

# UCSC- Faculty Forty years at UCSC: A candid reflection

GEORGE BLUMENTHAL

Today is the 40th anniversary of my arrival as a faculty member at UC Santa Cruz. As I reflect on the campus that has grown up around me, I'm reminded that its course, like my life, has taken unexpected twists and turns on its path to maturity.

When I arrived on campus as an assistant professor of astronomy and astrophysics on April 1, 1972, I was a shy 26-year-old with long hair and a full beard. The campus was seven years young, with 3,700 students and only 300 graduate students.

Imagine UCSC without the bike path, without Baskin Engineering, without the Porter Wave sculpture, Bay Tree Bookstore, or Kerr Hall.

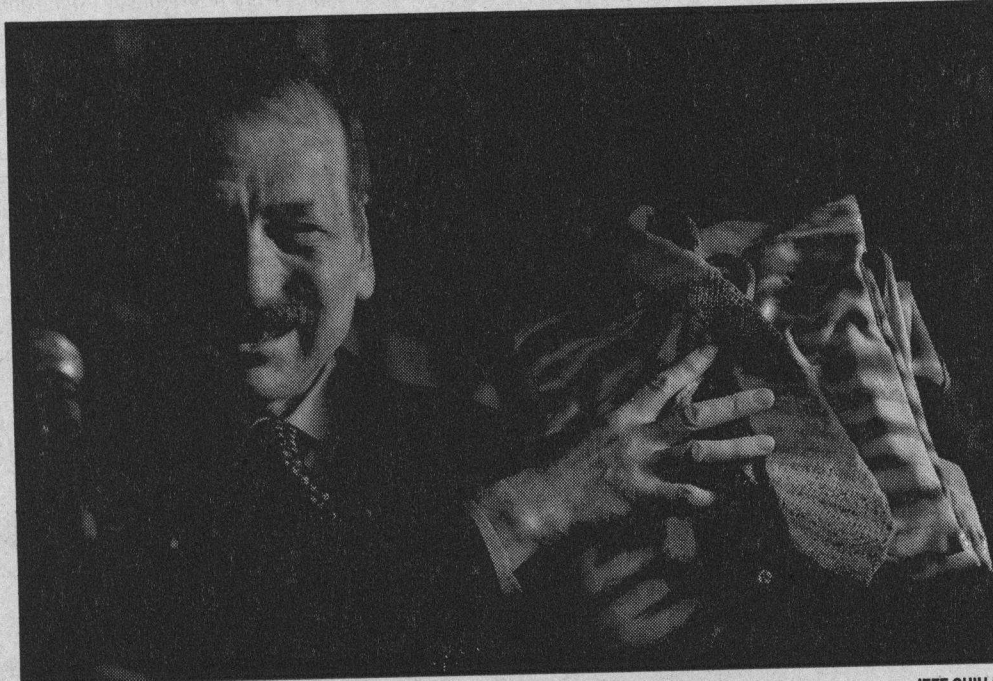
The job at UCSC was a good fit for me. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, I earned my doctorate in physics from UC San Diego. I was sorely disappointed by the conservatism of San Diego at that time. The anti-Vietnam War rally I organized there was that city's first.

At UCSC, astronomy was already a highly regarded department. I rented a furnished apartment on Button Street, commuted to campus by bicycle, and dove into my research.

Then, shortly after my arrival, Chancellor Dean McHenry called me in to his office.

It turned out that the campus's founding chancellor was still in the habit of personally interviewing each prospective faculty member — a step I had somehow missed. Our meeting was cordial; he struck me as kind and almost fatherly.

The city of Santa Cruz in the early 1970s was still a rather politically conservative community. I remember voting as a resident of Live Oak for a young progressive schoolteacher who won a seat on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors. That victory so offended the powers that be that they



JEFF CHIU/AP

UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal holds up a tie and shirts given to him by the Grateful Dead at a news conference at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco in April 2008. The surviving members turned over the band's archives to UCSC that year.

successfully recalled him.

Nevertheless, this seaside community of 31,000 people was changing. I was among the opponents of a plan to build a shopping center and condominium complex on Lighthouse Field, and I'm grateful to this day that we prevailed.

On campus, as a junior faculty member, my impression at the time was that UCSC was home to a few world-class faculty members whose departments were just beginning to make their mark.

