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Telling UC Santa Cruz's Story: An Oral History with Public Affairs Director Jim Burns, 1984-2014

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Telling UC Santa Cruz's Story:

An Oral History with Public Affairs Director Jim Burns (1984-2014)

Interviewed and Edited by Irene Reti

Santa Cruz

University of California, Santa Cruz

University Library

2016

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Interview History

Public Affairs Director Jim Burns retired in June 2014 after serving UC Santa Cruz for over three decades. For many of those years, as writer Kara Guzman wrote in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, Burns was known as “the voice of the university.” This oral history, conducted over four sessions in July 2015, gives a sense of the person behind that voice, as well as the technological, economic, political, and cultural changes that transformed the fields of media and university public relations over the past thirty years.

Jim Burns was born in Monterey, California, an eight-generation Montereyan; his father was a descendent of Juan Alvarado, governor of California during the Mexican era and the son of a major league baseball player (Eddie Burns), who played against Babe Ruth in the World Series. In Monterey, Burns edited his high school newspaper and fell in love with journalism. He majored in journalism and philosophy at California State University, Chico. After graduating in 1974, he briefly worked for the U.S. Forest Service on hotshot fire crews in the Plumas National Forest. He joked that having to stay calm while fighting fires prepared him well for “being the crisis guy” at UC Santa Cruz. He briefly considered a career in the Forest Service but his love for writing drew him into the world of journalism. He began as a staff writer for a small newspaper in Colusa County and then wrote for a larger newspaper in the Grass Valley, Nevada City area, where he also met his wife Nancy.

Burns arrived at UC Santa Cruz in 1984, hired by the Public Information Office as Publications Editor. There he edited print publications such as *On*

Campus and the *UCSC Review*, and he and his close colleague Jim MacKenzie became early adopters of desktop publishing technology. His office promoted much of UCSC's most groundbreaking research, including the campus's national role in developing and spreading organic farming and sustainable agriculture; sequencing the human genome; saving the peregrine falcon from extinction; and offering a home for the Grateful Dead Archive. In the 1990s, Burns became a key leader in developing and building UCSC's first web site. And for the past twenty-plus years Burns served as a campus spokesperson during tumultuous demonstrations, budget cuts, the Loma Prieta Earthquake and other challenging events, a steady voice through the tenures of seven chancellors and dramatic shifts in campus culture and organization. "I was blessed to be able to represent a campus as fantastic and stimulating and just never dull as this place. I never had a dull day in thirty years," Burns said in this oral history.

I conducted these interviews in a conference room at McHenry Library on July 7, July 10, July 15, and July 28, 2015. While Burns and I had never met before this interview, our careers at UCSC have overlapped considerably. We both began working in the field of publications in the era of hot wax and phototypesetting, then transitioned to desktop publishing; we witnessed many of the same changes at UCSC and share a love for this unique campus in the redwoods. These intersections are woven into the fabric of this oral history, which I also transcribed and audit/edited. Burns reviewed the transcript with careful attention, added several footnotes, and requested minor edits. I would like to thank Jim for collaborating with me on every step of this oral history—especially for compiling a detailed topic outline which was of great assistance in

this project.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

—Irene Reti, Director, Regional History Project, University Library

University of California, Santa Cruz, August 25, 2016

Preface by Jim Burns

When Irene Reti first approached me about sitting with her for an oral history, I was both surprised and honored. I was surprised because the histories that she and others in the library have done over the years have appropriately focused on campus leaders or others whose contributions to UCSC history were obvious. I was honored for the same reason: that, for reasons not clear to me, Irene considered my UCSC experience to be worthy of such company.

As it turned out, the process of helping Irene produce one of these oral histories turned out to be much more difficult for me than I imagined. As I read the transcript she shared with me of our four sit-down interviews, I found myself wondering if my personal experiences helping “tell UCSC’s story” for 30 years would be even a little interesting to readers. Irene repeatedly reassured me that my reflections would be.

I must confess that I was also a bit uncomfortable reliving some of the most challenging campus moments that I experienced during my years at UCSC. But, Irene believed that getting a campus communicator’s take on UCSC achievements, protests, other challenging issues, and the changing field of communications was important enough to warrant inclusion in University Library archives. So, during our twelve or so hours of discussion, I tried to include what I could remember with as much detail and feeling as I could muster. Please forgive me for the fact that my answers to Irene’s questions at times are way too verbose.

Speaking of what I could remember, my friend Bill Doyle — a real UCSC legend — once told me that there is a very good reason why oral histories are not a completely perfect tool for documenting history: They are completely dependent on people's (sometimes flawed) memories. Therefore, please accept my apologies in advance if, during any part of my own UCSC history, readers conclude that my memory did in fact fail me during my hours with Irene. Please know that it was not at all my intention to mislead or misrepresent.

Finally, if you read only one section of this oral history, please make it the conclusion. In it, I said I was lucky to have had such a rich and varied career as part of a wonderful team trying to help tell UCSC's story. As I said in one of my sessions with Irene, it almost felt like I had “multiple careers” during my three decades on campus. If that is true, I feel blessed to have had each and every one of them.

The campus leaders, office colleagues, others on campus (like Irene), and reporters with whom I worked were inspirational, talented, collegial, and often just good fun. The many, many people with whom I came in contact during my time at UCSC had one other thing in common: Almost to a person, they each tried to do very, very good work, occasionally under very, very challenging circumstances.

Thanks for enduring yet more words from me!

—*Warmly, Jim Burns*

Early Life and Family Background

Reti: Today is July 7, 2015, and this is Tuesday. This is Irene Reti and I am here with Jim Burns for the first session of our oral history. We're in a room on the fourth floor of McHenry Library. So Jim, welcome.

Burns: Well, Irene, thank you so much. And it's been very nice to get to know you. You were always someone I knew of, but not someone I knew. I'm honored you asked me to do this, and I hope it turns out to be even a little interesting for readers.

Reti: (laughs) I'm sure it will. So let's start out; let's go way back in your life. Tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

Burns: Yeah, well it turns out that I really haven't come very far in life (laughs) physically and maybe in other ways as well. I grew up on the other side of the [Monterey] Bay. I spent my first 17 1/2 years living on the Monterey Peninsula — mostly in Monterey, but the first few in Pacific Grove in a very small two-bedroom, one-bath house, with a family of seven. After those first few years of my life, my late parents, whom I'm exceptionally proud of, decided that the family needed a larger home. So they built a house back when you could afford to do that, in Monterey. So that's where I grew up. I attended Monterey public schools, including Monterey High School. We were in the old Monterey Bay League, I think, so our school played Santa Cruz schools in sports way back then. In many respects, Monterey is still somewhat of a sleepy place, at least compared to Santa Cruz. But it was a wonderful place to grow up. And living with such a

large and vocal family was never dull, and probably prepared me a little bit for the hectic nature of my communications job at UCSC. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: I'm proud to say that I am an eighth-generation Montereyan. In terms of a little bit of family history, my mom's parents were Samuel Coleman and Rene Dudley. My mom was born in King City, and the family eventually moved to Carmel. Sam was the town treasurer there, I think, as his profession was banking.

And on my father's side, his dad, Eddie Burns, was a major league baseball player, which made him quite famous in a little town like Monterey.¹ In fact, Eddie played in the 1915 World Series against the Boston Red Sox and a pitcher — who was not yet an established hitter — by the name of Babe Ruth.

But it was really through my father's mother that I go way back in Monterey. She was a gorgeous woman with an equally gorgeous name — Viola LaPorte. She was half Spanish, half French. And on the Spanish side she was related to Juan Alvarado, who was a governor of California twice, I believe, in the 1840s back when Monterey was the seat of governance for Alta California.² So I go way back in Monterey, back at least to the mid-1800s.

¹ See <http://www.baseball-reference.com/register/player.cgi?id=burns-003edw>.

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Bautista_Alvarado.

When I look back on my time growing up in Monterey, I think the thing that's probably the most noteworthy — at least for the purpose of this interview — was that I ended up working on my high school newspaper. See, I really *haven't* come very far (laughs). I ended up in my senior year, at least part of the year, as the editor of *The Galleon*, which the Monterey High School newspaper was called. It was a wonderful experience, and in many respects, somewhat of a life-changing experience for me. Not only did I realize how much I enjoyed journalism and writing, I realized I enjoyed the experience of working as part of a creative team of people who wrestled with how best to communicate in a way that was informative, but also spirited. Being on the newspaper staff, and in my senior year serving as editor of the school newspaper, was absolutely a real highlight of my high school years.

And I maintained my interest in journalism when I went away to college in the early 1970s.

Reti: So you were born when —

Burns: 1952. I was seventeen when I went away to college. I kind of remember my parents just dropping me off at the curb and there I was.

Reti: Had either of your parents attended college?

Burns: Both attended some college. My father attended school at St. Mary's College in the Bay Area. I think he went there as much to play sports. He was a terrific golfer and a terrific basketball player. My mother attended San Jose State. For both of them, World War II changed the arc of their lives. Mom went to work

for the military in Moffett Field in Mountain View. And Dad enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor, and was there that Sunday morning on the “day of infamy” when the bombs dropped and so many American lives were lost.³

My mom was the classic homemaker with five children in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, and '70s, before she finally ushered the last one of us out the door. She really raised us pretty darn singlehandedly. And, because I'm quite fond of my late mother, I would add: beautifully.

My late father started out as an employee — a fairly low-level employee — at a longtime men's clothing store on Alvarado Street, the main street in downtown Monterey. It was a store by the name of Charmak and Chandler. Full-service, locally owned stores in small downtowns like Monterey and Santa Cruz don't exist as much anymore, having fallen out of favor with the advent of the shopping mall and now online shopping. But at the time we were all living in Monterey, Charmak and Chandler was just one of several men's clothing stores in downtown Monterey. I think Dad started out maybe stocking shelves and cleaning the place and ended up owning the store. He worked his tail off. My brothers and sisters and I learned a lot from him, including the fact that we could just roll up our sleeves and work hard.

³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infamy_Speech.

Studying Journalism and Philosophy in College

Burns: After high school, I attended Cal State Chico and, I suspect because of my high school experience, I almost immediately began to take classes in journalism. Like many people at that age, I was trying to determine what really interested me, what I really enjoyed doing. And writing and working in the newspaper business was something that I aspired to do, so earning a degree in journalism made a lot of sense to me.

Interestingly, I earned a second degree in philosophy. I don't know what the size of the Chico campus is now — I suspect it is very large — but back then it was quite small. In some ways, my experience on a very intimate campus may have been kind of like what I have often heard UC Santa Cruz's early students say their campus was like when it was much smaller in size. The classes were quite small. The educational setting was very informal. I earned a second degree in philosophy simply because I was so fascinated with the subject and with the books that I was reading and the process of learning how to think and analyze — qualities that that subject emphasized. And so, when I look back on those years, I can say in very tangible ways the academic work that I did there really prepared me for what I ended up doing professionally at UCSC. The writing and communication skills, but also the thinking and discussing and analyzing that I remember experiencing so fondly in those many philosophy classes.

Reti: That's really interesting. I can see how that would prepare you well to *think* about what the campus was doing and for everything that you had to do later. It wasn't just the nuts and bolts of journalism, but being able to step back and give

it that analytical perspective.

Burns: I would tell people much later in my UCSC career that I used to scratch my head when I realized that Staff HR had classified my position as a Principal Analyst. It wasn't my descriptive job title, which ended up being UCSC's Director of Public Affairs. But in many ways that *is* what I did. I worked with people on campus to analyze how we were communicating about ourselves — both proactively and reactively — and also how clearly we were explaining what we were doing, including the thorny issues that were tremendous challenges for the campus.

Reti: Okay, so we'll come back to lots of that later, for sure.

Burns: Okay.

Reti: So you're at Chico State and you graduated in —

Burns: 1974. Came very close, just by happenstance, to having a career in forestry after I graduated. I guess I could say that learning how to put out fires was another part of my life experience that served me well here. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Firefighting: On the Hotshot Crew

Burns: Immediately after graduating from college, I ended up with a seasonal job in the U.S. Forest Service. Just as a summer gig, really. I ended up a member of — I don't know what they are called now — but back then they were called Hotshot Crews. They were comprised of firefighters who were helicoptered or

driven in, or who hiked in as a first-response team in the beginning stages of a forest fire. Sometimes we were successful, and we could extinguish the fire or keep it small until reinforcements arrived; sometimes we weren't successful, and the fire would become quite large and destructive. We were dropped onto the scene so early that we would fight these fires without really having the benefit of water because the trucks weren't there yet. We had chainsaws; we had shovels. We had small amounts of water in backpacks we would carry. If we could, we would try to get a line around the fire before it became something less manageable. It was amazing work. I was paid very well for risking my life, I guess, as those jobs could be pretty hazardous. I was in my early twenties, physically fit, so why not do that?

I ended up being offered a job in the U.S. Forest Service for a position that was some combination of fire prevention and what was called "timber stand improvement." It was very physical work. We'd live in outposts way out in the boondocks. I was stationed for most of those years in remote locations in Northern California, mostly in the Plumas National Forest in the Quincy area.

Reti: A lot of fires up there.

Burns: Yes. Anyway, I was about to be offered a career job with the Forest Service, and I almost took it and followed that career path. But then I realized that I'd be giving up on writing and a chance at a career in communications. I liked writing. I had studied journalism. I was writing on the side, but wanted to explore doing it as a career.

Beginning a Career in Journalism

Reti: So you were doing creative writing?

Burns: I was freelance writing for newspapers, and realized that I should give this career a more formal try. So I put the Forest Service pursuit on hold and decided that I'd go back and try to see if I could break into the world of journalism, which at the time was very, very competitive. I guess it's still very competitive but for different reasons now. Now it's competitive because there are so few positions on the payroll. It was a much more burgeoning profession back then.

As a freelancer, I did a lot of entertainment writing for the *San Rafael Independent Journal*. And ended up getting enough clips to secure a full-time job in the smallest newspaper probably ever created, which was a daily paper up in Colusa County. But my mission at that point was to do anything I could to get clips, to try to build a portfolio. I aspired to work on a metro-sized paper, but, as I said, those jobs were very hard to get.

So I started at the bottom, learned a tremendous amount about writing from that job. I was in that position for about a year before getting a job as a reporter at a larger newspaper up in the Grass Valley-Nevada City area. The newspaper there at the time was probably similar to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. Like all community papers, it's much smaller now. But at the time I was there, it was a going concern. There were lots of writing opportunities in that job. I covered city, county, business beats. I was the business editor. I did some sports writing

because I've always enjoyed sports, and wrote lots of feature pieces. It was an amazing place to work, staffed by a lot of people like me who were in their twenties, enjoyed the work, and were learning the ropes in the world of journalism. I covered a great many local controversies. Heck, my writing probably created a few controversies.

Reti: (laughs) You mean investigative journalism.

Burns: Well, for example, there was a particular water district up there that ratepayers, justifiably or not, felt was not treating them fairly. I wrote a series of articles about the district's finances that made me pretty unpopular at their board meetings. While covering local government there, I learned how to sit in often long and ponderous meetings, distill the essence of the meeting, and summarize the most important items for readers. That's what you did if you were working in community journalism. You had to listen to three hours of a meeting and winnow it down to six, seven, or eight column inches. All in all, it was fascinating work, and I think it helped me learn how to listen more critically. And, through the experience, I continued to improve my writing abilities. So it turned out to be a perfect steppingstone to Santa Cruz.

I was in Grass Valley four to five years, and — if my wife ends up reading this, which I hope she will — I would be terribly remiss if I didn't say that the other great thing about my years there was that I met Nancy. And here we are, having been married for more than thirty years now and having parented a couple of terrific kids, Trevor and Monica.

I was very fortunate to have spent those years in Grass Valley. When you work on a daily newspaper that size, you end up wearing a lot of hats. And you don't have the luxury of spending — this was both a positive and a negative — as much time on stories as you might like to, partly because the news hole is not that big.

Reti: News hole? What's a news hole?

Burns: The amount of editorial space that newspapers or newsmagazines have for stories or other editorial content. To jump ahead to 2015, it's not difficult to notice what's happened in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and every other newspaper of note —

Reti: You mean the incredible shrinking newspaper?

Burns: — the *LA Times*, whatever newspaper you're reading, the number of pages and the amount of space that they have for news stories, that hole, has really shrunk. It is all a matter of economics — the cost of printing a newspaper, how much advertising they are publishing, what their paid circulation is.

Even back when I was a working journalist, the economics and the advertising were such that newspapers like the one I worked for in Grass Valley only had so many pages to fill each day. So you could not write incredibly long pieces that covered a subject from A to Z. Instead, what ended up happening was that you'd get multiple assignments every day. I'd come back to the office and maybe have to write two or three short stories and one or two long stories. And that was every single day. And maybe edit a section of a paper that I was assigned to edit.

I learned to write quickly and to think quickly about what people would want to know. It was fabulous experience for me.

So, after four or so years at that newspaper, with reporting positions at metro papers still very difficult to land, I started considering what else I might do. Marketing was a field that was emerging around that time. It was still focused very much on advertising. Social media obviously didn't exist yet. The Internet hadn't been born yet. So marketing was more focused around advertising. And advertising wasn't a field that felt like it was necessarily in my wheelhouse.

Early Years at the UC Santa Cruz Public Information Office

So I started considering what other kind of writing I could do. And about that time, I heard about this position at UC Santa Cruz through my brother, Tom Burns, who was living in Santa Cruz.⁴ It was a writing and editing job in what was then called the Public Information Office. It was a job writing for and editing the campus's faculty and staff newsletter. It was a pretty well-read newsletter called *On Campus*. You probably have copies of them somewhere in the library.

Reti: We have a whole set in Special Collections.

Burns: And if you ever are missing some, I think I have a whole set myself.

⁴ Jim's brother, Tom Burns, worked in Santa Cruz County government in multiple land-use roles: as the county geologist, as an assistant director of the county Planning Department, as director of the county's Redevelopment Agency, and finally as director of the Planning Department.

