

No room in town



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

UCSC professor William Scott and his family relax in their two-bedroom campus townhouse. The Scotts hold out little hope of finding bigger quarters in Santa Cruz or the surrounding area on a professor's salary.

Shortage of affordable housing hurts UCSC faculty recruitment, morale

By JONDI GUMZ
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — William Scott could have stayed in Bloomington, Ind., where he had a 3,000-square-foot home, and moved up the tenure track in the chemistry department at Indiana University. Or he could have gone to Columbia University, which offered him more money.

Instead, Scott, 40, came to UC Santa Cruz four-and-a-half years ago for the opportunity to work next to world-class researchers in an area blessed by majestic redwoods and scenic ocean views. Now his family of five is feeling squeezed in a two-bedroom townhouse, with little hope of being able to buy bigger quarters, and he wonders if the move he made was financially unwise.

He's not the only one.

Good faculty candidates are walking away from UCSC job offers, say-

'My current salary compares to (making) \$170,000 in Santa Cruz. ... We are really done with renting.'

MARRIED FACULTY CANDIDATE WHO DECIDED NOT TO COME FOR A SECOND RECRUITMENT VISIT TO UCSC

ing they don't want to give up their family's quality of life to advance their careers. A faculty committee appointed two years ago to study the issue concludes in a new report that there is a housing crisis, and it's growing worse.

The average price for homes and townhouses sold last year in Santa Cruz County was \$528,336, putting the dream of home ownership out of reach for assistant professors, the entry-level faculty position, whose salary averages \$58,711. Housing prices in the city limits, closer to campus, are even higher.

The problem has become so acute,

a faculty committee that studied the issue says administrators must do more to find a solution. The Academic Senate, the faculty governing body, will take up the committee's recommendations today.

Inadequate and unaffordable housing have created severe recruitment and retention problems, the committee found. For example:

■ Nine of 10 people who turned down computer science positions last year said housing was a principal factor.

■ The newly forming Department

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of Applied Math and Statistics has been unable to recruit two senior statisticians in the past two years.

■ Three people who accepted faculty positions came only after temporary housing subsidies were provided, and they are considering leaving if they are unable to buy homes within a few years.

■ The waiting list for on-campus housing has 109 faculty names on it. During the next five years, the campus is expected to hire 40 new faculty members a year to accommodate the growing student population, and about half of them are likely to request on-campus housing, which could bump the waiting list to 209.

That number would climb still higher if staffers are allowed to join the list.

"We just don't see how we can hire the best people out there if they can't afford to live here," said David Draper, chairman of the university's Applied Math and Statistics Department.

He said engineering faculty fear their plans to double the size of the school are in jeopardy unless the university deals with the issue. A second engineering building is due for completion in a year and a half.

John Tamkun, who chairs the biology department, already has lost one faculty prospect over housing costs and worries he is about to lose another.

"The bottom line is we pay faculty much less than those at comparable institutions even though the cost of living here is astronomically high," he said.

One married candidate decided not to come for a second visit, explaining in an e-mail: "My current salary compares to (making) \$170,000 in Santa Cruz. ... We are really done with renting."

Those who oversee recruitment searches say they are at a disadvantage because UCSC decided two years ago to stop using discretionary funds to help new faculty hires with down payments or mortgage payments. The practice is common at other UC campuses, but UCSC's executive vice chancellor said Santa Cruz, being smaller, didn't have enough money to make those kind of grants equitably.

UCSC spokeswoman Liz Irwin called faculty housing a concern, not a crisis.

"Our first-choice candidates are hired at a rate of 84 percent, which mirrors the systemwide average," she said.

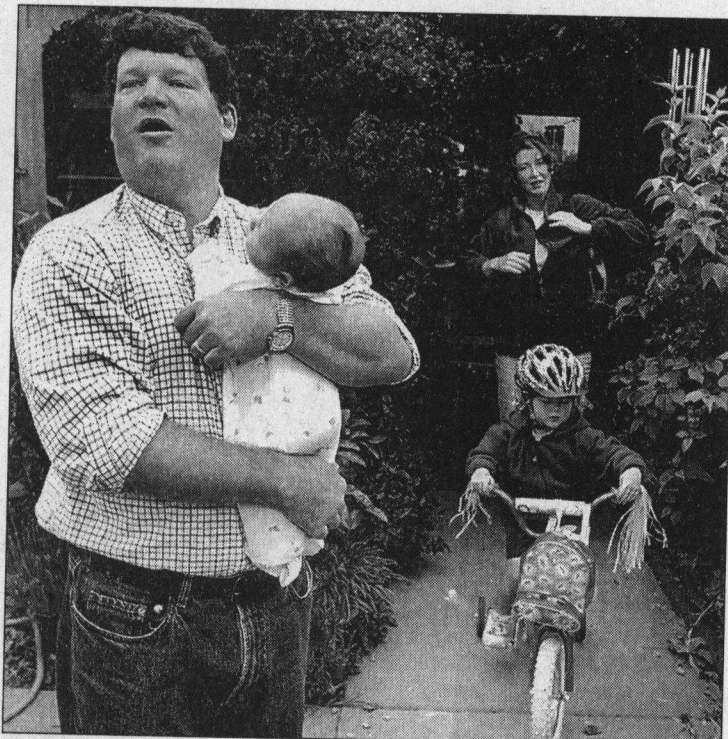
Statistics also show only 1 percent of faculty leaving for reasons other than retirement, she added, and \$10 million has been committed to faculty for home loans, with another \$27 million available.