In 1974, undergraduate enrollment reached 5,000, but the campus's popularity among high school seniors was declining from its peak in the late 1960s, when UCSC was the most popular destination in the UC system. In retrospect, I believe the emergence of the "Me Generation" caused prospective students to shy away from UCSC, fearful that narrative evaluations might thwart their ability to get into medical or law school. The Los Angeles Times published a damaging article that labeled UCSC as "kooky" and reported rumors that the campus was on the verge of closure.

Internal strife compounded the external bruising. Faculty chafed at the dual responsibilities of affiliating with both a college and an academic department [called at the time "boards of study"]. McHenry stepped down in 1974, and the role of the colleges dominated campus conversation for years.

Ultimately, Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer reorganized faculty college affiliations by academic discipline. The late 1970s were marked by budget challenges. Looking back today, those years of internal strife took their toll.

Important work was taking place, and our beloved Shakespeare Santa Cruz and Dickens Project were born, but it took many years for the campus to regain the momentum we lost during the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

The year 1991 marked the beginning of a period that I call the "solidification" of UCSC. Chancellor Karl Pister arrived from UC Berkeley, bringing an external focus that positioned the campus well for the dynamic leadership of MRC Greenwood, who led the

campus from 1996 to 2004. With an infusion of public and private support, she increased our capacity to educate students, she advanced our research program, and set us firmly on the path to today's success.

No chancellor is ever singlehandedly responsible for any campus achievement. Each milestone represents the work of many people. At UCSC, our campus values are imprinted on each achievement. In 2000, UCSC assembled the first draft of the human genome — and made it available for free to researchers around the world. To me, that's what sets us apart: A focus on the "greater good."

Our legacy is also evident in our environmental stewardship, which includes helping to save the peregrine falcon, shaping the vast network of marine protected areas along the entire California coast, and pioneering sustainable agriculture and training generations of organic farmers.

Recent years have brought a steady uptick in external recognition of our faculty. Today, our professors are well represented among

the most prestigious organizations.

Last fall, UCSC was ranked third in a global survey of the impact of university research. Only Princeton and MIT scored higher.

Our alumni also excel, winning honors that include six Pulitzer Prizes, five MacArthur "genius" awards, and the Shaw Prize in astronomy.

Last fall, two additional thresholds stood out to me: UCSC enrolled its most diverse class ever.

Nearly 34 percent of undergraduates are underrepresented in the UC system, and 45 percent will be, when they graduate, the first in their family to earn

a four-year college degree. My parents sacrificed so my sister and I could be the first in our family to go to college, and I feel a great affinity for families that are working hard to make that dream a reality for their children and loved ones.

If you had told me 40 years ago that one day I would be chancellor of UCSC, I would have been incredulous. However, when I was asked to serve after Chancellor Denise Denton's tragic death, I saw an opportunity to help the campus regroup, recover, and focus on the future.

We're not done, of course. We've revitalized the undergraduate curriculum and grown the number of graduate programs to meet the needs of the state. Our discoveries are propelling cancer research, scholarship in the humanities, creative expression, and interdisciplinary collaboration among the arts and sciences.

Significant challenges remain. Passage of the Dream Act opens doors to the university for undocumented students, but the financial barriers remain formidable.

In the wake of budget cuts, attracting and retaining top faculty and ensuring that students can get the classes they need to graduate in four years or less are higher priorities than ever.

But I've been around for 40 years now, so I recognize the value of taking the long view. Today, our students receive letter grades in every class. UCSC is the county's biggest employer, and strikingly, our research programs are the second-largest engine of job creation.

The campus and community are bound by more than economics and geology, however. We are united by shared values of social justice and environmentalism, an appreciation of our stunning natural surroundings, and a willingness to innovate when the status quo doesn't advance our unique vision.

Forty years is a long time. For me personally, the years have brought changes both welcome and unwanted: I met my wife, Kelly Weisberg, and together we've raised two wonderful children. On the downside, I run at the gym instead of on campus trails. For the campus, however, the years have been wholly beneficial, polishing a rough diamond into a gem of the UC system.

George R. Blumenthal, a professor of astronomy and astrophysics, is UC Santa Cruz's 10th chancellor. He joined the campus in 1972.

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