Reti: Good to know. (laughs)

Burns: I know that because I used that publication as a resource for some of the 50th anniversary preparations I was doing for the campus after I retired. Back in 1984, the person who was in that position was an absolutely wonderful writer and person — Karen Rhodes. I'm still friends with her all these years later. She was transitioning into the world of development writing. I saw Karen not that long ago. She's now head of development communications for the School of Engineering at UC Berkeley. So she went on to do really terrific things. But her first step in that journey was to do development writing for University Relations at UCSC. Her aspiration created a vacancy for me — a position that I applied for, interviewed for, and ended up getting in July of 1984.

Reti: And that was Publications —

Burns: Even though it felt like it was more in the publications realm, the job was organizationally in the public information side of the house, which at the time was a three-person group. Tom O'Leary was the director; he may have been the first director of public information for the campus. He wasn't the person in the office with the most seniority. Joan Ward had that distinction. But Tom had attained director status in the office; he was a very talented person and I've stayed in touch with him through the years. Anyway, the staff at the time was Tom, who was the director, and Joan, who was a writer and promoter of some of the academic divisions. The two of them had divvied up the academic departments — or boards of study as they were called then — and they were trying their best to promote campus achievements in the way that it was done

back then — press releases were typed, Xeroxed, and snail mailed to reporters near and far. I did some general assignment writing as well, including some press releases. But my primary task was to do this newsletter that the Public Information Office produced.

Reti: On Campus.

Burns: The *On Campus* publication. In July 1984, I became the editor of that publication. I was also its only dedicated staff member. But I relied heavily on material that Tom and Joan produced. I'd also write my own material. And in the manner in which it was done at the time, it was a paste-up publication. I worked with a printer in town to produce fixed-width columns of type, and I'd wax the back of those columns as I laid out the publication by hand.

Reti: With hot wax.

Burns: Yes, hot wax. It wasn't quite as bad as hot type. Thankfully, we'd moved beyond that. It was kind of a solo operation. *On Campus* came out about every two weeks. I was pretty free to decide what should be in the publication. It was distributed almost exclusively to just faculty and staff. Those were great years because, while working, I was able to begin to really understand the many academic and administrative layers that made up UC Santa Cruz.

When I came to UC Santa Cruz I knew a little bit about the campus, really just by virtue of the fact that my brother Tom had been a student here. I would come to campus and visit him in the early 1970s. But I had not kept up with UCSC at all.

Reti: Had you heard much about the campus? You grew up in the Monterey Bay

Area as the campus was being built. You were a kid when the campus was founded, I guess, in 1965.

Burns: I knew this much about UCSC: It started out as an incredibly competitive place to get into. By the mid-1970s, that was beginning to change. By the time I got here in the mid-1980s, you could walk up to the Cook House a week after school started and if you met UC's minimum eligibility requirements they'd enroll you. In the world of public relations and admissions, that was a challenging period for the campus.

Reti: Did you find the physical setting of the campus unusual, or confusing to navigate?

Burns: Yes. I remember this being addressed in the oral history you published with Chancellor Karl Pister, one of the chancellors with whom I worked very closely and knew quite well.⁵ I had the good fortune to know all seven who were chancellors during my time at UCSC. But I obviously had deeper relations with some. Karl was one of the ones I knew quite well and worked very closely with. And, he used to tell me this — and I noted it in the library's oral history with him — that when he first came to the campus he couldn't figure out where the campus was. That was partly having to do with our signage challenges, or I guess in transportation vernacular: wayfinding. But also just the layout of the

⁵ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Karl S. Pister: UCSC Chancellorship, 1991-1996*. (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2000). <https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/pister>.

place — that you come to the old historic part of the campus and you would wonder where the heck the actual campus is.

I had that same first impression. I remember thinking, so I'm in the Carriage House. That's where the interview took place. That's where my office would be if I get this job. Now, where's the campus again? (laughs)

Reti: (laughs) Right. It's up there on the hill, in the trees somewhere.

Burns: Yes, in the trees somewhere.

Reti: You can't even see it from down there, not really. That's by design.

Burns: No, you can't. I mean, now you can see the Music Center, but at the time I came to UCSC that building didn't exist.

Obviously I knew a little bit about the campus's arc, that it had started out as this magnificent experiment, had struggled a bit, and was trying to get back on track. At a minimum, there was a public perception that the place was less desirable for some of the very best prospective students. It was having enrollment challenges, which led to budget challenges.

And I knew about the no-grades thing.⁶ That was a deep-seated impression that

⁶ "UCSC opened in 1965 during a time of unprecedented university growth, student protest, and introspection. The founding faculty, dissatisfied with traditional forms of grading, opted for a system that was intended to provide a better understanding of what a student had achieved in a course, while downplaying the competitive aspects of learning. Faculty-authored narrative evaluations were adopted in lieu of letter grades. UCSC instructors would write a personalized narrative evaluation of each student's academic performance in all courses in which the student earned credit. The proposal to implement narrative evaluations was approved by the systemwide Academic Senate in 1966 as a variance from the

people had about Santa Cruz. Whether they perceived that as a good thing or a negative, they knew about that. And that was one of the things that I knew about the campus.

I enjoyed working with Tom O'Leary and Joan Ward a lot. They were so generous in helping me understand this place. Tom, who was my supervisor, was also especially willing to just give me work that in some respects I wasn't particularly prepared for. But he must have assumed that I would just figure it out. That was Tom's approach to management. And it served me well. I was eager to learn. I was eager to try different things. I was trying to be unafraid of areas that I knew very little about. Here's a good example of that: I think I had been on the job for only a few days when Tom left for a month-long vacation. At the time I was hired, there was already was a UC Santa Cruz *Review*, though it wasn't the magazine I would later help launch. It was a quarterly tabloid-sized newspaper that was probably about six to eight large-format newsprint pages. Among other responsibilities, Tom served as the editor of the *Review* at the time.

standard University of California grading system. A condition of the variance was the requirement that to receive the bachelor's degree a student must either write a senior thesis or pass a comprehensive examination." See <http://planning.ucsc.edu/irps/Stratpln/WASC94/a/sec2.htm>

And I think I'd been employed at UCSC — now that I'm thinking about it, it was less than a week — and Tom announced that he was going on vacation. I thought to myself: geez, I don't really know what I'm going to do. I'm still learning the very basics of the job.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: It's maybe not quite the orientation that would work for everyone, but that was Tom's approach and it served me very well. On his way out the door for a month, Tom said to me, "Well Jim, I'm about halfway through putting out a quarterly issue of the *Review* that we send out to members of the Alumni Association." I think that was the readership at the time. "So would you just finish this job and get it to the printer and make sure that it gets mailed." It was an interesting learning experience.

The beautiful part about those years was that there weren't many limits on what you could do, what you could write about. The office very much functioned as a news office. It did not have, as far as I could tell, much in the way of an overt public relations function, or certainly not a marketing function. It was strictly a news office. Tom and Joan would write press releases. I was a third person who was available to do that kind of work about a research or student activity on campus. We had very little contact with the Chancellor's Office about the workings of the campus, or about anything that campus leaders may have felt was a strategic communications priority. I distinctly remember forming that impression after being here about six months and realizing that I didn't recall our office receiving a single call from the Chancellor's Office.

Reti: And this would have been under Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer?

Burns: It was. Now, to be fair, there were other people in University Relations who probably were having those discussions. There was Collette Murray, who if her title wasn't vice chancellor, certainly worked as head of what was either called University Relations or University Advancement. We seemed to alternate titles of the division.

Reti: I know.

Burns: So there may have been people who were having conversations about strategic communications. But Tom, Joan, and I — we just functioned as the campus news office. We put out press releases. It was obviously before email. There were press releases I can remember typing up on my old typewriter, Xeroxing, and then just mailing them to reporters near and far.

Reti: So even though it was the mid-1980s, you hadn't gone over to using computers and UNIX or anything like that? It was still only typewriters?

Burns: No. I guess I'm not describing that completely. The organization that was overseeing IT, which was called CATS [Communications and Technology Services] at the time, they did have mainframe computers up in the campus's old Communications Building. So people at the time had just begun working on what were called dumb terminals, in addition to using typewriters. A renowned UCSC faculty member, Harry Huskey, had been involved in the very early work

that years later led to the advent of the personal computer, but at that time such computers weren't commercially available yet.⁷ We were still a few years, I think, away from the first version of Windows or Macs. So you would type things up on your dumb terminal, electronically transmit them to the Communications Building using a language called NROFF.

Reti: I remember that.⁸

Burns: And then have what was called the cooked file come back to you; and you could print it out on the office impact printer that you shared with fifty other people.

Reti: Oh, that was painful.

Burns: We did have one of those printers in the Carriage House. Sometimes it was easier to just type up a press release on a typewriter and Xerox it. (laughs) And we would stuff envelopes and mail them out, and just hope someone called back. Put a name on the release, put a contact phone number on the release, and mail them out to local and national reporters. I don't want to say it was an unimpressive operation. It's just the way things were done at that time. It was very old school. You could follow some of these up with a few strategic phone calls, and we did. But you'd have to wait a few days to allow time for the press

⁷ See <http://news.ucsc.edu/2013/03/huskey-award.html>.

⁸ The interviewer began her career at UCSC in the Office of the Registrar in 1986 and used UNIX vi to produce sections of the UCSC *Schedule of Classes* and other publications.

release to get mailed, delivered, and opened on the other end. So it was an interesting but slow-motion communications era. We produced a lot of great stories. Some of them were picked up. Many of them weren't. And we would repurpose those stories in campus publications.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that there was a small Publications Office that we had a close relationship with back then. We were sort of Public Information/Publications. The person who was running the publications side of the house was Jim MacKenzie. Our two operations worked on very different projects. We were the news office. We promoted the campus to reporters and we produced what we called periodicals, which was the old *Review* tabloid newspaper and the *On Campus* newsletter. The Publications Office was neck-deep in work producing the *General Catalog*, brochures for graduate programs, and too many other jobs to mention for the Admissions enterprise. They were really a going enterprise. Jim was at the helm of that operation. He ran that office for about thirty years and became a wonderful colleague of mine, as well as a partner through a lot of the communication transformations that we went through. We worked very closely together for more than twenty-five years.

Reti: Wow. That's extraordinary.

Burns: Yeah. The Jims, as we were sometimes called.

But anyway, at the time the campus's Public Information Office functioned as a campus news office. Offices like ours and like those on other university campuses had not very much interaction with the campus leadership. We had

productive relationships with faculty — we'd hear from them, and we'd get story ideas from them. We tried to cover major campus events. And we stuffed envelopes and mailed out press releases.

That obviously started changing a lot with the advent of email and then much more dramatically when this thing came along in the early 1990s called the World Wide Web.

Editing the *UCSC Review*

Reti: So should we talk about the *UCSC Review* before we get into the Web and email?

Burns: Okay. It was summer of 1985, and our office received a blue memo. (laughs) People who've been at UCSC a long time remember the blue memos. They signified that the memo was internal in nature, and this particular communication was from Chancellor Sinsheimer. It may have gone to Steve Reed, who at the time was head of government and community relations for the campus, and to some extent helped Tom manage our area of University Relations. We were preparing to celebrate the campus's 20th anniversary. There was a committee that I was a member of at the time, that was planning the 20th, and then trying to figure out how to leverage the anniversary to promote our still-infant campus. The work for that anniversary, understandably, was not nearly as ambitious as the preparations for the 50th; but it was also similar in many ways.

And one of the things that Chancellor Sinsheimer decided was that we needed a

real campus magazine, not a tabloid newspaper, to usher in our anniversary year. So we decided to make the *Review* that kind of a vehicle. And the job was given to Jim MacKenzie and to me. As I recall, and I'm quite certain my memory is accurate about this, this memo was dated sometime in July 1985. I'd been at UCSC for all of one year. And the goal was to have a magazine on the streets and that we could hand out at various university functions, including a Founders Day function that campus leaders were planning for late September of 1985, or maybe early October. I want to say late September.

Reti: Wow, that's not very much time to bring a magazine into print.

Burns: It's not very much time at all. And Jim and I had to create the magazine from scratch. So, as Jim and I were fond of saying, we had our day jobs, in which we tried to make headway with our normal workload. And then in the evenings we would retire to the old Saturn Café, when it was down on Mission Street, and usually order a pitcher of beer and sit there and try to sketch out what the magazine would be like: how many pages it was going to be; identifying the sections; what was going to be in those sections; what would be the inaugural issue's feature articles? Who would do the writing and photography? There was a ton of work associated with producing that very first issue. We had to plan it, write it, design it, secure related art, and get it printed, in really just a couple of months. And do the rest of our work at the same time.

Reti: And it was just the two of you?

Burns: Well, we did have the great benefit of having Tom and Joan to help with

the writing. But that was pretty much it.

Reti: But in terms of editing and production.

Burns: In addition to helping with the writing, I did all of the editing. And Jim was just up to his eyeballs in design work, trying to figure out the layout of the book, arranging for the photography. His contribution to those early issues of the *Review* was very significant. Jim and I learned a lot about each other and about working together on that job. We'd bicker, but we had loads of fun along the way — and we shared the goal of trying to do the best possible work we could do. And in this case the best possible work we could do in not very much time.

But we made the deadline. Chancellor Sinsheimer was pleased. The Founders Day event occurred at Cowell College in the fall of 1985. I think Governor Brown came back to the campus for this.

Reti: Pat Brown?

Burns: Pat Brown. And there was a little ceremony, not a very big one, as I recall, by Founders Rock, over by Cowell College. There was a much nicer ceremony that a few of us organized for the campus's 50th, kind of a reenactment of the founding of Cowell.*

But anyway, we had copies of the magazine that we could hand out and give to

* See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2014/04/dedication-rock-ceremony-feature.html>.

the dignitaries who were there in the fall of 1985 and to the friends of the campus who'd been invited. So out of necessity and a request from a chancellor, the *UC Santa Cruz Review* magazine was born.¹⁰ And, for Jim and me, it was a labor of love that we did together for more than twenty years. We started out with the idea of producing four issues a year, in other words quarterly. We very quickly realized that we just could not pull that off. We were given no real resources other than the cost of production and printing and mailing to do this. We didn't have dedicated staff, other than PIO writers who generously contributed feature-length articles. So very quickly it became a three-issue-a-year publication. There might have been some years when we only put out just one or two.

As has occurred fairly regularly during the campus's 50-year history, there were periods of down budget cycles when it would be easier for someone to conclude that they should reduce the *Review's* frequency, rather than lay somebody off. I don't know whether it was the best decision from an advancement point of view for the campus, but certainly it was the humane way to handle these budget crises. So there were a few years, I think, when we combined the *Review* with the UC Santa Cruz's Foundation *Annual Report* and just produced one large issue. Jim and I worked on the *Review* together for at least twenty years, I would guess. It was a bit stressful at times but almost always fun.

Reti: That's wonderful. I know we have a complete set of those issues in the

¹⁰ See <http://review.ucsc.edu/>.

archive for anyone who is interested in looking at them.

Burns: I want to make sure that I really acknowledge the great work that Jim did. We were partners in it. I was more on the editorial side, and he really was on the design and artistic side. But we were partners in the best sense of the word, and my role as editor was no more elevated than his role as designer. We did a lot of good work together.

Reti: You are so lucky to have a collegiate relationship like that. Partnering for decades that way in publishing is not that common.

Burns: It was the first, but not the last time that a chancellor insisted that we create a new publication for the campus. I think it was MRC Greenwood, several years later, who decided that having just a newsletter as the internal organ for the campus was not adequate. And so she decreed that we produce a tabloid-sized newspaper to replace the *On Campus* publication, something that had more capacity and that looked more professional. And that was called *Currents*.¹¹ We even had an on-campus contest to name it.

It's funny. In some respects, it wasn't all that different from the old *Review* magazine, in that it was in a similar tabloid-sized format. Again, Jim was a partner, at least in the design of that. I was the editor, but the publication relied heavily for content on the many wonderful and talented colleagues I had over

¹¹ See <http://currents.ucsc.edu/>.

the years in the Public Information Office, the people who were hired principally as writers and to help with the publicity for campus's various academic divisions.

Reti: What about the colleges? How were they publicizing themselves? Or did that intersect with your operation?

Burns: We did help publicize them, but not nearly to the extent we publicized what was happening in the divisions. It would be fair to say, Irene, that the campus at times wasn't quite sure about a precise role for the colleges. Periodically somebody would put forth a reorganization plan for the colleges. I think, to some extent, at times in the campus's history the colleges haven't been as vital as they could have been. Perhaps as a reflection of that, our office wasn't structured very well to promote them. There was a bit of tension about how we were or were not promoting them over the years because, rightly or wrongly, with the limited resources that we had, we decided that we'd get the most promotional bang for our buck by promoting the academic divisions and the research enterprise. So we literally just developed a beat system, whereby three people in our office covered the five academic divisions. And most of what we considered to be newsworthy — and I guess I could define that as something that would be of interest to regional, statewide, or national reporters — was research-related. So that's pretty much how we organized ourselves. There was a lot of pressure that was brought to bear for us to promote the research enterprise, and that's what reporters seemed most interested in writing about — at least when they weren't covering protests or other challenges that the campus might

have. And it also was the area of the campus that was seen as having the most potential for support — private support in the form of gifts and public support in the form of contracts and grants. So there was a fair amount of pressure for us to promote the research enterprise. And that's what my PIO [Public Information Office] colleagues mostly did. And I think they did that work exceptionally well.

It wasn't a case of our not believing in the colleges. It was simply a matter of our relatively small office having a small and finite amount of resources.

Reti: That makes sense. Sure.

The Advent of Desktop Publishing

Reti: Should we move into talking about the rise of the email/Internet/Web and how that changed your work? (chuckles)

Burns: Sure. Well, one other thing we could touch upon in this section might be the advent of desktop publishing. It was in the mid- to late 1980s, and at the time we were still doing the *On Campus* publication. I think at the time Apple had just put out the second version of the Macintosh. It was something called a Macintosh Plus.

Reti: I had one of those.

Burns: I guess one of the things that served me so well during my thirty-year career here was that I was never afraid of new technology. So Jim and I decided that we needed to embrace desktop publishing. We could see that the days of printing up galleys of text, and waxing the back of the galleys, and trimming

them to fit a layout on a pasteboard — those days were going to change, and they were going to change quickly. So we talked Steve Reed, the person at the time who seemed to have the purse strings for our office, into permitting us to take an entire year's budget for the *On Campus* publication and spend it on a laser printer, Macintoshes for Jim and for me, and I think the very first versions of Microsoft Word and PageMaker. The very first versions. At the time, there wasn't anyone on campus who really knew how to do this, so we were going to be the guinea pigs. We'd done enough research to convince ourselves that we could take the leap.

