

UCSC's public image takes a beating

Efforts to boost reputation lagging

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UC Santa Cruz's reputation continues to struggle, ranking near the bottom of two new surveys on the public image of University of California campuses.

On "overall quality," a sample of Califor-

nians put Santa Cruz second to last on the list, just above UC Riverside.

A second survey of graduates found that UCSC alumni are more likely than most other UC grads to say their campus' reputation has fallen in the past decade. Only UC Berkeley ranked lower.

The findings come as UC executives try to figure out what people think of the system and seek ways to better market its virtues. The UC Office of the President has spent about \$500,000 so far, including the surveys conducted by independent consultants. They

interviewed parents, alumni, prospective students and the general public.

Reasons why UCSC ranked so low depends on whom you ask, and when they happened to be on campus.

The school's image has undergone several makeovers since its founding in 1965, transforming from a campus with an experimental curriculum to, in more recent years, a more visible postgraduate research institution with an emphasis on the sciences.

Several older alumni said the low marks for UCSC signal dissatisfaction with the

rampant changes they've seen.

Mike Wallace, former treasurer for the UCSC Alumni Association and a 1972 graduate, said UCSC has lost its counterculture roots as it grew to compete with more traditional schools.

"Those of us here in the early years felt really connected to the place and are not happy about the fact that it's gone to being just like any other, albeit in a nice setting," Wallace said.

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Community studies lecturer Mike Rotkin, who came to UCSC in 1969 as a graduate student, agreed.

"There's no question that UCSC is moving in a direction that older alumni don't like," said Rotkin, a Santa Cruz councilman.

He said he's watched average class sizes grow from 15 to 55 as the university has grown to 15,000 students, thereby reducing contact between students and professors. He also said the humanities and social sciences are treated like second-class citizens as the hard sciences snatch up a greater share of private research dollars.

The changes are not accidental.

Over the past decade, the university has been looking to get beyond the stereotype of slacker culture perpetuated in many college guides and lampooned in 2004 on the front page of Rolling Stone Magazine as "The Most Stoned Campus on Earth."

Increasing the ratio of graduate students to undergrads is one effort the university hopes will improve its image, according to the university's stated goals.

Former Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood said recent survey numbers aren't revealing because attitudes toward UCSC have lagged behind a "tremendous" improvement in the school's research stature in the past decade.

"Reputations once made are hard to lose and reputations yet to be made take proportionately longer," Greenwood said.

In the recent survey, just 38 percent of Californians rated overall quality at UCSC as very good or excellent.

Many applauded efforts in the late 1990s by Greenwood, who tried to turn one of the smallest campuses in the UC system — one with no football, no frats, no grades — into "the UC of Silicon Valley" and a major high-tech player on par with Stanford or UC Berkeley. Denice Denton, an engineer, was brought in to lead the university in 2005, in part for her familiarity with Silicon Valley and her fundraising expertise as the campus proposed to grow from 15,000 to 21,000 students. Fostering racial and gender diversity was another top priority for Denton, who committed suicide June 24.



Reflected trees and translucent leaves contrast the geometric constructs of the Earth and Marine Sciences Building at UC Santa Cruz. The university has championed the sciences in recent years.

Shmuel Thaler/
Sentinel

UCSC did move up the educational ladder in several U.S. News and World Report rankings. This year, UCSC was ranked 33rd among 162 public research universities. In addition to astronomy and astrophysics, three graduate offerings have been ranked among the best in the country in past years: geology; Third World literature; and gender and literature.

When Los Angeles native Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, 24, came from Harvard to UCSC for graduate school in 2003, she observed that many research programs were comparable or better than UC Berkeley. That's why she studied astronomy and astrophysics at UCSC.

"But at the end of the day, Berkeley has a better name," she admitted.

Another concern students expressed with UCSC was its lack of accommodation for minority students and faculty.

The survey found that although "Hispanic" respondents were more likely than whites to rate UC campuses as "excellent" or "good," this was not the case for UCSC.

"The only notable exceptions to this pattern are UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz, which fare less well among Hispanics than they do among whites and African Americans," the report said.

Prescod-Weinstein, who is black, said

UCSC has a reputation as a magnet for rich, white kids despite recent attention given to expanding campus diversity.

Public perceptions can either fuel or fetter research grants, gifts and recruitment of quality students and faculty.

The report on perceptions was not welcomed by campus officials, who charged the authors with presenting skewed information based on flawed survey methods by Washington-based Peter D. Hart Research Associates.

Acting Chancellor George Blumenthal could not be reached to comment.

Campus spokesman Jim Burns said that alumni support at UCSC is better than other campuses.

"Our own interaction with UCSC alumni suggests a very high satisfaction rate — both anecdotally and statistically," Burns said.

UC spokesman Michael Reese said the ultimate goal of the survey was to realign the public's feelings with "more accurate and positive" views of the university.

"If they do, we believe Californians will have a more positive impression of the institution and will support it through their votes on education bond measures, in electing legislators who are more supportive of higher education, and in encouraging young people they know to attend our campuses," Reese said.

He did not elaborate on UCSC's marks.

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Favorability ratings

The following is percentages of people who view UC schools as very good or excellent. Surveys were done regionally and statewide. Santa Cruz ranked second to last.

Campus	Region	All Voters
L.A.	90%	84%
Berkeley	90%	78%
Davis	89%	65%
San Diego	83%	62%
Irvine	85%	51%
Santa Barbara	67%	51%
S.F.	76%	46%
Santa Cruz	51%	38%
Riverside	57%	29%

Note: Merced, the UC system's newest campus, was not included in the survey.

Source: Peter D. Hart Research Associates