

Meeting the Beach
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Every fall for the last 11 years, the UC San Diego Recreation Department within Student Affairs has marked the end of Welcome Week by holding a vast beach party for up to 4000 of the newest generation of Tritons: first-year undergraduates, transfer students, and incoming graduate students.

This year, I had the good fortune to attend the latest glorious “*Meet the Beach*” event.

Having worked at UC San Diego for 12 months now, I’ve spent many happy hours strolling down to Black’s beach from campus, and enjoying the cool wet sand underfoot, the sight of wading birds hunting small arthropods, paragliders and pelicans overhead, and often a glorious sunset. Due to the early or late hours of my walks, the beach was sparsely populated, with just a few brave surfers or dog-walkers around. The only sounds were the rushing waves and the occasional shrieks of gulls tussling over a morsel of food.

Meet the Beach showed an entirely different side of the coastal experience. With a fleet of busses bringing hundreds of students steadily down from the main campus, the sands were thronged. Music spurted from giant speakers on the shore walls and Scripps Pier. Freshly made tacos topped with guacamole and pico were heaped high on paper plates. Aqua towels and T-shirts emblazoned with the event’s logo abounded. The sun was intense, the air was cool, and the water’s temperature was perfect.

Recreation did a wonderful job of immersing new students in seaside experiences that promote health and wellness. Kayak tours and surfing lessons enticed people into the deep water to experiment with sports that are challenging, yet accessible. Beach volleyball, spike ball, frisbee, and soccer kept people moving on the sands, as did a mix of Zumba and circle dancing led by an infectiously energetic instructor. And the hilarious sight of two canines riding long boards through the surf with aplomb drew hundreds into the shallow foaming water nearby.

Having been on the beach together with a group of new friends, and having gotten a sense for what the water and sand have to offer, it should be far easier for our newest Tritons to feel confident about returning to the shore throughout their time at the university.

Literally above and beyond the beach activity: a walk out over the water along the Scripps Pier, led by staff and students of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, showcased an enticing mix of environmental beauty and academic offerings. Just during that half-hour walk, we saw a young sea lion approaching the surfers to join in their fun, a pair of porpoises arcing northwards along the coast, pelicans diving for fish, swarms of anchovies flashing below the swells and retreating determinedly whenever yellowtails sidled into their midst, and a host of bat rays resting on the sands shaded by the pier. At the same time, we heard about the many courses and research experiences open to all UC San Diego students, regardless of whether their main areas of study lie within SIO.

The partnership between Recreation and SIO that made the Pier tour possible was also reflected in a myriad of other collaborations underpinning *Meet the Beach*: transportation, security, food, water, first aid, cleanup ... all the essentials were made possible because Tritons came together to welcome our newest students in style.

Thanks to Recreation and its many campus partners for a fabulous event!