Reti: Wow.

Burns: I think the craps term is that we were sort of *betting on the come* a little bit. So that very first night after I got my Mac up and running — I want to say this was the fall of 1986 — I remember sitting in the Carriage House saying, “Well, I've got to produce an issue of this *On Campus* publication and I've got to do it with this new-fangled technology. And I couldn't figure out how to make it work. (laughter) I got as far as producing galleys of type in PageMaker that then I could wax and cut into strips and lay the issue out the same way that I used to.

Reti: Right, with T-squares and blue pasteboard.¹²

¹² The interviewer also ran a small independent press (HerBooks) from 1984 until 2000, and in the 1980s employed similar kinds of pre-digital book production techniques to the ones Burns used in the Public Information Office.

Burns: Yes.

Reti: A light table and razor blades.

Burns: Exactly. It was pretty frustrating. The first few issues I remember doing that way and coming home very late at night and Nancy would say, “What are you doing at work so late?” And I’d reply, “Well, we’re now doing publications in a new and more efficient way.” (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: And as with everything else like that, obviously the learning curve was kind of steep. But eventually we figured it out. My recollection is that Jim had not yet learned the technology. So I really did have to be the guinea pig and try to figure it out. In the end it worked out beautifully.

The more interesting part of the story was that it ushered in an era in communications that was not without its challenges — and I’ll reference this later when we talk about the Web. With the advent of desktop publishing, suddenly every campus office had its own in-house “designers,” people with little or no design experience who could produce their own publications. They didn’t have to consult with a central office anymore that was staffed with professional designers.

Reti: Right, they could use as many typefaces as they wanted. (laughs) And try them *all* out in one document.

Burns: And they did. (laughs) Exactly. There was a rush of publications

produced on campus by the colleges, by divisions. And they were all being done by the new generation of “designers” who were out there. But, in all fairness, the technology was allowing them to do it. It was a fascinating era in campus communications, and it became a somewhat frustrating era because we realized that an increasing number of offices were now able to produce their own publications without consulting with Jim’s team or with us. The campus was still flush enough with staff at the time so that people had extra bandwidth in their jobs. They had the bandwidth to take on these new and fun roles as desktop publishers.

I bring that up because we were probably slow to recognize that that was going to create a somewhat fractured overall impression of the campus because many of the publications weren’t necessarily going to look like they came from the same place. In this case, a technology breakthrough was making it difficult for us to market the campus as effectively as possible because these new homegrown publications — produced in a decentralized way — often didn’t incorporate common content, typefaces, or even logos.

Burns: I would relive this experience a few years later when the World Wide Web was born. So do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Reti: Please.

Developing a Campus Website: The Early Years of the World Wide Web

Burns: As best I can recall, it was in probably 1993 or 1994 when the World Wide Web was just being hatched ...

Reti: That sounds right to me.

Burns: At the time Karl Pister was chancellor, and I had a lead communications role in his administration. I was attending some meeting in the library — the Chancellor's Office, as you know, used to be located in the library for many years before Kerr Hall was converted into a central administrative hub. Anyway, I was leaving the library and walking out into what was then called the free speech area of the library. I don't know what that area is called now. It's the area that's outside the café, but it used to be outside the foyer of the library. And I happened to cross paths with Galen Jarvinen from Planning and Budget, who like me had a fascination with technology. Actually, Galen was probably more fascinated with the subject than I was. He asked me what I knew about the World Wide Web. And my response was something like: "The World Wide What?"

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: (laughs) I knew about the Internet because the Internet had been created a few years earlier in the international science community, born on college and university campuses, or research institutions. And in fact, there was a fellow who [worked at] the Science Library at the time —

Reti: Steve Watkins.

Burns: Yes, Steve Watkins.

Reti: He was very instrumental in developing the Gopher System, even before the Web.

Burns: The Gopher System, exactly. Steve, who I think has gone on to great things at CSU Monterey Bay, left Santa Cruz. I think he might have been one of the founding librarians down there. As you know, he was a very early player in the Gopher world, which was essentially the World Wide Web without graphics. Back then, it was really just the organization and online publishing of text files. I had become work friends with Steve.

I think because I was just curious about the medium and its potential, I had begun to post our office's stories and content online in a text-only Gopher format. So I understood a little bit about what existed with the early Internet network, but did not allow myself to picture how this could work with graphics. And that, of course, was what began to define the World Wide Web.

Anyway, Galen asked me what I knew about it, and the context for the discussion was a campus home page. As I said, I told him I knew nothing about WWW. But it was during the course of this conversation that I realized I needed to know something. And there wasn't anyone else in our office at the time who was going to be any more interested in this than I was.

As I recall, Galen told me that there was already an unofficial UCSC site. And he was, of course, correct. If I recall correctly, that very first campus home page, or at least the thing that appeared when you typed in www.ucsc.edu was something that had been created by a small group of students.¹³ I don't recall

¹³ <http://www.ucsc.edu/>.

anything about the student group, and I don't recall us having any difficulty at all acquiring that domain space from them. I think we just worked with CATS, as ITS [Information and Technology Services] was called then, to assume ownership of the domain name.

Anyway, there was a small group of staff people who very quickly got together and figured out we needed to do something in this new medium; we needed to establish an official presence for UC Santa Cruz on the Internet, something that went beyond what Steve had already helped us do in the Gopher realm. The units in that early effort, at least organizationally, were our office, meaning the Public Information and Publications group; the library, which hosted the first web servers for the campus; and CATS, which was going to help us with the systems or the back end of this. Galen, who was in Planning and Budget, was a key player and terrific resource for getting this off the ground.

It is interesting because when I reflect back on the ad-hoc partnership we created in those early years, I think it would be fair to say that there was probably a bit of a tug of war about who was the first among equals.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: But, all in all, it was a pretty collegial undertaking. We recognized, correctly, that it needed to be a partnership. I think the person I worked with most closely at the library was Lee Jaffe. Maybe I had some interaction with Bob White in some way. In some respects, the library saw the World Wide Web as its medium because it was about information and it was about how you organized

information. So I don't think it was a stretch to say that the library people were reluctant to cede control of that to our office completely because they saw it was something that really belonged more in their sphere.

The technology people, with Jacques Delsemme representing CATS, I think saw it as something that was more in their sphere because it was a technology medium. You needed to understand programming and how servers worked, and all of that in order for it to work.

Reti: Interesting.

Burns: And Galen and I were beginning to promote the idea that it was about campus communications, and that our office, whether we were prepared to or not, should be the unit that was in charge. And so there was, at least in those early months and maybe years, a little understandable tension about who was actually managing UCSC's web presence. I don't want to overstate this; it wasn't tension that paralyzed us at all. We all realized that we needed to just do this and get UCSC's web presence off the ground.

It may have taken a few years, but I think in the end the people involved really did come to believe that the web was a communications enterprise, and that our office could and should lead the campus's web presence. But in those early years you can imagine how, very understandably, there was a small amount of tension around that.

Anyway, Jim Mackenzie and I — in consultation with Galen and probably Lee and Jacques — began to think through an information architecture for the

campus's first official homepage. And it was not very many months before we had something up. I'd say weeks, but I think it was longer than that. But within a few months we had a web site up with a homepage and some secondary pages. I can still picture what it looked like. It was pretty first-generation web. Jim did all of the graphics. I knew how to write in *vi* at the time — thankfully from my *On Campus* production days I had learned the coding language because that was the language that our off-campus printer wanted to receive the text files in. And that was, of course, the UNIX-based code used by the campus mainframe at the time.

Reti: It was a text editing program.

Burns: Right. It was an editing system for the UNIX systems on campus. And it turned out to be hugely helpful because I used *vi* to basically write code for that first campus web site.

Reti: So there was no HTML at that time?

Burns: It was HTML, but I used *vi* to write HTML files for publication on campus servers. I had to learn HTML, and Galen — as always — was a huge help with that. He always was such a terrific resource for me. Of course, you could find a few web sites that were up, and so you could go look at their source code and try to figure out how they were doing it. That first site was pretty crude, but we were pretty proud of ourselves for launching it.

In reflecting on that chapter in the campus's communications history, I am struck by something: At the time there was really no demand from the administration that we do this. I think the Internet, or at least the World Wide Web, was so

young that many people thought it was going to be just a passing fad. As you recall, the download times were just horrifically slow on those first modems.

People were fascinated by this new medium, but I think there was some skepticism about whether it would really take off. And so, unlike other projects that I undertook or helped launch, like the *Review* magazine, or even the *Currents* newspaper, I don't recall there being a request or a demand from campus leaders for us to even launch an official UCSC web site. It was a core group of us at a lower level, who just believed we needed to help the campus enter this new world of promotion and publishing. In fact, I don't recall us having to run that first web site by anybody before we published it.

Reti: That's amazing.

Burns: I think we just let people know we'd done this, a bottom-up process that was probably very helpful to us because we were able to just get it done without a lot of interference.

Reti: You weren't bogged down in committees for a year before you could even start.

Burns: Right.

Reti: Do you have any sense of what was happening at other UC campuses around this transition?

Burns: If I had to guess, I would say that in the early 1990s there were major government entities — the executive branch and the White House come to mind

— that were beginning to publish things online. I think 1994 was the year that the White House published its first web site. I don't know whether we preceded the White House, but I have a sense that, as was the case with our other online publishing projects, that we were one of the first UC campuses to do it. But it's quite possible that Berkeley or someone else beat us to it. I just don't really remember it that well. And quite frankly, it caught fire pretty fast, at least on college and university campuses, where the Internet was really launched. The commercial world lagged a bit in the online world, but in higher education if you didn't have a web site up in those months you were not part of the next big thing.

Reti: Okay, I think that's a great place to stop for today.

Reti: So today is July 10, 2015, and this is Irene Reti. I'm here with Jim Burns at McHenry Library on the fourth floor for our second session of the oral history that we're doing together. And so, Jim, we were going to start today by picking up where we left last time. We were talking about the implementation of the UCSC web site.

Burns: Yes, well, as I think I said last time, it was an amazing era in communications, not just for us, but for everyone. The Internet had existed for a little while, but the World Wide Web gave the campus a chance to leverage it, to begin — in a visually pleasing and editorially substantive way — to do a better job of telling our story through a different medium, one that even in its infancy,

seemed like it had the potential to be very far reaching. So, in addition to my attraction to the technical side of communications, the storytelling potential of the new medium seemed pretty fertile. I think at the time there were very valid concerns about how slow the Internet was. Because of the download speeds, would people ever really be able to use it effectively? It just seemed like those challenges were going to get solved. I remember having a conversation with my friend and longtime colleague, Jim McKenzie, that there was money to be made here, so we shouldn't give up on this medium just because the modem speeds were quite slow at the beginning.

At UCSC, I think we quickly ran into what probably a lot of campuses ran into, which was that our office had a vision of a campus web presence that was very organized with a shared "look and feel," but we didn't have any authority to really make that happen. We took a few different cracks at governance along the way, none of which were terribly successful. It allowed us to have fun and spirited and sometimes productive meetings with people representing various elements of the campus. But in the end, we didn't really have the authority to say to other units, "Do it this way."

We created templates for people to use, thinking that that was going to foster the shared spirit that we wanted. People would frequently use our templates, but they would often change the colors of this element, or the design of that element, in an effort to make the web page uniquely theirs. When I reflect back on it, I realize that the Internet certainly, but the World Wide Web specifically, began on college campuses and at universities like ours as a research tool. At UC Santa

Cruz, our first web efforts came so early in the game, I think people really didn't fully appreciate what the web's potential would be for marketing the campus, promoting the campus successfully, giving people an accurate sense of UC Santa Cruz.

College and university campuses tend to be decentralized by nature. There is a freedom of expression that exists in places like ours that doesn't exist in the business or commercial world. And that's a good thing. But it may not have been a completely good thing when it came to organizing a new medium like the web.

Reti: Santa Cruz is even more decentralized than your more traditional university campuses because of the college system.

Burns: We certainly have a legacy of taking decentralization to a new level, but I know that this challenge also existed on other campuses in higher education because I would have this conversation with communications colleagues elsewhere. But you're quite right about UC Santa Cruz. Our campus was created with a decentralized college-based model, and for very good reasons people here have a legacy of embracing individuality. These qualities made it even *harder* to try to organize something that could be as disparate as the World Wide Web into a coherent campuswide medium.

The advent of web publishing wasn't completely dissimilar from what had happened with the advent of desktop publishing. Back in the early days of PageMaker, for instance, if you gave someone a desktop publishing application, they would end up believing that they were a designer. They might not have the

skills or maybe even the aesthetic to be a really great designer. But they had this tool that allowed them to create a publication.

In the web world, the same thing happened. The very first browsers didn't have editing functions, but my recollection is that Netscape Communicator, which is what I think it was called, had an editing function. It was one of the early applications that allowed people to create web pages without really understanding how the code worked. In a way it was terrific; it enabled people without technical skills to publish content on the web. But the widespread use of these applications didn't necessarily enable the institution, as a whole, to maximize this new medium for the most efficient and effective promotion and marketing of the campus, or even as an efficient and effective medium for presenting campus information. That was an ongoing challenge for our office.

Ultimately, many years into the campus's web history, I think we were given a big assist by campus budget challenges. As budget crises deepened, people on the staff side were getting hit particularly hard by those cuts. In that environment, units, divisions, and offices had an increasingly challenging time keeping their web presence vital and current. So much so that five or six years ago, when — in partnership with ITS [Information Technology Services] — we began to promote an enterprise-level web editing tool with a built-in, locked-in design, people were quite willing to try it. They may not have liked the color palette that we chose, or they may not have liked this element of the design, or that element of the architecture. But they were willing to join us because their offices had been so decimated by budget cuts that they said, "We have to

maintain the editorial side, the content side, which is still no small feat. But we'll participate because we no longer will have to noodle in web editing programs, or try to figure out how to create and publish code." So ultimately I think the campus moved in a very positive and transformative direction; but it may have had very little to do with our or my persuasive skills and more to do with the reality of budget cuts.

After a slow start, the commercial end of the web, the second generation after college or university campuses and other government entities, had really embraced the power of this new medium. Businesses tended to utilize the web more effectively, organize their content in a way that really worked for users, and present a unified look and feel to people so that visitors understood if they were on, say, the Microsoft web site, there was a common identity regardless of where they were in the site.

People could argue, well, it's better to have the individuality and diversity that those early UCSC web sites represented. I was just not one of those people because I felt like we needed to represent something that worked for the visitor or the user, and that experiencing an information architecture that was similar throughout the UCSC web site would be useful to visitors. In the current UCSC web presence, I think that's what has happened to a great extent. I guess I take some small amount of credit for the arm-twisting that that took, but I think the budget realities might have had more to do with it.

Reti: Okay, thank you.

Promoting UCSC's Research Accomplishments in the 1980s and 1990s

Reti: Let's talk about some of the research accomplishments that the Public Information Office, or the news office within that, in the 1980s and 1990s was helping to promote. Those included the Predatory Bird Research Group. Do you want to start with that?

Burns: Yeah. The list is endless, so let's just talk about a few of them.

I have to begin this section by saying that, in the end, it's the quality of what people do, in this case their research activities, that really made a difference in how promotable their work was. I could sit here and say my colleagues and I did a terrific job in August 1998 promoting the fact that the peregrine falcon had been restored to such an extent that it could be removed from the federal Endangered Species list. And quite honestly, I think Tim Stephens, who was the campus's science writer at the time and still is, did an absolutely terrific job of promoting the campus's role in that story.¹⁴ But he promoted something that was an extraordinary achievement by other people at UCSC, in this case the people who made up the campus-based Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group.

On the promotional end, none of our office's contributions would have been possible without the work of the incredibly talented writers I worked alongside during my thirty years at UCSC. People like Tim, like Joan Ward and Tom

¹⁴ See http://www1.ucsc.edu/news_events/press_releases/archive/98-99/08-98/082098-Peregrine_falcon_re.html.

O'Leary, like Jennifer McNulty and Rob Irion, and Guy Lasnier, Scott Rappaport, Barbara McKenna, Ann Gibb, and a host of people during my tenure on campus who did fabulous promotional work for the campus. I'm certain I've unintentionally left writers off of that list, so allow me to apologize to them right now. While I may have been working on the web or technology front, or the internal communication front, or been wrestling with how best to communicate about the thorny issues that confronted the campus, the writers that I was honored to work with were the people who — day in and day out — were focusing on telling the news about some major research accomplishment, or major activity at UCSC that would advance our society in some way.

In terms of research accomplishments, we helped promote, I've always thought that the peregrine falcon effort — launched by local veterinarian James Rausch and the late — and beloved — UCSC biologist Ken Norris and continued by Brian Walton and later by Glenn Stewart — was a truly amazing accomplishment. At the time those people were getting involved, the peregrine falcon population was down to single digits in terms of known falcons that existed in California. So the peregrine was very, very close to being extinct as a species. Through our researchers' great work, twenty or twenty-five years later the peregrine was delisted as an endangered species. So it was a great story to tell.

Another one is clearly the long history that this campus has with sequencing the human genome. That obviously came to fruition in July 2000, when David Haussler's group — with our help — announced that he and his team had

sequenced a draft of the human genome and published it on the UCSC web site.¹⁵ By the way, I think the web hits continue through the roof on that project.

But really the seeds for that went back fifteen years earlier when Robert Sinsheimer, when he was a chancellor here, and he was an eminent biologist himself, convened a meeting at UC Santa Cruz in 1985.¹⁶ Out of this group came, the very radical proposal — at least at the time — to launch a massive project to ultimately the complete DNA sequence of the human genome. It was fabulous that the sequence ultimately was completed by David Haussler's group on our campus, and the publishing of the draft sequence really put UC Santa Cruz on the map in the genomics world. It's not just marketing-speak to say that it really did begin here — with Robert Sinsheimer back in 1985.

