



UCSC - Faculty

# George the First

Witnessing Chancellor Blumenthal's inauguration, and recreating his road trip | BY CHRIS J. MAGYAR

**CAN UC SANTA CRUZ BE THE UNIVERSITY OF THE 22ND CENTURY?** The lawn of the East Field at UC Santa Cruz was hardly an unpleasant place to be on Friday morning, June 6. The sun was beaming, a slight breeze was ruffling the flaps of a giant white tent, and in the distance, Monterey Bay presented its white caps. The occasion was the formal inauguration of George Blumenthal as the 10th chancellor of UCSC, two years after his emergency appointment as acting chancellor in the wake of Denise Denton's suicide. That amount of time is already as long as the tenures of three of Blumenthal's predecessors—since the initial chancellorship of Dean McHenry (1961–1974), no man or woman has held the position for more than a decade. But if anyone's suited to a long and fruitful career at the top, it's Blumenthal, who has been with UCSC for 36 years, and is the first chancellor to rise through the ranks of the campus itself.

The ceremony began only seven minutes late, as the parade of robed dignitaries and faculty marched down the center aisle—academic celebrations often have the bizarre mixture of wedding joy and funeral solemnity—led by Quentin Williams, chair of the academic senate's Santa Cruz division, carrying a brutal looking ceremonial mace (presumed symbolism:

POLITICS *GT 6-12-08*

## Throwing a life preserver to state parks, beaches

**BY JOHN LAIRD** Our state parks are in crisis by any of a number of measures. In fact, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently placed our entire 278-park system among the 11 most-endangered places in the nation.

Whether it's a billion dollars in deferred maintenance, continuous weakening of operational support, the lack of money to staff new parks as California grows, or the basic inability to fund parks adequately in our annual budgets – we need a long-term solution.

Last week I proposed an annual \$10 surcharge on non-commercial California vehicle registrations in exchange for anyone in a vehicle with a California license plate getting in to state parks for free—known as the Parks Access Pass.

A similar system works in Montana, and California would finally provide

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to conk ignorance on the noggin). A round of applause greeted the new chancellor's appearance at the end of the march, lasting from the moment he entered the tent to the moment, many minutes later, when he ascended the stage to renewed clapping and cheers.

Richard Blum, chairman of the UC Regents, started the ceremony off with a speech that included the sly dig, "Everyone likes working with George—even the Santa Cruz City Council." Indeed, speaking immediately next, Mayor Ryan Coonerty insisted that the city council had a lot to do with Blumenthal's permanent appointment. "We realized overt support might do him more harm than good," Coonerty said, "so we decided to be strategic and quiet partners ... no small task, as the city council has never been strategic, nor quiet." The council unanimously voted to applaud the UC's decision, and Mayor Coonerty proclaimed June 6 to be George Blumenthal Day in Santa Cruz.

Assemblymember John Laird (class of 1972), spoke next: "When I was mayor, we couldn't get a unanimous vote for prayer, so George ranks with the higher powers." Noting that he has had the opportunity to work with or observe the tenures of all 10 chancellors, Laird expressed gratitude that the UC chose someone from within, "someone who has been a neighbor and a teacher and a colleague."

A multitude of speakers took to the podium to congratulate Blumenthal and note his reputation for having a calm demeanor, a sharp mind, and open ears. He has already weathered a tough patch in UCSC's history, with controversy swirling over the university's long range development plan (LRDP), labor unrest, and a shrivelling state budget. The day was ruled by optimism, however—some speakers were nearly giddy with joy at the selection. And while all three keynote speakers—alumni Gary Novack (pharmaceutical research pioneer, 1973), Kent Nagano (world-famous orchestra conductor, 1974), and Reyna Grande (award-winning novelist, 1999)—spoke of the challenges that face the new chancellor, only Grande issued a direct challenge: as the daughter of a Mexican immigrant maintenance worker and the first of her family to earn a degree, and someone who pulled two jobs working in maintenance and at the Boardwalk to put herself through UCSC, she expressed solidarity with the staff union's current agitation for better wages, saying, "I encourage you to support the staff, and look out for anyone who provides a service to this campus."

Moments later, while Blumenthal was in the middle of his inaugural speech, a commotion went up on the path just outside the field's borders (which were roped off—though the event was free, tickets were required to attend), and demonstrators from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and sympathetic organizations attempted to shout and cheer loud enough to be heard in the tent. Though a two-day strike had been approved and then called off at the last second earlier in the week, the unions were still determined to shed a little rain on the chancellor's parade.

Blumenthal spoke through the interruption without blinking. His main theme was foundation of UCSC to be the university of the 21st Century, and its mandate to provide university education differently. The only applause interruption came when he spoke about the college system that aims to provide liberal arts intensity with university resources: "Our colleges uniquely define the undergraduate experience here," he said. "Just ask any alum. The first thing they will likely tell you is what college they're from. The colleges are central to learning at UC Santa Cruz. I am committed to reasserting their prominence in our academic life."

