

# New UCSC leader wins praise for tough transition

UCSC - Faculty

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By J.M. Brown

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Sometimes the most highly regarded leaders are those who have taken the helm after tragedy struck.

Thirty years ago, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, then president of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors, was named mayor after her predecessor was shot and killed in his office at City Hall.

More recently, astrophysicist George Blumenthal of Saratoga, a longtime faculty leader at the University of California-Santa Cruz and within the UC system, was tapped to head the 15,000-student campus after Chancellor Denice Denton committed suicide by leaping off a San Francisco skyscraper in June 2006.

Even though the top job was not something he necessarily aspired to — he wasn't a candidate when Denton had gotten the position a year earlier — Blumenthal nonetheless stepped into the role amid strong support from faculty and staff, who saw him as a familiar and comforting figure who could unite the campus.

As interim chancellor, Blumenthal's first responsibility was to heal the wounds on a campus in shock and grief. After the UC regents made the appointment permanent last September — naming him the 10th chancellor — he has improved UC-Santa Cruz's relationship with the community, kick-started a fundraising rally and weathered demonstrations against controversial



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UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal was a longtime faculty member before taking over the top post in 2006.

growth plans and biomedical research.

"He has contributed much-needed stability to the position of chancellor," UC-Santa Cruz Academic Senate chairman Quentin Williams said. "He has worked very hard at improving our relations with the community and legislative leaders."

UC-Santa Cruz will celebrate Blumenthal's achievements during his public inauguration ceremony Friday. There are no more tickets available, but UC-Santa Cruz expects to air a broadcast of the event on its Web site July 7 and 8.

The 62-year-old Blumenthal joined UC-Santa Cruz in 1972 as a professor of astronomy and astrophysics. His relationships among the faculty and

universitywide leadership have made him one of the most well-connected campus leaders in the UC system.

Many of UC-Santa Cruz's stakeholders describe him as an affable and accessible leader, borne out in such complicated situations as the ongoing litigation between the 43-year-old campus and its host city about the Long Range Development Plan, which calls for enrolling up to 5,100 more students by 2020.

"The issues we have are complex and contentious and wrapped in years of history," said Santa Cruz Mayor Ryan Coonerty. Blumenthal "has really dedicated an enormous amount of time and energy to understand the city's concerns and taking steps to address

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them. He's certainly not solving all the problems, but he is trying to lay the groundwork for a relationship that will work better in the long term."

Christi Suchil, outgoing president of UC-Santa Cruz's Student Union Assembly, said the chancellor is "definitely an ally of ours." She credited Blumenthal's support of voter registration, a keystone issue among student leadership, for UC President Robert Dynes' decision to allow registration drives in dorm halls.

Williams said many faculty members have great admiration for Blumenthal, who led the systemwide UC Academic Senate from 2004 to 2005 after serving two years as the faculty representative to the UC regents and a year of leading UC-Santa Cruz's faculty.

"He is very accessible, partially because he knows the campus community and feels very comfortable interacting with the campus community," Williams said.

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