There are a number of other things that I could cite. If organic agriculture wasn't born here, it certainly came to fruition on our campus.¹⁷ I think somewhat like genomics, our research prominence in that field — so to speak — began much earlier when the campus hired Alan Chadwick, I think back in 1967. What ensued with the Farm and Garden; the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems; the very successful internship program; the work that Steve Gliessman did at the farm for years; the work that he and others did with local

¹⁵ See http://www1.ucsc.edu/news_events/press_releases/archive/99-00/06-00/human_gemone.htm

¹⁶ See <http://www.ucsc.edu/features/genomics/milestones.html>.

¹⁷ See http://review.ucsc.edu/fall07/Rev_F07_pp12-13_BreakingNewGround.pdf.

farmers to really make this research something much more than what initially seemed more like a fringe activity, is something that UC Santa Cruz and the people behind these activities deserve so much credit for.¹⁸ Jennifer and others in our office helped to promote that, and we should be proud of those efforts. But again, the researchers themselves, the faculty, the students, the staff involved in agroecology gave us something pretty impressive to promote.

Marine sciences, because of the strength of our program, has been another very fertile area of promotion over the years. The work that Burney Le Boeuf and Dan Costa and Ron Schusterman and people like that did in the research related to marine mammals in general, and elephant seals in particular, was particularly ground breaking. And, I know that, for the science writers in our office, it was work that was very promotable.

In another area of the campus, the Grateful Dead Archive in 2008 — how fun was that?¹⁹ That was absolutely perfect for UC Santa Cruz, and the library people deserve a ton of credit for that. The fact that we have this going concern, Dead Central, is terrific. I don't want to say that the campus's acquisition of the Dead archive was one of the most difficult things that our office ever had to promote, because anything having to do with the Grateful Dead sort of has a promotional

¹⁸ For a collection of oral histories documenting UCSC's unique contributions to shaping organic and sustainable agriculture see Irene Reti, Sarah Rabkin, and Ellen Farmer, eds. *Cultivating a Movement: An Oral History of Organic Farming and Sustainable Agriculture on California's Central Coast* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/cultiv/home>.

¹⁹ See <http://news.ucsc.edu/2008/04/2142.html> and <http://www.gdao.org/>.

life of its own. But Scott in our office and the library people worked hard to tell the story of that important acquisition. And obviously the highlight of that promotion came in April 2008, when several surviving members of the band and Chancellor Blumenthal and Ginny Steel and other people at the library were able to announce the gift of the band's archive to UC Santa Cruz. How awesome.

Reti: Is that when George Blumenthal wore the Tie-Dye tie?

Burns: I don't think he wore one that day, but he has on other occasions. You know, speaking of Chancellor Blumenthal, I often feel like a project he was part of much earlier at UCSC sometimes is overlooked when considering milestone research activities on campus. George was a member of a group of astronomers and astrophysicists who promoted the concept of what is called "cold, dark matter."²⁰ Not necessarily the sexiest term, but it's the theory that I think even to this day remains an important basis for the modern picture of the structural formation of the universe. I think it was in 1984 that George [Blumenthal], and Sandra Faber from UCSC and Joel Primack from UCSC, and Martin Rees, who I think at the time might have been the UK's royal astronomer, published a very influential paper on the subject. It's something that this campus should be justifiably proud of. It's foundational work that these UCSC people published way back in the mid-1980s.

On the promotional front, the other accomplishment that I at times was involved

²⁰ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_dark_matter.

with — but again, other people in our office deserve more credit for promoting — was the fact that UC Santa Cruz alumni, five of them, have won six Pulitzer prizes.²¹ When former students do something like win a Pulitzer Prize, that is really a moment. It's probably safe to say the campus unashamedly capitalized on our alumni's achievements. But their work made us very proud. One of our alums, Dana Priest, won the award two times. Another, Hector Tobar, won it as a member of a *Los Angeles Times* team. Laurie Garrett won it for her amazing reporting on the Ebola virus. She's still somebody that is absolutely one of the go-to people for international media when it comes to talking about Ebola and other viruses. Annie Wells won it for a photo that she took of a particularly threatening California flood. And Associated Press writer Martha Mendoza won it for an investigative story that she and her AP colleagues did about a massacre of South Korean refugees by the U.S. military during the Korean War.

Reti: So I'm trying to get a picture on the ground — and I realize this probably shifted over time, given that you would have different organs of publication — but when you say that you were going to promote the Agroecology Program or some of these other endeavors that you've mentioned, would you proactively go out and contact people that you thought were doing interesting work? Or did their administrative people come to you? How did this work?

²¹ Between the time of this interview and the publishing of this oral history, two more Pulitzers have been awarded to UCSC alumni (one was a second one). UCSC now has six winners of eight Pulitzers. As of publication, Dana Priest and Martha Mendoza are repeat winners. See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2016/04/pulitzers-mendoza-finnegan.html>

Burns: Well, it's a little bit of a mix. First, our office was structured in a way that allowed the writers, who were assigned a particular division, or in some cases more than one division, to get to know specific groups of faculty. Ultimately, whether a writer is a successful promoter of the campus starts with how successfully he or she interacts with the faculty and staff in their assigned areas. So, for many years at least, we tried to make it a priority to have our writers schedule some type of an informal orientation meeting, or interview, with their new faculty. That was something that became harder to do as the campus was adding increasing numbers of new faculty. But there was a period of time when that was part of our standard operating procedure, to try to make the connection so that a new faculty member knew who his or her contact was in our office.

Like a lot of work on or off campus, our business is about relationships: the relationships that different writers had with different faculty members that would allow them to be trusted and contacted when there was some newsworthy research paper that was about to be published, and also the relationships that writers in our office had with reporters and editors in the media. They made it their business to know who in the media might be particularly interested in what story and who had written about a particular subject before. And sometimes a successful promotion might be the result of years of cultivation. When the campus received the Grateful Dead Archive, that was a singular moment in time — a large gift that had the potential to be very promotable because of the band's renown. And as I said, Scott Rappaport, as the person in our office who was assigned to promote the library, did a great job making sure that happened. But other topics might start out much less

promotable, and success may be the result of our writers communicating for years with reporters, letting them know, whether it produced a story or not, about an achievement, or that a person's stature in a particular field was on the rise, that they were doing interesting work, that they would be interesting interviewees and subject experts. By the way, sometimes faculty might have a wealth of knowledge about a particular subject but not be particularly comfortable conveying it. So we would give extra attention to faculty members who were doing especially interesting and promotable work, but also had some ability to convey it or interest in conveying it in a way that would be interesting and accessible to reporters.

Reti: Right. I can imagine someone like Ken Norris, who was fabulous at that communication, very, very articulate.

Burns: Exactly. And sometimes faculty, while they might be doing great work, could be a bit resistant to taking the time to help our writers promote it. Sometimes our writers were successful at overcoming that barrier and sometimes they weren't. But in the end, at least from the perspective of people who worked in our office — and I really felt like they were a remarkably talented group of people — their success hinged to a great extent on relationships they built with faculty, relationships that enabled our writers to know about a possible story. And success also ultimately hinged on the relationships our writers had with reporters. Not only were reporters wanting them to be able to explain a story and its importance to them, but they also had to trust that the people in our office weren't going to be pitching them about everything, that they were going to be

saving the contacts for stories that the reporters would truly feel were newsworthy. It doesn't mean that we didn't blanket the world with press releases occasionally about things that weren't as promotable as we hoped they would be. I'm sure we did that. But I think, to a great extent, the writers in our office tried to exercise real judgment about the stories they would pitch.

Reti: Oh, absolutely. That has to be the bottom line. I am having an epiphany about what it is that you were really doing. I think I didn't fully understand this before. I was well aware of all of the internal publication organs, the *UCSC Review* and of course the web site, and all these ways that you were publicizing what the campus was doing in terms of *campus* publications. But it seems that your office was also the interface with the entire media nationally.

Burns: Absolutely. But, again, while I may have occasionally helped with some of these promotions, others in my office really focused their efforts — successfully, I think — on getting positive media coverage for the campus. And they are the ones who deserve the credit for those successes.

Reti: I apologize for not completely groking that concept, to use a Santa Cruz word. (laughs) So would that mean that you would be going to journalism conferences? How would you develop these relationships with reporters from science magazines, and the *New York Times* — Or would they just come to you because they knew you were out there and you had established a reputation over time? How does that work?

Burns: Well, it's a range of approaches. Again, our most successful promotions

began with quality research. What's the expression? You can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse, or something like that. (laughs)

Reti: Right. If you don't have a good story to begin with —

Burns: Then we might not get much coverage, despite our best efforts. In the science world, for instance, breakthroughs are often described through the publication of a paper in an important scientific journal. So in that case, we would depend on the faculty member letting us know that his or her paper was about to be published, and then we would try to tee up a press release that would explain the significance of the research, hopefully in terms that were more succinct and accessible than the scientific journal article itself.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: (laughs) Many times a science story happened in that way. It's also true that there were conferences, or particular academic organizations would meet regularly, and the promotion of research breakthroughs might be part of that particular conference, or something that was disclosed at that annual meeting. We didn't have a lot of bandwidth to attend many of these, but there were times when our writers staffed such meetings. For example, the American Geophysical Union I think often had its annual meeting in San Francisco and the science writer in our office at the time — in my time either Rob Irion or Tim Stephens — would make a determination about which of our faculty were presenting at that annual meeting. If there was a UCSC item of interest at the meeting, our science writer would write a press release about it and have it available for reporters

there who were covering the meeting. Or maybe Rob or Tim would write little vignettes about a range of UCSC presentations at that particular annual meeting. Or maybe they would try to figure out which reporters were going to be covering the meeting and communicate with them in advance.

In the non-sciences, it was a bit more difficult because there weren't as many papers being published. In the end, our writers just had to figure out what was newsworthy? Is it a particularly essential interpretation of music or a pathbreaking book? Or sometimes, and this is especially true in the social sciences, is a particular research activity related to a current regional, national, or international event. Was there something breaking in the news that we could be part of? If we had an expert who could speak about a particular aspect of a breaking news story, then it was incumbent on us to reach out to the faculty member because of our familiarity with his or her work and say, "Look, we think we should pitch you as an expert in this particular aspect of the story. Are you willing to do that? Do you feel like you're a good fit for that story?" And if the answer was yes, then one of our writers could very quickly develop and issue a media advisory, alerting reporters to the relationship between one of our faculty member's scholarship and the breaking news story. And in that case, time was really of the essence because we weren't the only university office doing that. And because reporters would just move on to another story, the breaking story might be cold in two or three days. Jennifer McNulty, in her time as the campus's social sciences writer, did this successfully on a number of occasions.

Reti: Well, I know this came up when we did an oral history with John Wilkes,

the founder of the science writing program here. He said that faculty would often not understand that reporters were not working on the same time frame as scientific research.²² The faculty would not call back for a couple of days and that was the end of the story.

Burns: Opportunity missed.

Reti: Yes, so it was getting faculty to understand the needs of reporters.

Burns: John is 100 percent correct, and it would be true to say that that was a challenge for us regularly — to make contact with the faculty member, which isn't often the easiest thing to do — and then convey to him or her that if we were going to promote their activity, they had to make it a priority. They had to want to do this because we didn't want to put out a tip for a faculty member, however qualified they were to speak on a subject, if they weren't going to pick up the phone or answer email promptly when a reporter, or hopefully more than one reporter, became interested in the story.

The other thing is that faculty, very understandably because of their schedules and the competing demands on their time, deserved an honest assessment from us about the chances for media success. So that would factor into the discussions sometimes. Again, lest anyone who reads this conclude otherwise, this element

²² See Sarah Rabkin, Interviewer and Editor, *Creating a World-Class Graduate Program on a Unique Campus: An Oral History with John Wilkes, Founder of UCSC's Science Writing Program*. (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, UCSC Library, 2015). See: <https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/wilkes>.

of our office's work was done by my amazing colleagues in the Public Information Office, which later became Public Affairs Office, which later became the Communications and Marketing Office. For the most part, my job was to handle — or at least try to handle — the much more negative media stories.

A Changing Media Landscape

Reti: Would it make sense at this point for us to talk about how the changes in the media over the last thirty years affected your career?

Burns: Sure.

Reti: Because we're kind of telescoping thirty years as if it was all the same over that time period. And I realize it wasn't.

Burns: (sighs) Boy, where do we begin? We could have a whole separate oral history, and you'd want to check in with a whole lot of other people on that subject. The media obviously has changed dramatically since I started working at UCSC in 1984. In my early years at UCSC, to use the local newspaper as an example, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* had a dedicated reporter whose job it was to cover UC Santa Cruz. Period. In fact, one of the first people who I remember working with in that capacity at the *Sentinel* was a person by the name of John Robinson. You know John's wife, Lynn Robinson, who has been a City Council member and mayor of Santa Cruz.

Reti: Oh, yes, of course. Recently.

Burns: John was a long-time reporter at the *Sentinel*, and as I mentioned, his beat

was 100 percent UCSC. The good news about that was that he was very interested in the campus — he had to produce stories every single day and the media was healthy enough at the time that the *Sentinel* had a pretty significant news hole. And so we had a fair amount of success pitching the research or the other activities of our faculty and our students because the newspaper had the space for the content.

The bad news was that when something went awry, which at UC Santa Cruz and elsewhere it often did, they had a full-time dedicated reporter (laughs) who would come and cover the problem from every angle.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: And their coverage of a challenging issue on campus could go on for days and sometimes weeks. So when I look back on those years, I can recall how thorough their coverage might be of UCSC's achievements. But I also twitch a little when I think about the two- or three-part series of critical articles that the *Sentinel* did near the end of Robert Stevens' tenure as chancellor. Whether or not one believed the story was always deserved, the *Sentinel* certainly had the bandwidth to cover the heck out of a problem or a perceived problem, and they did. And that obviously was the same at regional dailies, the larger papers, the *Mercury News*, the *Chronicle*, and statewide papers like the *LA Times*. Those people had dedicated reporters who covered higher education. For most of the time I knew him, for example, I think that Larry Gordon at the *LA Times* covered only higher education. But most of those reporters are also doing other general assignment reporting at this point. So the coverage is diluted. Newspapers have

lost so many good reporters, and that is a real loss for all of us in our society.

The *Sentinel*, as recently as fifteen or so years ago, had an editorial staff of something like thirty-five people. That included reporters; it included photographers; it included editors and other desk people. Today, they're probably down to fifteen, or fewer, of these key people. So they've been decimated by the changes in the industry and have struggled mightily, I might say heroically. Because of my relationship with many of the local reporters, I know how hard those people work. They are under incredible pressure to produce and to produce and to produce, and I believe that the reporters at the *Sentinel* and elsewhere do the best job they can to give their readers meaningful content.

Maybe in part because I started my career as a reporter, I never lost sight of the importance of their work — even when they were critical of the campus. Well, to be completely truthful, there may have been a few times in my thirty years working with reporters when I lost sight of the overall importance of their work (laughs).

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: I'm quite certain that there were a few tense conversations that I'm sure I contributed to or even caused. But for the most part, I never lost sight of the fact that journalists are trying their best to keep the public informed about the good, the bad, the ugly, the shenanigans of government, the waste, the exhilarating breakthroughs, the things that happen that really can advance society.

Collectively, it's all good stuff. In my position, I had to take the bad with the good, and I tried very hard to do that.

Perhaps I should mention one other thing about the media's changing landscape. As the print media in particular shrunk, I think at least at the local level it did give us some opportunities as well. Occasionally the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* would be interested in a research story of ours and because they trusted our work and knew that it was very carefully and professionally done, they would sometimes just run our stories as our writers produced them, rather than assign a reporter to do a rewrite. So in that case, the shrinking print media helped us promote the campus. And by virtue of the fact that the *Sentinel* was part of a chain of newspapers, the Bay Area News Group, it often made it so that our content was available to other newspapers in the chain. Let me add that the *Sentinel* and other media never ran a story of ours in that manner if the subject was in any way controversial or about a difficult campus challenge. Those stories were always assigned to their own reporters, as they should have been.

There are many other elements of the media story we can talk about, but clearly the web changed the media's world permanently. You don't need me to say this. Newspapers in particular have struggled to come up with a viable business model because so much of their content is now accessible for free.

I'd like to conclude this section by saying that I have great admiration for virtually every single reporter with whom I worked over the years. Certainly, there were stories where I felt like UC Santa Cruz was not treated particularly fairly. But I often felt like maybe that occurred because I didn't do a good enough

job explaining the campus position with respect to that story. I rarely felt that the reporter was really out to get us. I guess I think that the sense I had about reporters' inherent fairness probably served me well — and, more to the point, I hope it served the campus well.

Reti: Yes.

'Questioning Authority' in the 1980s

Reti: I think the next thing would be to move into talking about some of these events that took place in the 1980s.

Burns: In our world, we call them "issues." (laughs)

Reti: Issues?

Burns: "Events" always evoked something like a theater performance, or a musical concert. These were certainly events, but they felt a little more gut-wrenching than that. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: I didn't necessarily apply for the job of communicating about the campus's issues or challenges; my job just transitioned into that over the years. Maybe that happened because I was reasonably good at it; but more likely it was because no one else wanted the job (laughs).

Seriously, at times it was challenging explaining protests or the administrative reaction to protests, or an administrative decision that wasn't particularly

popular, or just a very painful budget cut that axed a popular program, or any number of other challenging topics. And, I guess at times it did seem like — to use the 50th-anniversary marketing theme that one of my colleagues helped develop — UC Santa Cruz really was the “Original Authority on Questioning Authority.”

Reti: So someone in the office came up with that.

Burns: Well, not exactly. I guess it would be more accurate to say it was developed by an alumnus. But it was a project that our office was very involved in because we had to figure out how to best implement and use it to promote the UC Santa Cruz campaign and the campus’s 50th. Whatever you think of that — it might be a theme or a tag line — the line certainly was true about protest activity and people taking full advantage of their constitutional rights to exercise free speech and free assembly. And the degree to which people at UCSC “questioned authority” sure made this place infinitely interesting, albeit occasionally stressful. But trying to explain this place, including our many challenges, was work that I was quite honestly honored to do. I never had a dull day in thirty years here, never had a day where I was looking at the clock and wanting it to move along at a faster clip.

Reti: That’s so deadly.

