Assembly. Left to right: Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Marc Fisher; Angie Bryan; Chancellor Henry Yang



a member of Gauchos for Recovery and former assistant manager for the Haven, who won second place in a short story contest given by the Department of English. As an award-winner, he also received a Kieth E. Vineyard Honorary Scholarship — named after a UCSB alumnus with a love for writing who succumbed to cancer — which is given to students who demonstrate outstanding creative writing skills.


Mack, a Chicago native who graduated this year with a degree in English with a specialization in Modern Literature and Critical Theory, submitted the first chapter of a yet-untitled novel that he is writing for the contest. The story, called “The Persistence of Delusion” (see excerpt below) follows the beginning of a recovery path of Leon Nowak, a young heroin user in Chicago. Although Mack, who has been sober since October 10, 2014, has never used heroin, he sponsors recovering heroin addicts and interviewed people addicted to the substance to build a story that is raw, gritty, real — and ultimately redemptive.

“The main character is not based on anyone in particular, but I did draw on my own experience,” he says. “In talking to people in recovery, I started to understand the causes and conditions that are at the root of any addiction. There’s no difference, really — you just cope in different ways.”

At one point, Mack dreamed of being a sports writer. The basketball fan penned articles that were published on the Huffington Post. Recovery shifted his perspective. “I decided I didn’t want to chronicle other people’s greatness as my life’s work,” he says. “I wanted to do something great myself.”

Graduating a quarter early in late March and with a part-time job at a bookstore, Mack happily found himself with the luxury of time to start writing a novel. “I was meditating on the beach and observing my body’s call for a cigarette, when I started imagining how difficult it must be to meditate withdrawing from heroin rather than nicotine,” he says. “That’s when the idea hit me of opening a story with a relapsed heroin addict trying to do his 11th step for the day in a jail cell.”

Mack set a goal of 1,000 words a day, enlisting his father, an English professor, as his editor. The story began to take shape. “I’m attracted to writing about the deeper darker aspect of the self,” he says.

When he learned about the competition, he submitted the first chapter, which totaled 5,999 words, just under the contest’s maximum length of 6,000 words. When he found out he placed second, he let out a whoop of joy. “More than 30 people entered; it was competitive,” he says. “Writing is such a solitary endeavor, so it’s great to have a validation of my work.” 

### Excerpt: “The Persistence of Delusion”

Leon failed to see the irony of his existential crisis: he was disenfranchised by the conception of God he felt was being pushed upon him while simultaneously using his personal conception of a “higher power” to justify his addiction. This type of inner conflict was quite typical for the 23-year-old college dropout, just a glimpse of what some might consider his insanity, which could best be described as a subconscious desire to do what he consciously knows to be in his absolute worst interest; a constant battle between the id and the superego magnified by a million. There were times when Leon considered this, usually during one of his brief stints of sobriety, although the idea that his subconscious was trying to kill him only drove him into a greater state of anxiety, and before long he found himself coping again the way he understood to work best.

*How did I get here?*

It was a question Leon found himself asking with increasing frequency as of late. Through realizing that he did in fact have a serious substance abuse problem, yet continuing to use in spite of this knowledge, Leon had discovered a way to accelerate his own demise. From the evident deterioration of his mind and body, to the increasingly sketchy characters he found himself associating with, to the decreasing quality of the places he found himself waking up, it was becoming clear that his options were thinning down to drastic change, jail, or death.