

# 11-year-old graduates from UCSC

Adragon Eastwood De Mello has a problem that none of his fellow graduates at UC-Santa Cruz shares — he may have to go back to junior high school.

"I'd rather stay here," Adragon said after picking up his bachelor's degree in mathematics this weekend, "but I don't want to go back to junior high. I already know that stuff."

Adragon is 11 years old.

The young whiz kid claims to be the nation's youngest college graduate but may be forced to re-enter junior high school or leave the country.

"I'm pretty excited," he said about his graduation, but while the other 150 or so members of his class try to parlay their diplomas into jobs, De Mello's diploma could wind up serving him no purpose other than as another item for the intellectual trophy case.

Adragon, who calls himself "A.D.," will spend the summer working on computer programs, writing — he already has completed a science-fiction trilogy and a screenplay about a computer "hacker" — and waiting to hear from graduate schools where he has applied for admission.

But under state law, if he is not accepted to a graduate school — and he already has been turned down by several because of his age — he must take the same classes as other 11-year-olds.

"Our system is not equipped to deal with children like him," A.D.'s father, Augustin De Mello, said, adding that he was considering moving abroad to bypass a state education code that requires kids to stay in school until they are 16.

A.D. was reading before he was 2, and studies in advanced science began at an age when most children are too young for kindergarden.