The Anti-Apartheid Protests

Burns: I think my first recollection of UCSC protest activity turned out to be one of the most memorable for me. It was in July 1986, so I’d been on the job here a

total of two years. There were anti-apartheid protests all over our country that were occurring, related to companies and, in our case universities, that were doing business with South Africa. And there were numerous protests throughout the UC system aimed at the Regents for the University's investment in companies doing business there.

Today, the Regents' meetings are all pretty much designated for a venue at UC San Francisco, or a venue at UCLA, perhaps. Occasionally, there are visits to other campuses. But my recollection of the board's meetings thirty years ago was that the Regents meetings happened on a rotational basis, with the meetings moving from campus to campus.

Reti: Yes. I think that's true.

Burns: And whether you consider that we drew the long straw or the short one, it turned out that it was UC Santa Cruz's turn to host the Regents meeting in July of 1986. It was at that meeting that the board was scheduled to vote — with the governor, Governor Deukmejian at the time, in attendance — about whether or not to have UC divest of its holdings in companies that do business in South Africa.

There was a press center that was set up at Cowell College — I want to say in the Cowell conference room. I'd have to really search my memory banks to confirm that. But Cowell became the epicenter for the press who descended on UC Santa Cruz for that summertime meeting during a time of year when it normally would be very quiet on campus. Understandably, the vote was a topic that was

getting a lot of press attention. And so we had reporters come to UC Santa Cruz from all over the country for those few days in July of 1986. The Office of the President was staffing the press center and they asked the members of our office if we could help them do that. For me, it was helpful exposure to a large protest at UC Santa Cruz, how such protests did or did not move the needle, and the amazing amount of logistics that were required to enable a protest of that scale to occur, and to help reporters cover a story with that degree of local, statewide, and national interest. Irrespective of our personal views, or the soundness of the protest, the members of our office had an obligation to make it as easy as possible for reporters to do their work.

It's been awhile since I looked at a clipping of that, but my recollection is that there was a large number of arrests that occurred on campus during that particular Regents meeting. Most of them occurred at the base of campus, near the main entrance. The protestors very much — and again very understandably in my opinion — wanted to take a stand against the regime in South Africa, against the U.S. companies that were supporting South Africa, and against the Regents for their investment practices. The protestors lined up to get arrested. I think I can comfortably say there were dozens of people who were arrested during the penultimate day of the Regents meeting.

At least for me, when I've reflected on the incident in the years that followed, the thing that I most remember was how organized the protest was — and ultimately how successful it was. Perhaps the Regents, because of mounting political pressure based in part on the sheer number of protests, would have

done the right thing anyway. But the protestors were very focused and didn't turn the protest into a battle with UCSC police — we can talk about how that changed in later years.

In fact, at that particular protest, they partnered with the police, let the police know that this was an important enough issue to them that they were prepared to be arrested, and a large number of them filed onto a bus at the base of campus and were driven downtown where they were booked. I quite frankly don't remember what the charge was that they were arrested for. But that's not the point of the story. The protestors that day were non-violent, worked with the campus to ensure that the arrests were conducted without force, and in the process drew a lot of media attention to this historically important vote and this historically important meeting at UC Santa Cruz.

It's a memory that I cherish because of its historic importance. But, in a smaller way, I was also impressed by the protestors and by the university's response to the protest, at least on that particular day. And, in the process, I learned a lot about what it took to prepare for a large-scale event that was sure to attract a large number of reporters.

Protests in recent years have escalated into confrontations with police that have also received a lot of media attention. But if you read the stories carefully, you realize that the actual issue that the protestors are trying to call attention to often ends up getting very secondary coverage in a story that is dominated by the protestors' interactions with police.

Reti: So what was the mood like in the press room?

Burns: Well, it was very chaotic because there were dozens of reporters who came to the campus to cover that particular meeting. Reporters were there to cover the meeting, as well as the protests that preceded the board's vote. In other words, the mood in the press room was appropriately chaotic, as I recall.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: People with deadlines needing to file their stories, and wanting to interview protestors, university officials, and members of the board for their stories.

Reti: Was that possible?

Burns: It was possible.

Reti: So you would help arrange that?

Burns: Yes. I did not have a lead role in that, but I was one of many asked to help. The people who were running the press room were from the Communications Office for the Office of the President. We were helping them as needed, doing everything from issuing press passes, to setting up in-person interviews, to providing phone updates to reporters who couldn't get to Santa Cruz for the meeting.

Reti: Okay. That gives me a real picture, thank you.

The Campus Response to the Loma Prieta Earthquake

Next, I think, chronologically, would be the Loma Prieta Earthquake, something that comes up in almost every oral history I do. It's indelibly — if anyone was here during that time, it's part of the story of having been at UCSC and in Santa Cruz when the quake occurred.²³

Burns: As you know, the quake struck a little bit past 5:00 o'clock that day and there was a World Series game occurring between the Giants and the A's. So I think it would be fair to say there weren't a lot of people left in our office, and probably in many offices on campus by the time the earthquake hit. That wasn't true in the campus housing areas, by the way. They'd have their own horror stories to tell. But in our office — as an administrative office — there weren't many of us around. I remember Rob Irion, who was a science writer in our office at the time, was still at work. We were both in the Carriage House, where the Public Information Office existed for decades, when the earthquake hit. That was a building that existed in the old Cowell Ranch days, literally as the carriage house for the old ranch. So it survived the 1906 earthquake. And I have to say, being in that building when the Loma Prieta quake hit, you could see how the Carriage House had also survived the 1906 quake. It's made of large timbers, and the wood just swayed during the quake. Almost nothing in our area was damaged. There were workstations where shelves collapsed. But probably one of

²³ See <http://quake89.ucsc.edu/>.

the safer places to be on campus during the 1989 quake was in the old Carriage House, where I was at the time.

In fact, probably because we were in the Carriage House, Rob and I didn't fully appreciate the significance of the quake. Our building was pretty isolated from both the campus and the city, and there wasn't the level of destruction there that there was elsewhere on campus. In the library, for instance, I suspect that when many of the stacks collapsed, that the people who were working in the library at the time had a much better sense of the magnitude of the quake.²³ But I personally did not immediately have a very accurate sense of how devastating the Loma Prieta quake was.

In the minutes that followed the quake, Rob and I went out to the Carriage House parking lot. At the time there were areas between the trees where we could see part of the downtown. There was a fire that was occurring down the hill on Myrtle Street, or somewhere in that neighborhood. We saw smoke from the fire. We could hear all the sirens, and looked at each other and thought, maybe this is more serious than we realized. And of course, after completing a quick inspection of our office, it didn't take us long to realize that the phone lines — if they weren't already dead, were about to be.

²³ For a library perspective on the Loma Prieta Earthquake see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Allan J. Dyson: Managing the UCSC Library, 1979-2003* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2006). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/dyson> Also see *The Loma Prieta Earthquake of October 17, 1989: A UCSC Student Oral History Documentary Project* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2006). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/quake>

On a professional note, I wasn't quite certain what to do that had value. The phone lines were not functioning properly; the campus network was affected and it would probably be fair to say that the quake — in retrospect — made everyone at UCSC and elsewhere rethink the importance of campus emergency planning.

On a personal note, I figured I'd try to get home and make sure that my wife Nancy and our two very young children, who were just 2 1/2 and 1 at the time, were okay. I won't take too long discussing my personal experience, but as I was driving home, it didn't take long for me to realize that the quake was much more severe than I had realized because there were chimneys that had fallen in virtually every driveway I drove by. Because the traffic signals had stopped working, there was a lot of traffic gridlock in town, and I ended up snaking my way through the downtown via Walnut and then Lincoln Streets. So I ended up driving through the downtown before it was cordoned off. In fact, I drove right by the old Ford's Department Store. I believe there was at least one fatality in the store —

Reti: Yes.

Burns: And I knew immediately that there were significant injuries in there because as I drove by Ford's Department Store, rescuers were carrying injured people out of the store. And, of course, you couldn't drive through downtown Pacific Avenue without realizing just how devastating the quake really was because there was rubble, where an hour earlier there had been streets and buildings. It was a devastating and dreadful scene.

On a very personal note, Nancy and our two young children, Trevor and Monica, were all fine. A bit stunned, with plenty of broken glass in our kitchen, but all things considered, fine.

But it became clear to me, beginning that evening, that campus communications would be sorely tested in the days and weeks ahead. For starters, we would need to communicate with current students, especially the people living on campus. And quite honestly, as I may have said, I think the '89 earthquake was a wake-up call of sorts for campuses like ours that before then may not have given that much thought to pre-disaster planning. It was probably the single event that really alerted our office to the need to plan in advance for the possibility of disasters. If you have an earthquake in an earthquake-prone area, just how exactly *are* you going to communicate with people, with phone lines out? The web didn't exist at the time. Later, we did a lot of planning for the eventuality of needing to mount a web site in an alternative location if there were such a disaster and our own campus server couldn't publish information. But this was pre-Web.

Reti: And no cell phones either.

Burns: No cell phones. And land lines out. I can't say — at least centrally — that we overachieved in communicating internally about that particular disaster; in fact, it was somewhat of a Pony Express operation. When the power came back on, we typed up a campus bulletin, Xeroxed copies of it, and literally drove around campus distributing the bulletins. I'm not sure how helpful the bulletin was. Really, it was more an effort to try to reassure people that the leadership

was managing this crisis. Whether or not the leadership really was prepared to do that is probably another thing because of the scale of the problem. I think that the campus staff who would have the most interesting stories to tell and the most heroic stories to tell would be the people at the colleges, the people who had to manage thousands of people living on campus — feed them, house them, and calm them. Staff and faculty who were around at the time know that it was bad enough when the main tremor struck. But it was almost more terrifying in the hours and days that followed, with the many aftershocks we experienced.

Reti: Yeah.

Burns: I'm afraid that for a while I couldn't quite shake, so to speak, the memory of being at home or at work and almost hearing the aftershocks coming. I certainly felt that way and I talked with other people who had a similar experience. It almost seemed as if you could hear the next shock approaching your neighborhood, or traveling through the ground, before it actually got to you. For me, I think what was the most terrifying was never knowing whether one of those aftershocks was going to be another big one.

Reti: (sighs) Right.

Burns: Would it end quickly? Would it truly be an aftershock, or would it be another earthquake of the magnitude of the original tremor?

Anyway, under difficult circumstances, we did our best to handle the initial round of internal and external communications. I remember being in the Carriage House on a weekend day mass-producing a printed campus bulletin

with Stephanie Hauk. She was a woman that I worked with at the time. And every time one of those aftershocks came, the two of us went running out of the Carriage House. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: It probably took a little bit longer to produce communications than we wanted it to.

From the perspective of campus history, when that particular disaster struck, our office had multiple hats to wear. There was the internal communication hat. I think ultimately we might have helped Admissions set up a bank of phones in the Cook House for parents, once the power came back on. I have some recollection of that, but you should probably confirm that with Michael McCawley, who was also working on campus back then.

Reti: For parents? Do you mean to call?

Burns: For parents of current students to call and perhaps leave a message for their child. Remember, this was before cell phones.

What became a much more demanding job for us during the Loma Prieta Earthquake was working with and supporting the many local, statewide, national, and even international print and broadcast reporters who were coming to Santa Cruz in droves, for very obvious reasons. Downtown Santa Cruz was in shambles, as were other areas of Santa Cruz County as well. And so, there was an obvious visual element to the story. President Bush — the first one — came to tour the downtown, what was called the Pacific Garden Mall at the time. By

virtue of our proximity to the epicenter, and just the sheer scale of the destruction and the number of deaths that occurred here, Santa Cruz was a real magnet for the media.

On top of that, UC Santa Cruz had, and still does have, a world-renowned earth sciences group. And at the time, seismologist Karen McNally was the person who was front and center here. She was part of a faculty and research group that was doing cutting-edge earthquake research. So we had a lot of reporters who were coming to cover the damage, including the damage at UC Santa Cruz, and could tap into our researchers' expertise at the same time. By the way, in terms of structural damage, the campus fared reasonably well because most of its buildings were relatively new.

Reti: Well, UCSC was also sitting on top of the slopes of Ben Lomond Mountain, as opposed to being built on unconsolidated river sediments downtown.

Burns: Right. Exactly. So the liquefaction was not as significant an issue here as it was just a mile or so away in the city's floodplain. Anyway, we had a lot of reporters who came here just for the pure science of it too. So we had multiple responsibilities during the quake: internal communication; engaging with the Santa Cruz community to try to support our neighbors in whatever ways we could, both in terms of real support and also communications support.

But also, we had earthquake experts on our faculty. We had seismologists who could weigh in, and who provided important expertise in the days, weeks, and months of coverage that followed that quake. And that obviously involved our

office. Rob Irion was front and center, as our science writer at the time. On the campus's 50th anniversary site, I uploaded an old black and white photo of Rob and me greeting a crew from Japan that had flown into San Francisco from Tokyo, helicoptered down from San Francisco, and landed in the Great Meadow to cover the story, to interview our scientists, and to get our B roll of the destruction.²⁵ Or at least that's my recollection of that particular activity; Rob will correct me if I'm wrong.

The quake occurred at a time when the media had a lot more resources to cover a story of that magnitude. If something like that happened today it might be different. But at the time, everybody who covered science was seemingly coming here to cover the quake, or at least everybody who covered earth sciences. Obviously, for many reasons, it was a big deal in campus history. The context for the coverage was obviously disastrous, but the faculty who were in our Earth Sciences Department at the time made amazing contributions to the public's understanding of the quake. In addition to Karen and her Earth Sciences colleagues, we had the Richter Seismology Lab up in Applied Sciences. Rob set up many of the media interviews there. David Gardner was the president of the university system at the time. He came to campus, I think just to show support, and Karen took him on a very informative tour of the seismology end of Applied Sciences.

²⁵ See <http://50years.ucsc.edu/timeline/#116>.

The Elfland Protests

Reti: Okay, now let's talk about Elfland.

Burns: Do we have to? Okay, at least in my time, I don't remember a protest that became as violent as the Elfland protest. Old-timers will remember Elfland as being sort of a spiritual web of pathways through the woods in an area that is now behind the site where Colleges Nine and Ten were built. UCSC was on a growth trajectory at the time, and long had plans to build its two newest colleges, which are still its two newest colleges, in an area that was pretty heavily wooded and was very popular among students because it was a fun area in which to take a walk, just connect with nature, or do who knows what.

Reti: Why was it called Elfland? Didn't it have pagan ritual sites?

Burns: Well, students certainly erected totems and altars in the area, but probably that book, *An Unnatural History of UCSC*, explains Elfland's origins better than I ever could.²⁶

So the campus, because of safety issues and to just make the job easier for the chainsaw crew, had identified in advance a number of trees that needed to be felled. As was the case with really virtually every construction project I witnessed on campus over my thirty years, the planners had gone to great lengths to save as many trees as possible. We're sitting in the library doing this

²⁶ See *An Unnatural History of UCSC* (Bay Tree Bookstore, UC Santa Cruz, 2008).

interview right now, and there were many trees that were cut for the expansion of this building. But look how many trees remain.

Reti: We're surrounded by trees.

Burns: It's such a beautiful setting. It looks as if the library was lowered by a crane down into the trees. It was just beautifully done. And I think Colleges Nine and Ten, at least in my opinion, turned out to be very successful projects from a visual perspective. But, to be fair, we weren't going to build two new colleges in that area of the campus without a large number of trees being removed.

From the campus's perspective, we're the University of California. We had to provide space for an increasing number of state students who were eligible for UC. And it was pretty clear that UCSC, as one of the younger campuses, was going to have to take its share of these new students. And we were going to want to grow, to some extent, in order to continue a natural trajectory of academic development.

Anyway, in reflecting on that particular protest, it became clear to the people who were running the tree-cutting operation that December — in 1991, I think — that this was going to be a challenge. My recollection is that the Earth First group, which learned in advance that we were going to be cutting trees, was intent on disrupting the operation. Anticipating at least the potential for problems, the campus brought in a lot more police than I think it had originally planned. It was at the end of a quarter on our campus, and between semesters at UC Berkeley. Because of the proximity of Berkeley to Santa Cruz,

the outside police that we brought in were mostly from that campus, or that's how I remember it.

On the day the tree cutting began, I watched events unfold from my perch at the Cowell Health Center, which was pretty much right across the street from the site. My recollection is that some of the protestors had broken through the police perimeter and had chained themselves to trees; others had entered the site before the police even arrived early that morning. The initial goal of the protest was get on site and make it unsafe or impossible for the campus to bring down the trees that had been, if memory serves me correctly, marked in advance with orange spray paint.

The police response to that particular protest was forceful. Was it justified? I don't know. Somebody smarter than me can make that determination.

Reti: So some people got injured?

Burns: Well, as I was watching this unfold initially, it had not yet become completely chaotic; at least from my perspective, the operation seemed to be reasonably under control. But then I received a message from someone on the Cowell Health Center staff, telling me that I needed to go to an office back in the Health Center because a *San Jose Mercury* reporter, Lee Quarnstrom, was on the landline phone there and wanted an update on what was happening at the protest. Even though Lee was in the Santa Cruz bureau, which was located down on Pacific Avenue, he had decided to just call in for this particular story after hearing about the protest.

So I left my vantage point in front of the Health Center so that I could take the call and help Lee with his story. I probably did about a ten-minute phoner with Lee, letting him know the particulars of the protest, trying as best I could to be his eyes because it was clear that he didn't really want to come up here to cover the story.

And when I returned after that ten-minute interview, it appeared that all heck had broken loose, including that several reporters had been, if not arrested, at least confronted by the police. All these years later, I still shake my head about it. The Elfland protest was disastrous on seemingly every level, including reporters getting corralled by police at the scene. You can imagine how that played in the newspapers the next day. The reporters had been taken to an area of the health center. Fortunately, it didn't take me long to determine what was happening and convince the police who were in charge that the reporters had a right to cover the story.

This screw-up happened early in the protest, so most of the affected reporters were local. As publicity got out about the protest, and I suppose got out about the treatment of reporters, the scope of the coverage expanded. John Robinson from the *Sentinel* had been confronted by the police, so had a cameraman from KSBW TV — I want to say his name was John Toriega. I might not be remembering John's last name correctly. Anyway, John, who was just trying to do his job, was separated from his camera, let's put it that way. And his camera recorded a lot of the event as it rolled down a hill. The whole event was awful — the TV footage was as bad as could be; the protestors were completely uncivil;

the police response, at least to me, seemed very aggressive. And it's certainly true to say that my preparation for that event did not contemplate all that could possibly happen.

