

Sexuality a target of studies at Kresge

By KAREN CLARK
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ—Issues of gender, race and sexuality will be the focus at Kresge College at UC Santa Cruz this year, and faculty members hope controversy surrounding the move of gay and lesbian teachers to the college won't overshadow the unique nature of the changes.

"People are worried it's going to be perceived as controversial," said Roz Spafford, a lecturer in writing at Kresge. "But what the exciting possibility is, is studying gay and lesbian questions, issues of gender and race ... and the intersection of all those."

Nancy Stoller, acting provost as Kresge, said the seeds of change were planted in the spring when several offices opened at the college and the faculty decided Kresge should build on its women's studies program to include intercultural studies.

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As part of the changes, several gay and lesbian faculty members at other colleges on campus were invited to move their offices to Kresge.

One of them, Earl Jackson, a literature professor who is coordinator of the lesbian and gay faculty research group at Kresge, said such a grouping is unique.

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Stoller said the depth of scholarly works in the field will increase. "With the lesbian and gay faculty research group, it will make it easier for them to have more communication on the issues they're studying."

Another teacher recruited to Kresge was theater arts professor Michael Edwards, who has been active in Shakespeare Santa Cruz.

"Many people would like us (gay and lesbian teachers) to be invisible," said Edwards. "People are not only worried we'll talk loudly, but we'll talk articulately. It's really very much to do with

Please see KRESGE — A2

Kresge program changes

Continued from Page A1

the work, and we believe it's an area of profound knowledge."

With this new focus on cultural interaction, Kresge faculty members are moving forward by taking a step back.

Kresge, one of eight colleges that make up UC Santa Cruz, opened in 1971. At that time, colleges had a say in hiring, firing and tenure decisions, and offered courses. They also each had rooms for students to live, something that continues.

In the past decade, that responsibility has eroded, with academic departments (boards) at the university gathering power while individual college staffs lost it. The colleges now don't offer courses, but some sponsor guest lecturers, plan special talks and organize student/faculty gatherings.

That's what the staff of Kresge wants to do: offer special lectures and talks that spotlight the new focus on gender, race and sexuality, said Stoller. And they want to foster an atmosphere where professors can help each other further their academic research.

"Colleges (today) have been seen as residential holding units without academic focus," said Marge Frantz, a lecturer in the women's studies program. "They used to have a sense of what they were. ... particularly at Kresge in the last several years there has been no faculty participation or presence ... no sense of belonging."

Students will benefit by the closer ties to faculty members, said Stoller, as well as the collegewide look at how cultures intersect and what happens when they do.

Carolyn Clark, an anthropology professor at the college, said California is the perfect example of how diverse cultures interact.

"We recognize the diversity of the state, and the need for people to come together to organize not by trying to deny their differences, but to respect those differences and see what can be gained by being in a community with this kind of diversity," said Clark.

Re-energizing the personalities of the colleges also appealed to Clark.

"Faculty members don't seem to have a great deal of attachment to colleges," she said. "We wanted to start addressing that question ... and find people from different disciplines with similar goals. ... We wanted to breathe academic life back into the colleges."

The need for deeper study into issues of race, gender and sexuality, said Stoller, stems from the fact so much work in the past was based on a white, male, heterosexual point of view.

"By looking at these processes ... we're better able to understand them and live with these kinds of changes so the individual is not stricken with anxiety when having to face a new culture or

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community," said Stoller.

Page Smith, a professor emeritus at UCSC who has been critical of the large women's studies program at the university because he considers it divisive, said the new Kresge plan is detrimental to a well-rounded education.

"With constraints like this, how can you talk about serious issues in life?" he said. "The issues themselves are important, but when you develop a template where you say ... these are the only things that matter in human life. The whole extraordinary range of human experiences has come down to those particular questions."

Smith said students are being forced to identify with groups, rather than being encouraged to learn the broad scope of history.

"This increases the sense of separateness, of grievance," said Smith about focus at Kresge. "The general tone is this group or that group ... has not been given a fair shake. And that's true. But to isolate and treat them as central issues ... I think that's a disservice to people."

"A university should be a universe-ity," he said. "The important thing about them (the differences) is to get beyond them, not by cherishing and nurturing them."

But Stoller said diversity is a fact of life, and "studying and understanding those interactions is part of understanding. I don't see any validity in his criticism."

Spafford said "a most engaging community can be built out ... of a respect for differences. To focus on humankind tends to blur people into having to adapt into a norm, which is usually white and usually male."

She said with Kresge's study of "sexuality, gender, ethnicity — and everybody has one — and issues of class, I can't see who we're leaving out."

It's the goal of increased faculty/student interac-

tion that has some teachers chomping at the bit for classes to begin Sept. 27.

"I'm tremendously looking forward to having a faculty presence at Kresge again," said Frantz. "It's a real community enterprise that will do some exciting things."

The exciting things in the gay and lesbian studies will come in part, said Kresge teachers, from the fact the offices of handful of gay professors will be in the same college.

Jackson, who will teach four new gay studies courses this term, said the clustering of offices is an exciting concept because "we're getting more and more aware that we are a people who need each other."

Heterosexual students, said Jackson, "need faculty in positions of power who also are different."

He said there should be eight to 10 gay and lesbian faculty members at Kresge by next year. This year, there will be six gay studies classes, five of them created because of the changes at Kresge.

This is not, emphasized Jackson, a gay-studies major, although student protesters in March had asked for that. A study about the need for such a major and how it would be implemented is ongoing.

Like Edwards, Jackson has considered whether the cluster could be considered a "gay ghetto" at UCSC. But he considers the changes a positive step and a chance to "celebrate and study these differences as valid preferences."

In addition to women's studies and the lesbian and gay faculty group, other groups based at Kresge are the Writing Program, Literacy Project, the Dickens Project, legal studies, a special core course all Kresge students must take and literature. But, said Clark, the women's studies and lesbian and gay faculty group may be what people use to predict a "lesbian/gay and women's takeover at Kresge." But she sees it more as a recognition of differences and an effort to "give space to them."

She said Kresge will be the target of much interest this year as other colleges and the administration watch how Kresge accommodates this diverse faculty.

"We're stirring to life in a system that has been moribund for some time," said Clark. "If it doesn't work, someone will come up with a different model of what a college (at UCSC) should be. I think people want to make their (professional) lives meaningful."

Added Stoller: "People want to be at a place where they are going to have some creative, intellectual contact with other people. People (invited to join Kresge) felt something exciting and creative and they felt appreciated."