He did touch on the issue of expansion, but only obliquely. He stated a goal to increase graduate student enrollment until it represents 15 percent of the student population. But he also repeated a pledge to continue "living lightly, in intimate human scale, in the shadow of redwoods. Take a look around you; you will not see any walls. Truth is, walls aren't really the point here at UC Santa Cruz. There are no walls to keep out the diversity of people and ideas, no walls to keep people in instead of sending them out

## GEORGE *CONT. FROM P.9*

to be vital global citizens, and no walls to block the sun, the forest, the ocean, or the stars. That, too, will not change."

After the ceremony, and the gowns had all filed out to the merry tune of a mariachi band, dignitaries milled about in the field amongst scattered food tables. The demonstrators returned, lining up along the yellow rope as police in riot gear stood silent sentry in front of them. There was a moment of sublime cognitive dissonance, as the mariachi band played festive music for the party and protestors with bullhorns shouted "*si se puede*" behind them. Students were holding about half of the placards, and having a hard time keeping the appropriate expression of frustration and anger on their faces, bright sunshine smiles accompanying the cheers and can rattles. It was, after all, a beautiful day for a protest.

"I don't think they're aware we're here," yelled a rep from Students and Workers Unite for Justice. "They're still eating! Let's make some noise!" Everybody did, about a hundred protestors in all, for 20 minutes or so, then they filed over the hill to the east remote parking lot, just another procession in the day's ceremonies.

### FINDING THE LEGACY

At the beginning of his remarks, Blumenthal mentioned that his first act upon becoming acting chancellor was to take a "road trip" around the campus. This sounded like an excellent idea. After an entire morning of hearing about the challenges and legacies of the UCSC, what might the impact of the campus look like from the town's perspective? As UCSC and the city continue discussions—which at this point are confidential, though Blumenthal stated at the post-inauguration press conference that they were moving forward, and that he hopes his new permanence in the position will lend confidence to organizations like the Coalition to Limit University Expansion (CLUE), that his words will become deeds—it seemed an opportune time to look at just what spills over from this wall-free campus.

Hopping on board the free core shuttle bus—which is both a necessity for getting around on campus and a novelty compared to the city's automobile-focused traffic structure—the radio cackles with reports of the demonstration from earlier cropping up at different spots, blocking traffic. The demonstration culminated at the university entrance at 3 p.m., then moved down Bay Street into town, with students and workers sitting in the intersections to halt traffic and "try to get arrested," according to AFSCME spokesperson Max Bell-Alper.

Julian Posadas, a food service worker at UCSC and the executive vice president of AFSCME's local chapter, says the timing of the noisy demonstration was extremely deliberate. "We are welcoming a new chancellor to this campus and knew there would be a lot of decision makers of the UC here," he says. "We know that the postponement of the strike was discouraging to some of the members. We wanted to demonstrate that we still stand in unity."

AFSCME argues that the 20,000 patient care and service workers it represents have been negotiating a better contract since August 2007, in order to get its members a better shake than \$10 an hour. According to the union, 96 percent of UC service workers are eligible for federal assistance programs, and that many work multiple jobs out of necessity. "We have been hit by a lot by media saying that we are not willing to meet, and that's completely false," says Posadas. "We are willing to meet as long as concrete proposals are on the table. Clearly, we want to continue bargaining."

As money shrinks and university ambitions grow, one of Blumenthal's undertakings is the university's first-ever major fundraising drive. While the contracts are negotiated at the UC level, Posadas says other chancellors at Santa Barbara and San Diego have taken a lead role in lobbying for the workers. How UCSC acts as an employer in the wake of its cash infusion will be part of its legacy.

The bus stops at the performing arts center, where the student art show had taken over the maze-like assembly of warehouses and darkrooms. Art covered every conceivable surface, with large inflatable sculptures made of stitched plastic bags making the most immediate impact (one outdoor bubble could be entered without shoes, and served as a wrapping station). The constant infusion of artistic talent and output into this community is also part of UCSC's legacy.

At a table in the midst of the fair, two students handed out pink signs and zip ties. The signs read, "Bicycles allowed use of full lane. California Vehicle Code 21202." The students urged these could be affixed to bicycles, riders, or cars to raise awareness in the wake of several severe and deadly accidents involving trucks and bikes on Mission Street. There was even a kit with stencils and chalk for putting down guerrilla bike lane symbols. In the wake of the California Highway Patrol's foot dragging on better signage for bikers on Mission, this sort of strong activism with a community focus is also part of UCSC's legacy.

On the way back to the bus lane, two young women spontaneously strip naked and start dancing in a water spray from a hose, using a bar of soap in the process. They were laughing and saying something about organic, renewable soap. It was hard to tell, because of its proximity to the art show, whether the act was meant to be performance art or just performance fun. Either way, keeping Santa Cruz weird is definitely part of the UCSC legacy.

And hopping on the #10 via High Street in order to return to work, the journey took 30 minutes due to gridlocked traffic (this was before the traffic-stopping demonstrations by AFSCME took effect, and, according to a student on the bus, a normal occurrence). Crawling through the narrow streets down the hill in a rain of cars, traveling at an average of 5 miles per hour, watching a crowded town choke on its own outdated planning—this, too, is part of the UCSC legacy.