As a campus, we — and I include myself in that — learned a lot from Elfland. For one, we learned that we needed to have a much closer connection between the people who are running the operation — whether it be Physical Planning and Construction, or the police, or some other office — and the communications staff, if we expected there to be media coverage. I don't recall there being discussions at all between our offices in advance of that protest. In retrospect, it would have made an abundance of sense to set aside an area that was appropriate for media to cover the tree-cutting, and work very hard to communicate with reporters that it was not appropriate for them to go elsewhere on the site. We hadn't done any of that kind of preparation. I wasn't the senior person from our office there that day, but I was senior enough, so I'll just finger myself for that.

On a personal note, one of the things that bothered me about that day, aside from the painful events I've already described, was that this happened very early in the tenure of Karl Pister, who was a chancellor who I greatly admired and grew particularly close to. He had accepted the chancellor's position on an acting basis just weeks or months prior to the Elfland protest, and I think at least some of the planning for the tree-cutting operation preceded his arrival on campus. Or it should have preceded his arrival. And here he was, kind of stuck with this mess. Chancellor Pister was and is a truly amazing person who had a great capacity to tackle difficult issues, including many very thorny land-use issues on campus. I

think he did a particularly good job helping the campus think about what it was trying to do with respect to land use and growth and all of the tension that our growth created on campus and in the community. That he ended up having to be front and center at a post-protest press conference to explain why it was that a tree-cutting operation on his watch had gone a bit south — I felt like we all had let him down.

To be fair, there are some aspects of a protest the scale of the Elfland protest that can be beyond the campus's ability to control. But, I suspect it's also true that that particular protest made us all wonder if we needed to prepare more cohesively for these kinds of problems. It's a small thing, but when I went back to the office that day, one of my first actions was to ask the woman — Jennifer Thelander — who was assisting me at the time if she would buy me one of these new contraptions called a cell phone. In the future, if I needed to take calls from people like Lee Quarnstrom, I didn't want to have to leave a scene like Elfland to do so. Cell phones, I think, had been around for only a few months, so it's not like I was very far behind the communications curve. But I realized that day that, in my line of work, I needed to have one.

Reti: Okay. Maybe we can talk next time about some of the lessons that were learned from that experience and how they were applied later as other protests took place.

Burns: Because you and I are talking face-to-face, Irene, you know I'm smiling when I say this. But in pondering this oral history, which I was honored to be asked to do, I must confess that I wasn't looking forward to revisiting some of

these things. I suppose it's useful from the point of view of institutional history, but some of these memories I'd probably just as soon not revisit. But I'm going to smile when I say that.

Reti: That's part of what comes with the territory sometimes, of doing oral history, I think. Thank you for being willing to revisit these issues.

Burns: Before we completely leave our discussion of the Elfland protests, the other thing I should mention is that when reporters became part of the story, that created a lot of follow-up media coverage — that day and for weeks, really. Among the follow-up crews that showed up that day was KSBW, which decided that they'd send another crew to the campus to interview me about what happened to their first crew. It was an absolutely reasonable thing for them to do. It would be fair to say that the person who interviewed me had a particular bias, but who could blame her? One of her colleagues had, in my opinion, been treated too forcefully while just trying to cover a story and do his job.

As the KSBW interview was taking place, one particular person who was probably one of the protestors walked by and decided that he would spit on me in the middle of the interview.

Reti: Oh, no.

Burns: It's probably as much restraint as I've ever had to exercise on the job, because I was in the middle of being filmed. It was obviously a pretty degrading thing, for me as well as the reporter interviewing me. But it was just one of those things that — at least on that disastrous day — came with the territory. I guess I

tried as best I could to never forget that we were a public institution supported by taxpayers and, as such, we had an obligation to try to explain what we had done, even if what we had done was difficult to explain.

Budget Cuts and Protests

Reti: So today is Wednesday, July 15, 2015. And this is Irene Reti. I'm here with Jim Burns for our third interview in his oral history. So Jim, last time we left off in the early 1990s. We were talking about the Elfland protests. I know that there has been a long history of protests against budget cuts at UCSC, which seem to happen on a cyclical basis. One of my narrators years ago said budget crises at UCSC tended to happen every ten years. But that was before time started speeding up and they began happening almost incessantly. (laughs) Budget cuts have been a theme of protests going back to, what, the late nineties?

Burns: Well, I can remember them back as far as the eighties. Someone who knows more about our economic history would be a better source, but what I observed seemed to fit a pattern. The nation and the state of California would go into a recession, tax revenues would decline, our state funding would level off or even decline, and then there would be budget cuts. There seemed to be a little bit of a lag time — maybe a year or two — between the beginning of a recession and the university realizing it needed to cut its budget in response to reduced expenditures from the state of California.

Reti: We've been living through this period of increasing divestment on the part of the state from public education.

Burns: Yes, that's exactly right. There would be cuts from the state of California to the UC system, and UC's response to that would be two-fold. The system would increase tuition — I guess it was called registration fees back then but for all intents and purposes it was tuition. And that would account for some of the deficit. And then UC's Office of the President would turn to the campuses and ask for budget cuts, which on our and other campuses would lead to academic and administrative program cuts. It also very often led to layoffs. In some cases, it led to actual salary reductions.

Whenever there was a recession, you could expect that there would be another wave of protests on our campus, very understandably related to tuition increases and very understandably related to program cuts. The tuition hike was especially painful because it usually meant that students, and maybe their families, were being asked to pay more for someone's education at the very time when, because of the recession, people could least afford to pay more. That pattern repeated itself many, many times during my time at UCSC.

One of the most severe of these cyclical budget cuts, or at least one that I recall particularly vividly, occurred in the early nineties. And eventually it led to budget protests in McHenry Library in what we used to call the library foyer. It's a space now occupied by the World Café and operated by the Hoffmans. But anyway, there was a very heated protest over budget cuts. A large crowd of students filled the foyer, spilled out into the free speech area behind the library, and expanded toward the stairs in the front of the library. My recollection was that it went on for at least a full day, and maybe more than one day. I think the

chancellor at the time, who might have been Robert Stevens — or maybe it was Karl Pister — was out town on university business, so Michael Tanner, the executive vice chancellor at the time, was really the person on point, trying to discuss with the protestors why he couldn't roll back fees because they were UC fees, and why campus-specific program cuts were necessary.

As the protest moved into the late-evening hours and became a bit more threatening, the campus — rightly or wrongly — called for help: the city police came up, and deputies from the county sheriff's department came up with the goal of getting the protestors to leave the foyer. The police actions and the protestors' response turned a situation that was already volatile into something that was just short of mayhem. There were a number of arrests late that evening, and it was a pretty difficult moment for administrators, as well as the protestors. Without much guidance, it became my job to explain why that the campus decided it needed to break up the protest. The lesson I learned that night — and re-learned on many subsequent occasions — is that any time police are summoned to end a protest, the media coverage has the potential to be awful if arrests are required. Whether the police action is appropriate or over the top, the story will depict the police as over-exuberant, even if they aren't. The presence of police in riot gear is never a visual that anyone particularly wants to see.

Anyway, at that particular protest, it was so crowded in the foyer that Michael and others in the administration very understandably became concerned about the safety of the protestors themselves. There was legitimate concern that somebody was going to end up breaking through the single-pane glass that at

the time separated the foyer and the adjacent Chancellor's Office. I probably should have said this before: One of the reasons that the protest was in the foyer was that the Chancellor's Office was there. The chancellor's staff obviously is now in Kerr Hall, but for many years the library was where the Chancellor's Office and the chancellor's staff were located.

Once that particular protest had run its course, the campus decided that it needed to spend some serious money — I do not recall how much — to replace that glass with something much thicker and safer. Unfortunately, the glass was so thick that it could be — and was — described by its manufacturer as bulletproof glass. The campus was not installing bulletproof glass because administrators were expecting the protestors to produce firearms. Really, it was as simple as the campus wanting very thick glass at the scene of regular protests in an effort to reduce the chances that someone would fall through or be pushed through the interior glass there and end up very seriously injured.

Somewhat predictably, our decision to upgrade the glass spawned a new round of follow-up stories about that particular protest — I know the *Mercury News* published an article about the bulletproof glass. I think they may have broken the story, so to speak. And of course *City on a Hill* and the *Sentinel* and local and regional TV stations followed suit, suggesting that we were wasting money by installing expensive bulletproof glass at the same time tuition was increasing and programs were being cut. It was kind of a damned-if-we-do and damned-if-we-don't situation. We received a lot of bad press for the arrests that occurred that night and a lot of bad press for the installation of bulletproof glass that occurred

after the arrests.

So it was a rough few weeks for that particular protest. While such budget-related protests did repeat themselves regularly over the years, thankfully they weren't all like that. Protests are just an understandable and, if the issue is important enough, in some ways desirable part of the churn of university life. It doesn't always feel that way to administrators. My successor will have to deal with how best to communicate about them; in fact, I think he already has had to.

Anyway, it would be fair to say that many of them posed real logistical and real communication challenges for the campus. The fact that programs were having to be cut was painful and difficult enough; but then the subsequent protests were often made-for-media moments that overshadowed a lot of the positive media coverage the campus was regularly receiving for the scholarship of its faculty and students.

You could certainly understand why students were upset with the fee hikes. You could understand why students were upset when beloved programs were cut. You could really understand why people who felt passionate about these issues would passionately protest. I'm not sure that much changed as a result of the budget protests, but it was very understandable why the budget cuts over the years produced a lot of protests on our campus.

Reti: Thank you.

4/20: A Continuing Conundrum

Reti: So then on a completely different topic, the whole issue of 4-20 is something

that seems to resurface, more recently quite controversially. But it goes back quite a ways.

Burns: Yes.

Reti: We should explain what 4/20 is, first of all.

Burns: Well, the origins of 4/20 were actually — and I'm not a student of 4/20, although you'd think I would be, after all of these years —²⁷

Reti: (laughs) I'm not either.

Burns: — A group of students — high school students in Marin County, I think — were the people who created 4/20. And they convened on 4/20, April 20 every year, at 4:20 in the afternoon. The gathering, slowly over time, became sort of an unofficial national holiday, maybe an international holiday, for people who were in favor of decriminalizing marijuana use, or at least sharing a smoke with others in a public setting. So, every year, on 4/20 at 4:20, people — sometimes large numbers of people — would gather and light up. And clearly, UC Santa Cruz had become one of the “it” campuses in the country for 4/20.

I go far enough back so that I can remember 4/20 being celebrated by as few as a dozen students out on the lawn in what was called the free speech area behind McHenry Library — in the area near the pathway that heads up towards Kerr

²⁷ See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/420_\(cannabis_culture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/420_(cannabis_culture)).

Hall. In fact, I can remember that in those days — and this would have been the late eighties or early to mid-nineties — I'd be walking to or from a meeting at McHenry Library and I'd notice, say, six or so students who appeared to be smoking marijuana on that lawn. And I'd think to myself, "Oh, it's 4/20." So there was not much fanfare around 4/20 in those days. It was something that occurred but occurred on a very small scale.

Something happened, though — and quite frankly, I'm not sure I could tell you precisely what it was — that made the 4/20 gathering grow exponentially on this campus. It eventually moved out into the Porter Meadow, where it exists with great popularity to this day. One year, it was 50 people; the next year, it was 100 people; and the next year, it was 500 people. By 2004, I think, much to our dismay, *Rolling Stone Magazine* published an article on 4/20 at UCSC. It was a cover story that was written by someone who had attended one of our 4/20 events.²⁸ And by that time it was probably 500 to a 1,000 people out there in the meadow. The campus was still a little bit uncertain about what — if anything — should be its response. On the one hand, it still seemed like a fairly benign activity; on the other hand, the scale had gotten to a point where it was already impossible for the UCSC Police Department to curtail the gathering for legitimate safety reasons. We were kind of betwixt and between with it.

The *Rolling Stone* article, which was titled "The Most Stoned Students on the

²⁸ See <https://blog.longreads.com/2014/04/20/the-most-stoned-kids-on-the-most-stoned-campus-on-earth/>.

Most Stoned Day on the Most Stoned Campus on Earth” was a PR nightmare for the campus. And it also seemed to accelerate the growth of this very unwanted, at least by the administration, UCSC activity. After that 2004 article, the campus started to pay much more attention to 4/20, without any real success — at least if success is defined as figuring out a way to end or reduce the scale of the campus 4/20 gathering.

It, very understandably, became an activity over which there was a lot of administrative hand-wringing. With crowds that large, there were real safety concerns. So there were a lot of preparations each year in an effort to make sure that it was an event that was limited to marijuana smoking and didn't end up becoming more of a safety hazard than it already was. Members of the senior administration had regular meetings in the days and weeks that approached each 4/20 in an effort to think through the logistics of the event and its implications for the operation of the campus. For many years, the campus decided that it was unsafe for cars to travel on the west side of the campus on that particular afternoon of that particular day of the year. The vehicular blockade created a great inconvenience for everyone. But it certainly felt like the right decision at the time. Extra police were brought in, not because there was any hope at that point of trying to dissuade people from lighting up at 4:20, but just really to try to monitor the campus because the event had grown in size, to the point where it was attracting some pretty sketchy people. In isolated cases, there were people who were arrested for having a concealed weapon. There was evidence that there that some of the people here for 4/20 were also in possession of other more serious drugs. In the end, it became an exercise in trying to protect

our students, protect our faculty and staff, and protect visitors to the campus from the impacts of the hordes of people who would come to campus that day. There were years following the *Rolling Stone* article when the campus estimated that as many as 10,000 people participated in that year's 4/20 event in the Porter Meadow.

It led to lots of media coverage. Predictably, all of it was bad for the campus's reputation. It tended to reinforce — I think unfairly — the less desirable aspects of UC Santa Cruz's image. UC Santa Cruz is a fabulous place, with tremendous scholarship, path-breaking research, and super-bright students. I think there was a very legitimate feeling within at least our office that this one event each year was undoing a lot of the good PR that the campus was justifiably earning throughout the rest of the year. I certainly felt that way. There were image surveys that our division periodically conducted for the campus that referenced people's impressions that UCSC was a hippie school where a lot of pot smoking occurred. We pretty regularly made the *Princeton Review's* annual list of most pot-friendly schools. Was that justified for reasons other than 4/20? I don't know and have no way of really assessing that. But I suspect that the 4/20 activity, which garnered loads of publicity every year, had something to do with those impressions and rankings.

Reti: It seems like a bit of a conundrum for your office. The more attention you pay to it — and rightly so, you need to pay attention to it — but then you create more media attention.

Burns: Well, we were certainly in a box. Year after year, I did interviews on the

subject — only because reporters would request comment. I never tried to do them anywhere near Porter Meadow because I was always concerned that having students in the background smoking pot while I was on camera trying to explain what we were doing about it — well, I thought that combination wasn't going to be a winning visual for the campus. So I would usually just station myself in the Carriage House, where I worked for most of my career. It seemed to be a safe enough distance from Porter (laughs) to do those interviews.

Invariably, we would get hordes of Bay Area media, TV in particular, that would descend on the campus for that particular day. Clearly, there were 4/20 activities occurring in the Bay Area. But I don't think there was any one place — at least in our part of the state — where you could film 5,000 people gathered in one place for 4/20. So it just became too easy of a shot for them to get. Quite honestly, we tried to not make it easy for reporters to cover our 4/20 gathering. I remember one year a Bay Area TV reporter, whose name I will not mention, became absolutely livid with me because he said that I knew that it was going to be a media event and I had not designated media parking near the event so that reporters could conveniently cover the event. (laughs) I told him, "Well, quite honestly, I'd rather you not cover the event. Whatever you think about marijuana use, it's still illegal. Your coverage only attracts more people to an event that's creating real problems for the campus. The crowd this event attracts is a logistics nightmare for many of the people who go to school here and for many of the people who work here."

Because UCSC is a public campus, I did almost every interview that I was ever

asked to do on the subject — and I fear that all of them really were pretty pointless. But reporters wanted to have a talking head stand up and describe what it was we were doing — or not doing — in response to 5,000 people lighting a joint in one place for a few minutes each year. I suppose if I'd been a student, maybe there would have been something appealing to me about the scale of the event. But I always felt like it seemed like an awful lot of effort for a very small amount of fun, as people would just pour into the Porter Meadow around 4 p.m., light up their joint, and leave within minutes after the 4:20 moment passed.

Anyway, it was what it was. And it became an annual event. We tried lots of internal communication in advance. In the last ten years or so that I worked here we decided that it made sense to communicate fairly heavily within the campus about it. I think we felt that we had an obligation to do that because at minimum there were going to be a lot of people inconvenienced that day. One year I recall that the campus decided that it made sense to communicate in advance with parents of current students and ask the parents to encourage their children not to participate in the event. My recollection of that letter — I think it was written by somebody in Student Affairs — was that it honestly described the reputational damage UCSC's 4/20 event was doing to the campus. And it tried to get tuition-paying students, or tuition-paying parents, or both, to consider the fact that the event was devaluing a degree they were paying dearly for. In the end, my recollection is that that letter only created an additional round of pre-4/20 media stories that year — coverage that would not have happened without the letter. In other words, it backfired on the campus because the letter to the parents only

created more advance buzz, which probably meant that we had more people attending the event that year because it received so much advance publicity. So we tried different approaches without a great deal of success, to be honest with you.

Reti: Okay, thank you.

Tent University

So then that takes us into the mid-2000s and the Tent University protests. I guess you would call them protests.

Burns: Yes, it seemed like a new form of protest that occurred, I believe, in the spring of 2005. It was a protest by some of our students as well as others from off campus, against the trajectory of public higher education: higher fees, less access, larger classes. Like many recent protests, it attracted participants who also wanted to have their voices heard about a number of other social causes. It occurred in another one of those designated campus free speech areas, this one near the base of campus. It was in that grassy area between the Stone House and High Street down there.

Reti: Is a “free speech area” a legal designation?

