

OPENING REMARKS on April 24, 2026
Westwood Night Live – Ackerman Ballroom, UCLA



Dean Celine Parreñas Shimizu stands on stage in a hat delivering her opening monologue.

Hello, UCLA! I am Dean Celine — and I am so happy to host the very first WESTWOOD NIGHT LIVE.

This week, I rehearsed with students from across this campus who wrote and directed all the sketches for tonight. And if you don't know, now you know there are no students more brilliant, more ambitious, or more willing than Bruins to ask their Dean to do things she has absolutely no business doing.

I will say this plainly: I had to draw some lines. There were requests — and I will not name names, Jiya — that required me to remind our brilliant students that I am still, in fact, the Dean. There are acts I will not perform, lines I will not cross, and red Solo cups I will not be photographed holding or distributing to students. I am also someone known for never using expletives. That boundary held. Barely. There was one moment when I said, “does this character have a stick up there...?” Forgive me.

So I stand before you in a bind — tonight can a Dean come in uninhibited and unashamed, may a Dean let loose— just like ex-SNL cast member and comedian Molly Shannon: who held nothing back, body, beauty, soul and spirit , with her kick and her stretch, not just cuz she's 50, because some things can only be said like Mary Catherine Gallagher, when you go all the way in to go all the way out?

What would Molly say?

MOLLY SHANNON via Video:

Dean Celine! Your friend Molly Shannon here — I've got you. I was once a first-time SNL host myself. Being on the real SNL for six years really teaches you some lessons. Here's my advice: you cannot perform halfway. When you go all the way, the audience can see everything you've been through that got you here! Joy, sadness, all of it. But what's special about the space you create tonight, is that there are no mistakes. Sure, lines might be forgotten, a set piece might fall, in your case- a cast member may find out their midterm grade before going on stage.... Life happens! But when you're out on that stage, you have no other choice but to do what you know already as a Dean: lead with confidence, integrity, and not an OUNCE of embarrassment. That word doesn't exist on this stage. That's the whole secret. So tonight — go get it, Dean Celine. UCLA, she is so ready. Westwood Night Live, so are you! And don't worry — Jiya and all the students? They've got you. Trust.

Thanks so much to my friend, the glorious Molly Shannon!

When Jiya — our showrunner, our founder, our very own Lorne Michaels — asked me to host, I said yes, only if we do this well. So, I asked my staff to find slots in my demanding schedule. Thai opened the dean's suite for rehearsals, Crystal sent me reminders about props (she's backstage with them now), and Melinda even changed my flight from speaking at Princeton last night to arrive back early this morning. Why? Because that is

the TFT way. Not just rehearse, practice, get it right! It's about: Show up for the things that matter to launch the next thing!

It's true. Tonight I will not hold back my instinctive willingness to show up for our students to immerse in their vision of the world with their stories and their words.

A dean provides vision — to keep an institution relentlessly progressing forward. And tonight, the vision flows the other way. The students flipped the script.

And they sure pulled me back into my own college days. I remember not knowing what was ahead, holding my hunger and hope before the recognition and rank I now possess as a distinguished professor. While my list of degrees and awards are long, I pray they help with what will be asked of me tonight.

In agreeing to host, I realize this is truly the most Dean thing to do: collaborate with students so UCLA advances towards its best self! Because students, your voice is our story.

So, count on me to be myself so you can be yourselves! Why not start an acting dream beyond being a dean and ask why not your dreams too as engineers write scripts and bio majors dance?

This matters. In a time when shared realities are under assault, when democracy is under attack, when cruelty elevates to policy — laughter is resistance and rebellion in Westwood. Comedy is how we speak truth when silence is forced upon us. Laughter is how we reach each other across the distance that fear creates. And where live performance is an antidote to AI.

I emerged from this week at peace and ease truly believing our future is in extraordinarily capable hands. These students will not shrink, shut up, or stand down. They will ninja you with laughter

and you'll be asking what did they do to me, what was that? What does it all mean? To create further connection.

Jiya — you asked this Dean to show up. And this Dean shows up! Because when students lead, UCLA launches its best future. Your Voice. Our Story. Go out there full force. Westwood Night Live — let's do this!