

# UCSC's New Chancellor Seeks Legacy of Leadership over Science

by Michael Thomas

**A**stronomy and astrophysics professor George Blumenthal, who was appointed as UCSC's permanent chancellor on Sept. 19, made a prodigious contribution to his field before taking the helm at the university. Ultimately, however, he hopes to be remembered as an adroit leader who steered the campus through times both turbulent and rich with opportunity.

"I am hoping that five years from now my success as chancellor will be because of vision and leadership rather than my science," Blumenthal explained. "A chancellor could come from any field," but must supply vision above all else, he adds.

Blumenthal's skill at cultivating collaboration and navigating political pitfalls is perhaps best evidenced by the warm reception his permanent appointment received, both on campus and off.

His confirmation, though a critical step towards stabilizing the campus, won't result in immediate changes to the administrative atmosphere. During his 14 months as interim chancellor, following the sudden death of former chancellor Denice Denton, Blumenthal didn't shy away from the critical decisions needed to propel the university forward. That included such tough calls as cutting the campus' growth target from 21,000 students to 19,500 students by 2025.

"I really have made long-term decisions," he said. "Having been confirmed, we can really sit down and think strategically about the university's future."

Though he has committed himself to a legacy as a leader, it's unlikely that Blumenthal will ever fully abandon academic pursuits.

"I am determined to keep my finger in astronomy," he said, noting that he's working on the third edition of the textbook he co-authored, *21st Century Astronomy*.

As an academic, Blumenthal pondered the origins of galaxies and the

structures of quasars. He contemplated the dark matter that makes up most of the universe, in total some of the deepest theoretical puzzles in the field.

As a chancellor, his challenges will be more tangible — and light years closer to home — but they may be no less complicated.

Blumenthal, who is 61, was born in

Milwaukee. A UCSC professor for 35 years, he has played an increasingly large role in campus leadership since 2001, when he began a two-year tenure as chair of the Academic Senate. He went on to serve as faculty representa-

tive to the statewide UC Board of Regents from 2003 to 2005, and was chair of the statewide Academic Senate in 2004-05.

## Tapping Silicon Valley, Building Local Economy



Former UCSC astronomy and physics professor George Blumenthal was appointed as the permanent chancellor on Sept. 19.

UC Santa Cruz already has strong connections with Silicon Valley's technology industry, born during Chancellor

MRC Greenwood's term, and Blumenthal aims to cultivate those ties. He said a School of Management geared towards the tech industry is one possibility.

"We [also] have a certificate program in technology and systems man-

agement that we hope may turn into a degree program," he said.

UCSC's Silicon Valley Center (SVC) at the NASA Ames research facility gets students of engineering close to the action. The university has a 10-year, \$330 million research contract with NASA, with scientists from the two institutions working side by side on air traffic management systems, nanotechnology and speech recognition software. It's just one of several major efforts that link UCSC with the tech industry.

With such a rich connection there, some have wondered if Blumenthal himself might end up working over the hill. However, he says he is committed to being present on campus. "I don't really see opening a satellite office for me," he said.

Here, he sees opportunities to build programs that might ultimately stimulate local economic growth. Blumenthal got his doctorate in physics at UC San Diego, and he sees that campus as a model of how UCSC could stimulate new industry.

"Back when I was a student, there was nothing surrounding the [San Diego] campus," he recalled. "Now there are software and medical companies. They located there because they were spin-offs [of UC research programs] or they wanted to be where the action was."

Though few local enterprises have emerged from UCSC, he thinks some of the vacant industrial space on the city's Westside could eventually house such companies.

The university's beleaguered Biomedical Sciences facility is aimed at the sort of interdisciplinary work that could incubate spin-offs.

The biomedical building is also essential to undergraduate programs such as the health sciences major that places students in internships with health care providers across Santa Cruz County.

"It is extremely popular and we can't expand that program until we have the facilities," Blumenthal said.

continued on page 19



facilities," Blumenthal said.