Burns: Within the Student Affairs world, I believe it is a legal designation. I’m far from an expert on the so-called “time, place, and manner” regulations that Student Affairs spells out for students in the campus Rule Book. Obviously the entire campus is considered a free speech area, to the extent that it’s defined that way by the constitution. But I think beyond that, Student Affairs had made

legitimate efforts to define specific areas where large protests or large gatherings could occur. And the area near the base of campus, I think, was considered one of those areas. I don't know whether it still is, but it certainly used to be. From the protestors' point of view, that area was desirable because it was very visible. So visitors to the campus, or passersby, would easily see that there was a protest and could hopefully understand what the protest was about.

For the purposes of Tent University, that was a key area in terms of disrupting the campus as well, since it occurred near the main entrance. The problem with that particular area was that it frequently became a safety issue for the protestors themselves because it's adjacent to a very busy intersection. To the extent that the protests occurred in the street, that often was just flat-out worrisome to administrators. Campus administrators were often quite willing to try to understand the protests and let them happen — but they were justifiably worried about the safety issues that protests in that particular area would create. I saw firsthand that, at some protests there, non-participants would get frustrated with the protest, frustrated with their lack of access to the campus, and literally try to drive through the crowd to get on campus.

The Tent University protest was very successfully promoted. As I said, it was designed to provide an alternative to what was seen as an increasingly bureaucratic educational system that wasn't serving students. I think it lasted for something like five days. I remember Chancellor Denton — Denice Denton was chancellor at the time — made an appearance and tried to help create some structure for negotiation with the protestors. The campus obviously had an

interest in having the protest end at some point. At minimum, its 24-hour-a-day presence there had become a real problem for our neighbors. That was often a sticking point because overnight protests in that area were loud. If they were successful, they attracted a lot of people. And if they attracted a lot of people and there were overnight activities, protests there could create a real problem for the people who live off campus near that intersection. And the campus would receive a lot of complaints. My recollection of Tent University was that we received complaints from neighbors because the protest was an around-the-clock deal for about five days.

Reti: So why was it called Tent University? Was it a teach-in that was going on in tents?

Burns: Well, there were tents or tent-like structures. I think the idea was that they were going to redefine what the classroom experience was like. It was going to be friendlier, less formal, less structured, an alternative teaching experience to the one that would occur in the designated and confined classroom areas on campus. I'm not an expert on this and not probably remembering it completely, but it's not as if Tent University only occurred on our campus. I think that it was a form of protest that had already occurred on a few, I don't think many, but a few other college or university campuses. After some success elsewhere, it manifest itself here, as things frequently did.

I think that kind of energy to explore alternatives is one of the things about which UC Santa Cruz should be justifiably proud. Even when the protests presented challenges for the administration, the protests showed a degree of

social engagement that could, at times, be pretty impressive. I can't say that that particular protest, despite its length, led to much. Did it call attention to the fact that tuition was going up, that class sizes were going up, and that with class sizes going up the quality of education might be eroding? Yes, I guess it did call attention to those issues. But, as increasingly became the case, large protests on our campus and on other campuses became more noteworthy because of the protestors' interactions with police. And I think that one lost its way in that regard as well.

I remember — somewhat painfully — that there were nineteen people who were arrested on the last night of Tent University. It was the first time that I had seen arrests on this campus where there had been that degree of resistance from the people getting arrested. It may have been that I'm not remembering others. But, I had seen and/or staffed a lot of UCSC protests. As you recall, going back to the apartheid arrests two decades earlier — those students were willing to get arrested over the cause they were protesting. And in fact they worked with UCSC police so that those arrests could occur with a minimum of police force.

But by the time Tent University occurred, it seemed as if many of the protestors were no longer willing to be arrested to call attention to the issue they were protesting. And they intentionally stopped working with the police. In fact, beginning with Tent University — or at least it seemed that way to me — they locked arms whenever the police were present and arrests might commence. So, when the decision came down after five days and a fair amount of patience that the police needed to start breaking up the protest, those particular arrests became

very difficult and very physical. If protestors chose to lock arms, it would become very difficult and very challenging for police to arrest them. It put the police, who often were just following an administrative order, in a very difficult position. And from the point of campus public relations, there was no way for media to videotape those kind of arrests in a manner that didn't suggest — often unfairly, I thought — excessive police force. Anyway, the arrests at Tent University were a made-for-media event.

If memory serves me correctly, the Tent University arrests also led to a spirited debate-discussion-disagreement between the administration and the Academic Senate. I recall that some members of the Senate wished that the arrests hadn't occurred and that the police hadn't been involved, and perhaps believed that the campus should just have allowed Tent University to continue indefinitely.²⁹ At least from the administration's perspective, the prevailing view was that after five days the campus needed to restore some sense of normalcy to that area, as we were getting lots of complaints from neighbors. I think no one was particularly happy with how the arrests occurred, including the police who were asked to make them happen.

Anyway, from my perspective at least, it was clear after Tent University that the nature of protests was morphing into something that was going to be more challenging for the administration to respond to. The WTO [World Trade

²⁹ See <http://senate.ucsc.edu/archives/Past%20Issues/campus-demonstration-response/TUSCreptSCP1479.pdf>.

Organization] protests had occurred in Seattle just a few years before that, and the trajectory of those particular protests may have played a role in how protestors elsewhere, including at UCSC, were going to conduct themselves.³⁰ By many accounts, Seattle's and that police department's response to those protests was pretty over the top. And perhaps because the arrests during the WTO protests in Seattle had garnered so much publicity, it almost seemed as if protestors had come to believe that if they could — by plan — turn the protest into a confrontation with police, that they would get more media coverage for their cause. For whatever it's worth, I would say that they were partly right and partly wrong.

Clearly, when police are involved and there are police-protestor interactions, it is like throwing red meat to reporters. Those events get covered and get covered extensively. The problem with that approach, at least it seemed to me — and I had many conversations with protestors over the years about this — was that their protest would receive coverage but the stories tended to focus on confrontations with police. And the actual cause that was the subject of the protest would almost get lost in the coverage. So I personally began to question whether protests that seem to have a confrontation with police as a planning goal would actually accomplish all that much in the long run. They clearly got the media coverage, but I'm just not sure that it was media coverage that was

³⁰ See <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/dec/16/news/mn-44481>.

terribly insightful about the issue that the protestors were legitimately concerned about.

Reti: I understand what you're saying. In your conversations with protestors, do you recall what their response to your opinion was?

Burns: I think in many cases, they agreed. To be fair, sometimes those discussions occurred in the middle of a several-day protest, so it may have been a little bit difficult for them to assess how effective that particular protest was ultimately going to be. But we had very civil conversations about the effectiveness — or ineffectiveness — of the tactic of making it between protestors and police.

The other thing that I observed for the first time during Tent University was that the protestors had become reluctant to choose someone or a small group of people to serve as their leader or representatives. Early in my career at UCSC, when large demonstrations had occurred, it was pretty clear who the protest leaders were. Either self-appointed, selected by the larger group, or among the chief organizers of the protest, they had been willing to be considered the leaders or representatives of the protestors. At least from my perspective, these people had seemed pretty darn responsible and pretty willing to work with the administration for many years at UCSC. Oftentimes, they would describe what their plans were, so that the police knew in advance what to expect, not so that they could thwart their plans, but so that they could be prepared. From the protestors' point of view — at least back then — working cooperatively with the campus wasn't always a bad thing, even if it was the campus or a campus

decision that they were protesting. Having the protestors select representatives would also give the campus administration at least a chance of working with those people to negotiate an outcome that maybe both sides could live with.

By the time Tent University rolled around in 2005, protestors seemed to go to great lengths to not have a leader. That ended up leaving campus administrators frequently in a position of not being able to identify somebody with whom they could meet periodically during the protest — perhaps to negotiate an outcome that would end the protest, or maybe just to define or update the rules of engagement: If you do this, you will be arrested; if you do something short of this, you won't get arrested — that sort of conversation. It became increasingly difficult for Student Affairs staff or the police themselves to identify people who were willing to either assume those roles or be appointed to those roles. The absence of those kind of leaders became an increasing challenge for the campus.

Reti: In addition to being unable to identify leaders, my sense is that it became hard to identify protestors because they would wear masks and hide their identity.

Burns: I just think that, increasingly, there was a subset of protestors who wanted to engage in unlawful actions to call attention to an issue, but wanted to do so without being subjected to campus discipline or legal consequences. When someone conceals his or her face, they're obviously not going to be very accountable for the particular protest path they choose. It became difficult for the campus and very intimidating to other students, the staff and faculty, or just campus visitors who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. In my opinion,

which may not be worth that much, it was not a very impressive way to take a meaningful and yet respectful stand for a cause that may have absolutely warranted a protest.

Reti: Okay, thank you, Jim.

A Tragedy: Chancellor Denice Denton

Reti: So you mentioned Chancellor Denton coming down to the Tent University protest and that this was during her tenure. Now I'd like to talk about Denton and the events of that time, which I know were quite difficult for the campus, and probably for you personally as well.

Burns: Yes. Well, people with more firsthand experience with Chancellor Denton than me can better describe her tenure. It was obviously a very difficult time. Her death was and still is very sad. She came here amid great fanfare. By all appearances, she had been a very successful engineering dean at the University of Washington. Yet, after less than 1 1/2 years here, she was gone. She didn't have a large circle of people who were close to her, or at least that was my impression. I was one of her two spokespeople at the time and every time I met her or talked with her about a particular issue, I always had the impression that she felt like she was meeting me for the first time.

In some painful ways, it almost seemed as if her tenure on our campus started to unravel pretty early — around the time of her appointment. One of her early challenges, for example, was the appointment that the Office of the President made for her partner. Partner hires like that had certainly occurred in

relationships that were heterosexual. So my impression at the time was that she and her partner were not being treated very fairly by reporters and the public when concerns first surfaced about UC hiring her partner for another job. At least to me, it seemed that the reaction was in part based on the fact that Chancellor Denton and her partner were in a public, homosexual relationship. I also had the impression at the time that the Office of the President was not very prepared to speak supportively of the partner hire. Far be it for me to weigh in about whether the chancellor's partner was qualified for the job that she was given — as director of international strategy. What I do remember thinking at the time was that perhaps UCOP could have done a better job preparing for the partner-hire announcement. I recall having a pretty urgent phone conversation with the Office of the President at the time, a call in which they were asking for help in explaining this challenge. Obviously, because Denice was going to be our chancellor, the UCSC people on that call really wanted to help. The partner hire had already been covered in kind of a crude way by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which in a sensationalistic headline referred to her partner as a "lesbian lover." During the phone call, I offered to help support Denice because we were getting some local and regional attention for the story; toward that end, I asked to see a job description, and the UCOP people on the call — much to my dismay at the time — reported that they didn't have one, which only seemed to reinforce the notion that this was a job that wasn't really needed and that it had only been created for Chancellor Denton's partner.

I also recall that those were just very difficult times for UC as a whole, a fact that probably didn't help Chancellor Denton. The president at the time, Robert Dynes

— rightly or wrongly — had been pulled into a lot of media coverage about UC executive compensation. In short, it would probably be fair to say that the extensive negative coverage that UC was getting about any number of budget challenges — and the blowback that was having on our own campus back then — may not have helped Chancellor Denton. But I'm just speculating a bit.

Unfortunately, we all know how that chapter of UCSC's history ended. It was a Saturday in June 2006. In the months leading up to Chancellor Denton's death, there had been enough media challenges to make me feel like I needed to be tethered to my cell phone all the time. But on that particular Saturday morning — I don't think it ever happened before or after — I managed to leave the house for a few hours without my phone.

At the time, my brother Tom and I had moved our then-elderly parents to Santa Cruz, and part of my ritual was to spend Saturday morning each week visiting with them. I'd managed to leave the cell phone at home that particular morning while visiting Mom and Dad. When I got home, I found a *large* note that our daughter Monica, who was staying with us that summer, had left for me. The note left a phone number for me to call. It had a campus prefix, but it wasn't a number I recognized. But in her note to me, Monica had helpfully added, sort of as a postscript, "And it sounds urgent."

So I dialed the number not knowing who would pick up, and it was Dave Kliger,

who was the executive vice chancellor at the time.³¹ His words to me were very to the point. He just said, “Jim, Chancellor Denton has died.” He didn’t go into detail about what happened, and I think I was stunned enough to not immediately ask for details. Dave essentially told me, “She’s died, and you’re needed at Kerr Hall immediately.” That was the extent of the conversation, really. I headed up to Kerr Hall for what would easily become the most difficult day of my work life, or at least the most stressful.

My boss at the time was Elizabeth Irwin, who had been in Chancellor Denton’s fairly small circle of confidants. Liz and Denice had a very close relationship, and Liz tried to support her in every way imaginable. But Liz happened to be out of town that weekend; my recollection is that she was in Nevada. So she was not available to help — at least that weekend. As I drove to Kerr Hall, my mind was racing in part because I realized that in my shock at the news I had not asked Dave about the circumstances surrounding Chancellor Denton’s death.

By the time I got to Kerr Hall, I also realized that I didn’t even have a key to get into the building, and because it was Saturday, that could be a problem. By the time I arrived, probably around 2:00 that afternoon, there were a number of campus leaders already gathered on the second floor, including Bill Ladusaw, who I think at the time was the head of undergraduate education for the campus.

³¹ See Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Campus Provost/Executive Vice Chancellor David Kliger* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ucsc/campus-provostexecutive-vice-chancellor-david-kliger>.

Fortunately, I had Bill's number in my phone, I reached him, and he came down immediately to let me in. My first question of him was, "How did Chancellor Denton die?" He informed me that she had committed suicide and that it had happened in a somewhat public way in San Francisco.

Anyway, I began to consider how the campus might communicate this fact. I didn't have to ponder that question for long. That's because very quickly, I learned that the story had already broken on the SF Gate web site, and that the early story contained quite a number of details about the chancellor's suicide.³² In other words, in all likelihood, I would not be doing a lot of proactive communication. I would be fielding media calls, and I did that — pretty nonstop — until the phone stopped ringing shortly before midnight.

I have to say, I was very impressed by how Dave and the other campus leaders who gathered in Kerr that Saturday responded. Everyone was in shock, but people were as calm and collected as could be hoped for, figuring out who had to be called, how the campus would be informed, and ultimately what I would say to reporters. From my perspective, the first order of business was to help Dave with a message that he could send out to the entire campus community and a statement we could make available to reporters.³³ He was absolutely terrific that day. Under real duress, he was thoughtful, sensitive, and just everything you

³² See <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/UC-Santa-Cruz-chancellor-jumps-to-her-death-in-2517073.php>.

³³ See http://www1.ucsc.edu/news_events/messages/05-06/06-24.chancellor.asp.

would want your leader to be like in the most difficult of circumstances. That's who Dave is, and it was very helpful that particular day.

I had a relatively new vice chancellor, Donna Murphy, who had come to the campus to head up University Relations. I think Donna had been on the job for all of four months when Chancellor Denton died. She did a tremendous job, taking the lead in contacting all of the people — elected officials, alumni leaders, Foundation members, other people that the campus had very important relationships with.

The media attention focused more on what Chancellor Denton's last few weeks had been like on campus. Very understandably, reporters wanted to know: Had she been around? Had she seemed distraught? The fact of the matter is she had left the campus some number of days prior to her death, and people had noticed that she had not participated in the commencement activities that had just occurred. She was obviously feeling a lot of stress — I suspect some of it was personal, and some of it was related to her tenure at Santa Cruz. For example, there had been a protest that she had experienced pretty traumatically. As I recall, she and a few other administrators had been surrounded by protestors while already in a car or while attempting to get into one on campus. There'd been significant vandalism at University House.

But whatever the circumstances were that preceded her death, this much was inescapable: People had been very excited when she came to the job; but, for whatever reason, hers was a tenure that ended in the saddest possible way.

Anyway, it felt like I did close to 100 media interviews, or at least had that many media interactions that day, though I'm sure it was far fewer than that. The interviews began almost the minute I got to Kerr and continued pretty non-stop until I left the building at about 11:00 that night. TV crews understandably just came to Kerr Hall that night, and I'd go outside and talk with each crew, trying to find the words to describe such devastating news.

In the days and weeks that followed, I think that the campus did an amazing job responding to such a very, very difficult tragedy. People in University Relations, working with campus leadership, very quickly realized that it made sense to have a campus memorial that honored Chancellor Denton.³ So within days, that was planned and executed, and I have to say, executed beautifully. I take very little credit for that; I mean, it wasn't difficult to promote the memorial to reporters. But the ceremony itself, the memorial itself, was an amazingly beautiful tribute to Chancellor Denton. President Dynes came to campus for it. It was very well done, and I think greatly helped the campus process the loss a little bit more successfully. You can only hope that it left Chancellor Denton's survivors with as good a feeling as was possible during this most painful and difficult time for them.

Over the course of my many years on campus, I had been through a lot of difficult communication challenges; but I didn't feel at all prepared for that one.

*See: http://www1.ucsc.edu/administration/denice_denton/.

And I recall, on a quite personal note, that when I finally exhaled enough after the last call was returned the night of her death, probably at about 11:00 or 11:30, I decided I really could just go home and try to get some sleep. I remember walking to my truck, which was parked near Kerr Hall, and literally just sitting in it and weeping. I guess it was the stress catching up with me. Very unfortunately, it had been one of those days I knew I would never forget.

Again, I can speak, I guess, about my own experience related to that. But, in the end, it was just very, very sad. By most yardsticks, Chancellor Denton had had an amazing career, was fearless while tackling difficult social-justice issues, including difficult issues having to do with women's and civil rights. It said something about her that she insisted that her inauguration really focus on the need to have the university be more reflective of the people that it represented. A chancellorship that started with great promise had ended so suddenly and so painfully.

Reti: It was a deeply, deeply traumatic event for all of us who were here. I wonder, as one of the people whose job it was to look at the reputation of the Santa Cruz campus and the general public's sentiment about the campus, whether you felt that there was any lasting damage to the campus's reputation. Do you feel that there was any kind of critical feeling about the campus that arose as a result of Chancellor Denton's death?

Burns: I suppose there's no way for me to completely know. (pause) I ended up concluding that it didn't hurt the campus as much as I suspected it might. I suspect in part that was the case because of a couple of things.

The way that the campus paid tribute to Chancellor Denton and to her career, I think went a long way toward helping the campus process what had happened, and begin to move on from it. In that way, perhaps, it also lessened the impact that her death had on the campus's reputation.