Meanwhile, those who come to Santa Cruz tell tales of woe. The faculty report cites several examples.

■ An assistant professor in the arts division who arrived when the rental market was hot spent six weeks before finding a 980-square-foot house off-campus for \$2,000 a month. The rent ate up nearly 80 percent of the faculty member's take-home pay. The university offered a loan to buy a home, but the amount was not enough to buy an entry-level listing priced at \$450,000.

■ An associate professor in the social sciences division ended up in a university townhouse because affordable housing off-campus was substandard.

"Trying to fit two kids, two adults and a pet in a two-bedroom townhouse is unbelievable," the faculty member said.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

UCSC chemistry professor Bill Scott, holding his son Michael in front of their campus townhouse, waits as his wife Sara O'Rourke and daughter Anna Marie prepare to start their day Tuesday morning. Scott, like more than half the UCSC faculty, earns less than \$75,000, although Santa Cruz is one of the most expensive places to live in the UC system.

■ One associate professor in the sciences slept in his office for three weeks while searching for housing. He finally moved into a university-owned townhouse with his family but it felt too small for two adults and three children. He looked at many homes for sale in the low \$300,000s but found them substandard. His family eventually returned overseas while he continues to teach at UCSC.

"This was not the life I envisioned," he said. "It's like being in the ghetto or military."

Entry-level faculty are in the toughest position to buy a home because their salaries are the lowest, they've spent years earning their degrees, and they don't have money for down payments. If they are starting families, they often have hefty day-care expenses. And if they don't have tenure, they are reluctant to speak out.

Scott, who grew up in Chicago, spent six years at UC Berkeley getting a doctorate plus three years as a postdoctoral fellow at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, England. When he arrived in Santa Cruz in the late 1990s, he encountered sticker shock.

Homes here cost much more than the \$170,000 he got for his three-bedroom house in Bloomington.

He and his wife, who met in England, bought a two-bedroom townhouse on campus after three attempts to buy in the community fell through. They have a \$100,000 mortgage and share an 11-year-old car, and a month ago welcomed a new baby.

Scott works in the summer on research projects to supplement his academic salary, now \$57,000 a year, but he said he still can't make ends meet. His wife has a doctorate in virology but she's a stay-at-home mom because child care for three youngsters under age 5 is too expensive.

Among their expenses: \$160 per month for maintenance and landscaping that Scott contends is spent mostly at Cardiff Terrace, an older on-campus complex where homes are owned by senior faculty, while play equipment for children is in disrepair and his garage and others at Hagar Court suffer from rot.

Scott's salary is fairly typical. More than half the UCSC faculty

earn less than \$75,000, although Santa Cruz is one of the most expensive places to live in UC system. Only 2 percent of UC San Francisco faculty fall into that income category, and 26 percent at UC Berkeley, but UCSC has more young faculty, more women and minorities starting their careers, and only one professional school — engineering.

UCSC administrators have tried to develop housing solutions but faculty say it's not enough and it's taking too long.

Last year, administrators announced plans to buy Laureate Court, a 64-unit apartment complex at the foot of campus. The plans involved upgrading university-owned rental apartments on Hagar Court, and selling them as condos to faculty.

Both projects are behind schedule.

The university had expected escrow to close last July. Now the target date is July 31.

Elise Levinson of the campus housing office said "there were issues on the part of the seller and the buyer," but declined to give details. She emphasized the university is already handling rentals at the complex and that about three-fourths of the tenants are affiliated with the campus.

Exterior improvements at Hagar Court, such as new roofs, were completed, and the interior work for 50 two-bedroom units, which includes new appliances, carpet and fresh paint, is out to bid now. The job is budgeted at \$1.85 million and Levinson said the contract should be awarded July 1.

Still to come is a decision from Executive Vice Chancellor John Simpson on how to split the for-sale housing among tenure-track faculty, other academic employees and staff.

The university hired a consulting firm that studied the demand for rental and for-sale housing and two months ago recommended a percentage system for the three categories of university employees.

Levinson said she expects Simpson to announce the percentages this month.

A third university project involves building 74 for-sale townhomes and 21 apartments on campus off Empire Grade. The devel-

Problem solvers

Here's a look at what a UC Santa Cruz faculty committee recommends to address the university's faculty-housing crisis.

■ Administrators work with faculty and financial consultants to develop solutions.

■ Adjust UCSC salaries to meet the housing price differential.

■ Use UC loans more effectively to help faculty buy homes.

■ Reinstate housing allowances to recruit and retain faculty.

■ Give faculty candidates and new hires 'realistic' information about housing.

■ Develop programs to help faculty move off campus to free up housing for new faculty.

■ Aggressively research and adopt alternative financial assistance, such as equity sharing or group investments.

opment, Ranch View Terrace, is undergoing environmental review with completion expected in two and a half years.

The three-bedroom homes in that development are expected to sell for \$450,000, and Scott would need \$250,000 to make the leap from his two-bedroom townhouse. The university caps the selling price so the owner can't take advantage of rising home values.

"We have no hope of ever being able to afford even this bad investment on my salary, let alone a house on the open market that would probably go for in excess of \$700,000," he said.

He is clearly frustrated by the situation at UCSC.

"It is a great scientific environment and I have the privilege of working alongside of some world-class colleagues, but it is asking a lot of my family to continue to live like this," he said.

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