

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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Return to the hill

UCSC students start year with old problem: housing

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — In a dim room, a dozen frazzled students hunched around a table, pencils in hand and thick books open before them. In silence they pored over the books, occasionally stealing glances at each other and the clock.

Finals? Term paper deadlines?

Worse — it's the search to find a rental in the last weeks before classes start at UC Santa Cruz.

"It's torture; it's a nightmare," said Dan Kowta, a returning senior. "I can't even think about school. I spend most of my time waiting by the phone. ... Everything is too expensive — or else they don't want us. You get to a place (to rent) and there are 50 people there."

Kowta and his friends were into their third week of house hunting and they weren't particular. In fact they were getting less particular

by the day.

Marciel Rivera was checking the rental listings for the third time in one day and had a glazed look usually reserved for finals week.

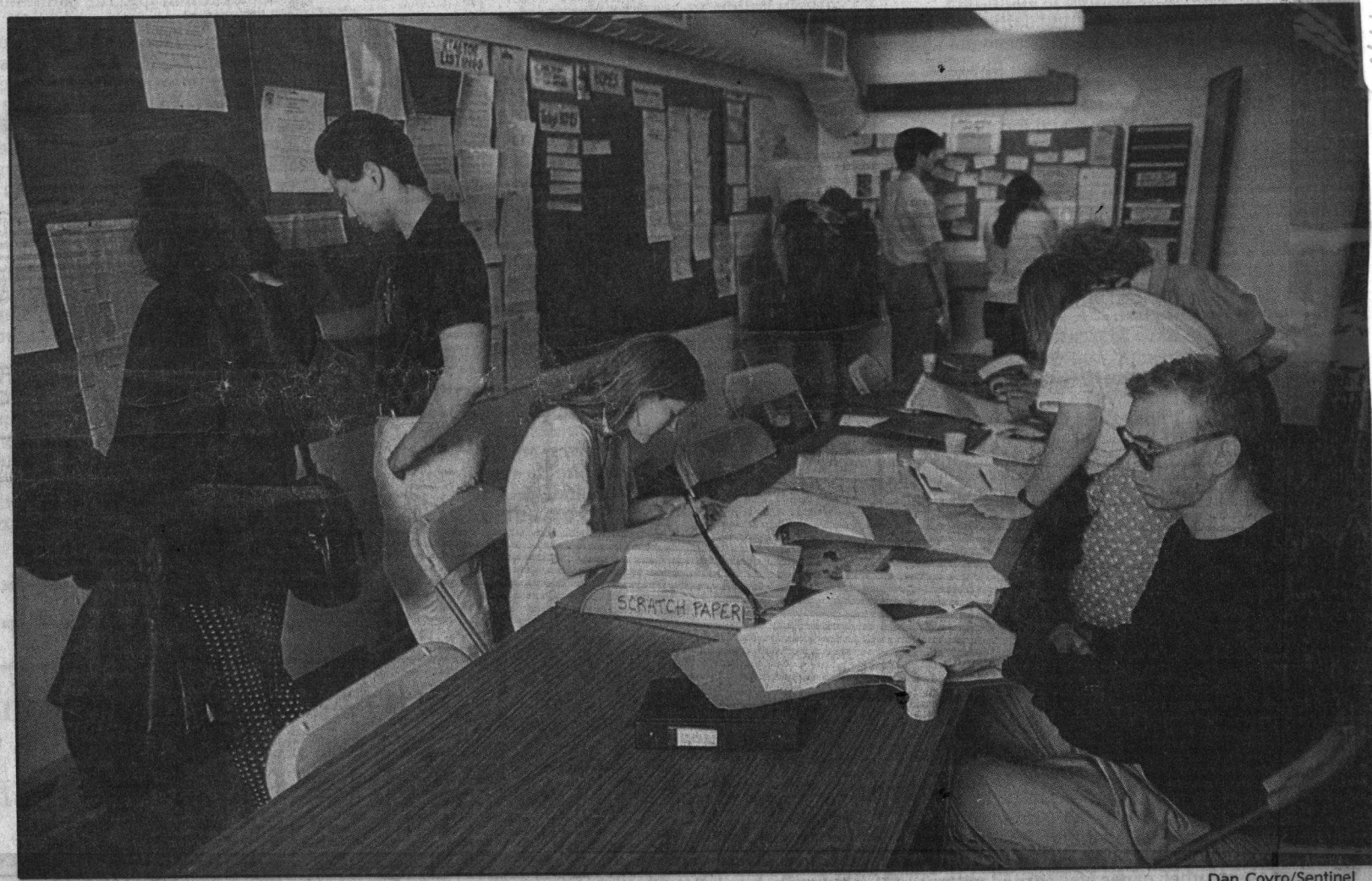
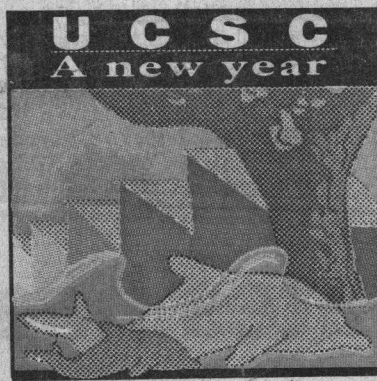
"Everybody wants \$300 to \$400 for a room, or else they don't want men," Rivera said.

Kowta and Rivera are two of thousands of UCSC students who have been searching for rentals over the past two months. About 5,500 students, more than half the student body total, are expected to live off campus this

quarter and most arrive a few weeks early. They step into a mad scramble to find lodging.

"In July and August we had 600 to 800 students a week (looking for rooms)," said Wanda Amos, coordinator of the UCSC Student Community Rental Program. "This month we've had about 600 a week. It takes several days of real hard

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

For many UCSC students, the start of a new year means tackling the task of finding a place to live.

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Students search for housing

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work to find a rental. Some only take two days. But normally it can take three weeks."

Rental units are plentiful in Santa Cruz, Amos said, but rents are high. The average price of a room in a shared house listed through the campus service is \$343. Two-bedroom houses average \$950 a month, and four-bedroom homes are around \$1,400 or more.

Living arrangements also tend to be somewhat creative.

Dina Zuccaro, a graduate student in education, found herself and three friends in suddenly desperate straits after a roommate "flaked out" several weeks ago and the landlord suddenly decided that his rental was a four- and not five-bedroom house.

The fifth bedroom in this case was a storage room. It wasn't

necessarily an unrentable room — sure it could have used a window, the ceiling was only six feet high and there was a big beam running down the middle, but it wasn't that bad.

"The landlord decided it was a storage room — which is not what he said when he rented it to us," Zuccaro said.

Without the extra roommate the rent was too high and the group gave notice. For the past three weeks Zuccaro has spent most of her time chasing rentals.

"The competition is so heavy for an affordable place," she said. "You go by a rental and there are eight other groups looking for the same place. A lot of people have agents and they invite everybody over at the same time, so it doesn't even matter if you are first."

"If we don't find something we'll be looking for a park or friend's floor to sleep on," she said.

Amos said the campus rental services meet with landlords and students, offering advice and counseling, and work hard to find accommodations for the students.

On the rare occasions when someone is unable to find housing off campus, Amos said she recommends the students move into campus housing.

UCSC housing officials say they expect about 4,500 students to live on campus this quarter, and say they have rooms for all freshmen, juniors and transfer students who have requested campus housing.

For the rest of the students, however, the first trial of the new year is finding a place to live.