However, construction of the facility was delayed this fall after a judge tossed out the Environmental Impact Report for campus-wide growth. The delay is indicative of the sort of challenges that Blumenthal will face as he seeks to cultivate expanded programs while entrenched critics of campus growth try to hold UC accountable for local impacts.

### Taking an Active Role in Mediations

Blumenthal confirmed that the university will file an appeal of Judge Paul Burdick's rulings on the insufficiency of the EIR covering the campus' growth plans. However, he will also be taking a lead role in the mediations that Burdick has ordered, personally representing the university at the bargaining table.

"I believe the university has the right to grow and the needs of the state are to provide a university-level education to every student who qualifies," Blumenthal said.

However, he also appreciates concerns over the university's increasing impact on water, housing and transportation in the city.

"To the extent that we are fighting in court, it's because legitimate concerns are clashing," he said.

At the same time, Blumenthal sees signs of cooperation between the university and the broader community. He pointed to the recent formation of a coalition on climate change that brought together the university and representatives of local cities and Santa Cruz County government. The university also has combined ticket operations for campus events with the city's ticket system, another sign of cooperation, according to Blumenthal.

He doesn't want to see the university's other contributions to the community forgotten in the debate

over growth. In the realm of education, UCSC's new Teacher Center has provided support and training for new teachers for nearly two decades, addressing the fundamental challenge of retaining teachers.

"The average new teacher lasts five years," Blumenthal noted. "If we only keep them for five years, [that's] a waste."

For students, the university's Educational Partnership Center offers tutoring, mentoring and academic counseling to get more local students on the road to higher education.

"I went to a meeting last spring on campus where we talked to 1,000 students and parents ... about what they need to do," Blumenthal said. "The conference was oversubscribed by a factor of two."

Cultivating future UCSC students is just one side of the coin. Blumenthal is also intent on seeing more graduate programs on the campus. Currently, about 9 percent of students are in graduate programs.

"We would like to raise that to 15 percent," Blumenthal said. A substantial portion of future grad students, he believes, will be preparing for technology careers. "We do not have a manufacturing economy [in California,]" he pointed out. "We have a knowledge economy."

### Cultivating a Research University

Blumenthal has been a member of the UCSC faculty since 1972, so he has already seen the university make strides towards becoming a renowned graduate university.

"Looking at what it was 20 or 15 years ago, I think the university has achieved a much higher level of excellence. ... We are known far and wide as a great place to do undergraduate education," he said. "I don't think we are really recognized for the things we are good at [in the local community]. There are 10 or 12 really outstanding, nationally recognized departments on campus."

However, Blumenthal said, UCSC's growth inhibits the university's ability to attract top-notch researchers.

"On average, UC faculty is compensated about 12 percent lower than [comparable private institutions,]" he said. "That's why we are now entering into a four-year plan to bring our salaries up to parity."

The statewide uproar this year over bonus pay for UC administrators has resulted in more transparency, Blumenthal said, noting that "every penny or every form of compensation I might get" is now public information.

"Many of these changes have been good," he added. "Although, frankly, I worry about giving that information to competitors who might want to steal our faculty."

### Moving to the Chancellor's Residence

Blumenthal currently lives with his wife in Monte Sereno, outside Los Gatos, but he plans to move to the chancellor's residence at UCSC in the next year or so. His wife, Kelly Weisberg, is a professor at UC Hastings College of Law in San Francisco.

Up until last year, such a move would have been more complicated, since one of his children was still living at home. His daughter, Sarah, is now a freshman at Harvard, and his son Aaron is a senior at UC Berkeley. Neither seriously considered studying at UCSC, Blumenthal jokes.

"My kids would never have considered going to a school where they might be running into their father," he said.

Nevertheless, one of his goals is to make the UCSC campus more accommodating of families.

"One pet project I would like to pursue is more childcare on campus," he said, noting that faculty housing with room for families is also a priority. "I want this campus to be much more family friendly." ■