But I also think that her successor had a lot to do with that. In many, many ways George Blumenthal was the perfect person to succeed Chancellor Denton. He is also a high-quality person who obviously has exceedingly deep campus roots. Having been on campus himself for more than thirty years at the time, he knew this place and he was someone people trusted to steady the ship. In his communications to and visits with members of the campus community, George seemed to find the right balance between paying tribute to Chancellor Denton, and helping us realize that we needed to keep doing good work and advancing this amazing place.

And so I think the campus response and the selection of George Blumenthal as our next chancellor were two things that had a lot to do with mitigating the impact Chancellor Denton's death had on the emotional well-being of the campus and, I guess, on the reputation of the campus.

Reti: So Jim, you were mentioning to me when we met for our pre-interview session about an excellent article that appeared in the *San Francisco Magazine*

about Chancellor Denton's time at UCSC and her death.³⁵

Burns: Yes, well in thinking about Chancellor Denton, I was reflecting on the media coverage of her death — in the weeks that followed, and in some cases the months that followed. Really, the coverage overall was pretty darn fair, and about as respectful to her and the campus as we could have hoped for. Some of it was a little more sensationalized than I probably would have preferred, but it was reporters trying very hard to do their jobs. But in thinking of the reporting that was done at the time, I remembered one particularly well-researched article. It was written by Diana Kapp and published, the following spring I think, in a magazine the *San Francisco Chronicle* published called simply *San Francisco*. My recollection is that Diana called our office to help her schedule interviews she wanted to conduct early on and to fact-check aspects of the piece later. She spent many months thoroughly researching the story. It was a very comprehensive piece about Chancellor Denton's time at UC Santa Cruz. My memory is that it focused some on the challenges that she had with our campus, it focused some on President Dynes and the challenges he was facing at the time of her tenure here, and it also focused some on media coverage of her that had been unfair. I am no doubt forgetting other important aspects of the article.

But I remember thinking at the time it was published that it seemed — at least to me — to be the most insightful and detailed article that I had seen that was

³⁵ Diana Kapp, "The Scandal, The Scapegoat, and the Suicide" March 2007.

written about Chancellor Denton's last few years. There are certainly people who knew more about one aspect or another of her story than I did, and perhaps those people could find fault with some particular aspect of Diane's reporting. But, at least from what I knew of what had happened, I thought it was a pretty fair account. If readers of this want to revisit that piece of campus history, that article — at least in my opinion — is as comprehensive as anything I can remember being done on that very difficult year and a half.³⁶

Reti: Thank you. That will be very useful. We'll footnote that in the oral history. And during the time that Chancellor Denton was the chancellor, there were also some protests around the military recruitments on campus.

Burns: Yes, there were several of them, two at least, that occurred in 2005 and I think again in the spring of 2006. They typically happened at job fairs on campus. As a public institution that received federal support in the form of financial aid and in the form of grants for research, UCSC was required by law — the legislation was called the Solomon Amendment — to open those job fairs up to military recruiters. To be fair, the campus may have been absolutely planning to do that anyway; but in truth, we didn't have a choice. So the campus invited military recruiters to participate in the job fairs, and I believe still does to this day.

³⁶ See https://dianakapp.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/2007_sfmagazine_the-scandal-scapegoats-suicide.pdf.

Perhaps because the fairs back then coincided with our country's rapidly increasing military involvement in the Middle East, there was quite a bit of hostility directed at the military recruiters at those particular fairs. My recollection is that both of those fairs took place in University Center, at Colleges Nine and Ten. They both attracted a significant number of protestors, and at least at one of them, the military recruiters themselves decided to voluntarily leave because they recognized, I think correctly, that their presence was creating a very tense situation. The protestors had occupied, in a sense, the job fair. The civilian job recruiters were obviously not very successfully able to attract people to their tables because the place was so packed with protestors. So I think quite civilly, really, the military recruiters voluntarily left. The campus, because of the Solomon Amendment, wasn't in a position to say, "You've been uninvited from this." And I didn't get the impression the chancellor or others wanted to do that anyway; these were job fairs, and presumably students should feel free to go to them to seek a job in civilian work as well as in military work.

My recollection is that one of those protests in particular ended quite badly, with the military recruiters deciding that they'd had enough and that it would be better for all involved if they just left. But, while exiting through a back door, their departure was detected by protestors, who followed them to their vehicles. At least a few of the protestors proceeded to throw rocks at the military recruiters. Quite honestly, I was appalled by that behavior. To this day, the campus invites military recruiters to job fairs. Thankfully, at least in my opinion, things have calmed down considerably at recent job fairs.

Those protests and Tent University occurred during Chancellor Denton's tenure. It would be fair to say that the character of those protests certainly didn't lower the temperature on campus.

Reti: Or her stress.

Burns: True. Those particular protests probably did not lower her stress level.

The Tree-Sitting Protests

Reti: Yes. So let's see. Do we have time today to talk about tree sitters?

Burns: If we must (laughs).

Reti: Okay. That happened during George Blumenthal's tenure, in 2007 and 2008.

Burns: Well, the background for that protest was campus growth, the campus's Long-Range Development Plan [LRDP],³⁷ and the campus's great interest in building the Biomedical Research Facility. There was a lot of terrific research occurring on campus in disciplines related to biomedical research — and that work needed and deserved a home. So the Biomedical Research Facility had been planned in the LRDP and construction was about to begin. Typically, what happens on the early side of a construction project is removal of some of the trees on the site. On the eve of that occurring, a number of protestors occupied several

³⁷ See <http://lrdep.ucsc.edu/>.

of the trees that had been designated for removal on the site. This surprise move occurred in the dark of night — actually I think in the dark of early morning. The people in the trees either believed that we should not proceed with the project, or in some cases, maybe didn't have anything else to do. What happened on our campus was being repeated at UC Berkeley, which had its own tree sitters at the very same time. Anyway, several of our trees were occupied in the early morning of a November day in 2007. And at least one of the trees on the site was occupied for the next thirteen months.

That first day the campus strategy seemed to be to surround the trees, in an effort to keep others from joining the people who had already scaled them. So we had our own police attempt to do that. I also think we brought in police assistance from elsewhere in the Santa Cruz community, and we put temporary plastic fencing around the trees, with the idea that we would be able to isolate the people in the trees, which would help us get them out and end the protest.

Well, it was a good-faith attempt at responding to a kind of protest that I don't believe we had anticipated. The people who were supportive of the tree sitters tried very hard to break through the police lines, a scuffle with police ensued, and the result was nothing short of mayhem. The protestors would probably say that the police were overzealous in their efforts to secure the site that day. The police would probably say that they were just trying to do a job, and that the protestors had initiated the violence. I was on site, and at least from my perspective, the police were in a pretty tough spot. They tried to resist the protestors' attempts to break through the barriers. Suffice it to say, some really

horrific video footage of the protest aired on TV throughout the Monterey Bay and San Francisco Bay regions that night, creating even more interest in the protest than it might have otherwise had.

As protests go, this particular one was very tense. I remember holding an impromptu press conference on site that first afternoon because the activity had attracted so many media from the Bay Area that it made sense to have them gather over to one side of the area so that I could try to explain — in one setting with one message — what the university was planning to build on the site, why it mattered, and why the protest had become physical. Obviously, most of the questions that day focused on the campus's decision to have police involved, and how successful or unsuccessful that had been. Little did I or anyone else know at the time that the tree-sit, the occupation of those trees, would receive fairly constant publicity for the next thirteen months.

Occasionally there were individuals apprehended at the site. Maybe it was a single protestor who would come down from the tree after his or her shift ended. I also remember that there was a faculty member who at one point was approached by police because he was out there providing food that could be sent up the trees to the protestors. I think it would be fair to say that that particular protest created a lot of stress for the faculty, staff, and students who, because of their work or studies, needed to spend a lot of time in that area of Science Hill. And it also created a lot of understandable stress within the senior administration about the best way of coping with or ending the protest.

In the end, the tree-sit reached its conclusion very quietly in the early morning

hours of a December day in 2008 — again, a long thirteen months after it started. After an incredible amount of logistical and law enforcement planning, and a lot of communications planning that Barry Shiller, my supervisor at the time, and I did, the tree-sit was about to be over. With everything in place, the campus quickly erected fences to keep other protestors out and climbed the trees to bring the actual tree-sitters down. By that time, I think there was one lonely protestor left in the trees, and he came down without incident.

Reti: Was this during winter break?

Burns: Yes, it was. I seem to recall that the lone tree-sitter was someone who had been questioned on the site by police months earlier, during one of the tree-sitters' shift changes. Anyway, it was someone we were familiar with, but not someone with a campus affiliation.

To be fair to the campus, it turns out it's a lot more difficult than one might initially think to get people down from trees. But in the end, probably the longest protest in campus history concluded very quietly, and I think everyone breathed a real sigh of relief that we didn't have to arrest a large number of people, or recreate the conflict that had defined the first day of that particular protest, thirteen long months earlier.

Reti: Okay, thank you.

Burns: (sighs) Oh, boy.

Reti: There sure were a lot of things happening on this campus during those years.

Burns: Yes, and I'm afraid we haven't gotten to the fire-bombings or to the building occupations that are also on your list. May we save those for our next session?

Reti: Sure, let's stop this for now, and we'll pick up there next time.

More Student Protests

Reti: Okay, so today is Tuesday, July 28, 2015 and this is Irene Reti. I'm here with Jim Burns for our fourth interview. So today we're going to start by talking about some of the more recent protests that have happened at UCSC, beginning with the fire bombings that had to do with animal rights, if I remember correctly, that took place in August 2008.

Burns: Well, to give you a bit of context, Irene, at that point in time the tree-sit still was happening on the site earmarked for the Biomedical Research Facility. As we discussed earlier, the tree-sit happened from November 2007 to December 2008, when we had at least one person, and I think for most of the time, multiple persons, in the trees on the site.

Several months before that tree-sit concluded peacefully, the fire bombings occurred. It was an August morning in 2008. I think it was a Saturday, as I recall, because I remember being in touch with Chancellor Blumenthal on a weekend and talking to him about his campus message and a public statement.⁸⁸ And it

⁸⁸ See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2008/08/2348.html>.

involved two faculty members, one who lived on campus and one who lived just off campus. They were both in the sciences. The sense at the time was that it was some type of an anti-science protest against their work, which was in the field of biomedicine. Did it have some relationship to the fact that we were still planning to construct this building in an area where some people didn't want trees removed? Did it have something to do with campus growth because the biomedical facility represented more campus construction at a time when everything that happened in terms of construction on campus either was challenged or protested? Or did it have something to do with the fact that there were people on campus who were doing very important work in the area of health sciences that, out of necessity, required the use of animals in their research?³⁹

The faculty member who lived on campus, down in the faculty housing area near the base of campus, had his car destroyed outside his residence. And then there was one who lived in a home just off campus, sort of near the 7-11 store down there, near the main entrance. I can't even imagine the terror that these scientists — people who were doing important health-related research — must have felt.⁴⁰ Nor can I imagine how their family members felt.

It was a very, very difficult time for the campus. In addition to the obvious

³⁹ See <http://www1.ucsc.edu/research/animals/>

⁴⁰ See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2008/08/2362.html>.

trauma this caused within UCSC's scientific community, the attacks received a lot of media coverage at the time, everything from the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* to the *New York Times*. There was extensive local and regional coverage of the attacks that weekend, which became extensive national coverage the following week. I can't help but mention that I received terrific support from office staff, and I want to mention Guy Lasnier in particular, as someone who really, really helped with communications during that whole incident.

There was a large rally in support of these faculty members, near the base of the campus, I want to say the following Monday afternoon. The UCSC community really stepped forward to support of the victims of these heinous acts. Anyway, the bombings were obviously challenging for the victims, but also stressful for the police and for the campus as a whole — and they occurred during a pretty rough five-year period on campus. From my perspective, it was an era in which the campus experienced a number of very difficult moments, and all of them came with some pretty vexing communication challenges.

Reti: That's certainly one of the scariest that I can remember, because they were threatening somebody's life.

Burns: Yes. I can't imagine how scary that no doubt was for the two faculty members and their families.

Anyway, since this is the section of this oral history in which you are asking me to relive some of the more memorable protest activity that occurred during those chapters of campus history, I'll just continue by saying it wasn't too many

months before we were introduced to another wave of protests — in the form of the building occupation.

I believe it was just that same fall when the Board of Regents raised tuition at a board meeting on the UCLA campus. Significantly, the increase was going to take tuition at UC past the \$10,000-a-year mark for the first time. Understandably, on many of the UC campuses this vote led to protests. On our campus, the fee protests morphed into building occupations. Many protests over the years had taken place inside campus buildings. But these “occupations” were branded differently by the protestors, and it seemed like the idea was to completely take over and shut down the building.

The first incidence of one of these so-called building occupations occurred on the first day of school in the fall 2009 quarter, following a fee-related protest at the base of campus. I remember thinking, boy, it’s the first day of a new school year — this is going to be a tough year (laughs). Perhaps it was the first official day of the quarter, or the first day of classes, but it was that early in the quarter.

There was a subset of the protestors who wanted to take it beyond a protest at the main entrance. And their target for that first building occupation, somewhat curiously, was the Graduate Student Commons building, which at the time was a fairly new facility that had been built as part of the bookstore renovation project, paid for by graduate students. (sighs) The protestors ended up occupying the Grad Student Commons building for a portion of a week, rendering that building inaccessible to their fellow students, including the graduate students who had paid for it. It struck me as quite an odd site for a building occupation because it

was directly impacting fellow students who had in effect taxed themselves to create the space.

That was the first of a string of such protests. That particular one ended quietly after just a few days. At the time, these building occupations were just coming of age as a form of protest — or at least that's the way it seemed to me. I remember that first one receiving quite a bit of media attention. And in the end, at least with that one, I did less speaking about the challenges of this particular protest than did the head of the Graduate Student Association. I reached out to the association's president, an extremely capable woman named Chelsey Juarez, asking her if she would be willing to talk about how that particular building occupation was impacting students. She was very willing to do it. I remember that Chelsey was a graduate student of Allison Galloway's in anthropology, and she did a terrific job — considerably better than I could have done. And the protest ended, I think within a few days.

But it was followed that fall by a number of others. In October, there was a student occupation of the Humanities Building. In November, the students held what they called a "study-in" at the Science and Engineering Library, which lasted nearly twenty-four hours. I remember that one started on a Friday night.

And then in November, the one in that series of protests that people probably most vividly remember, occurred on a Thursday afternoon, when Kerr Hall was occupied by students and others for a protest that didn't end until the following Sunday. There are always side issues that come up in these protests — the growth of the university; class size — but what was driving this particular one

was the cost of education, and quite understandably, the impact that was having on students and the impact that was having on access. Whatever one thinks about how the protests against tuition hikes played out, I think people could understand why people were concerned about the increases and concerned about what was becoming of a system of public higher education that was designed to be very affordable and very accessible.

Reti: Yes. And why do you think the students chose building occupation as a means of protest? I know there was a history, even during the anti-apartheid movement, of occupying the Central Services building. Building occupations happened in the 1960s on campuses across the country.

Burns: In other words, what was the difference between building occupations and protests that had happened at UCSC for decades in which people would sit in a particular building? I'm not sure if there was a difference, other than how the protestors themselves marketed those particular protests. It did seem as if people were intent on staying inside and in effect shutting down the building for a longer time, and I think the tenor had changed because the protestors — rightly or wrongly — were more forcefully claiming these places as their own, as something the people, not the university, owned.

The Kerr protest was very challenging for a lot of reasons, including the fact that we had to bring in the police to end it. If memory serves me correctly, once the police showed up there were some relatively mild skirmishes that took place out on the patio area that's near the second-floor entrance to Kerr Hall. The area was very overcrowded with people that Sunday morning, so I suppose that kind of

tension would have been difficult to avoid. By that Sunday, it would be fair to say that patience was wearing a little thin with administrators. There was a sense within the administration that it would be important to have the building open for business again early in the following week. When the police showed up, they told the protestors they were about to be arrested — and the seventy people who were in the building at the time voluntarily left. It ended pretty darn quickly.

There were many aspects of that particular protest that make me cringe when I think back on it. One was the fear that the staff who were working in Kerr that Thursday felt at the beginning of the protest, when people showed up in masks because they didn't want to be identified. It was pretty terrorizing for the people there, and they were sent scurrying before the building was locked down by the protestors. And sometime between then and the following Sunday, roughly at noon when it ended, a lot of senseless destruction occurred within the building. Most of it occurred in the conference room that was a meeting hub for the Chancellor's Office. That room was the audiovisual hub for the building, and the system's wires were just ripped out of the walls. The destruction of university property seemed unnecessary at best, especially for a protest that really was about how much it was costing for students to go to school there and about the university's budget priorities. As I recall, the campus had to turn around and spend about \$34,000 on cleanup and repair costs related to that particular protest.

Reti: Yes, and that's at the height of the budget crisis.

Burns: Yes. So I'm not sure that the intimidation and destruction that defined

that particular protest helped the protestors' cause — I think we talked about this earlier, how the character of protest changed in the thirty years I was at UCSC —

Reti: Yes.

Burns: — from being pretty focused on a particular topic, like Regents divesting from South African holdings, to basically being very unfocused at times. It almost seemed as if anything that an individual protestor wanted on the group's list of "demands" could be added. The campus could be given a list that included items that you would expect to be there. But the list would also include a lot of other demands that seemed completely unrelated to that particular protest. With the Kerr occupation, there was a very long list of demands, including rolling back tuition to levels that had occurred ten or fifteen years earlier, something that obviously the campus administration, even if it wanted to do, couldn't do.

That particular protest did receive lots of coverage. I remember being in touch with the *New York Times* and other national media that particular Sunday — so the Kerr Hall occupation did receive extensive coverage. But, as we discussed earlier, the coverage was pretty diluted by other issues — in this case, the destruction of the building. In my mind, that was unfortunate, as the negative impact that increasing fees was having on the quality of and access to public higher education was a very legitimate issue to protest.

The Budget Crisis and Shakespeare Santa Cruz

Reti: Okay, thank you. So let's move to talking about the situation with Shakespeare Santa Cruz.

Burns: What a difficult issue. Shakespeare Santa Cruz, as you know, Irene, was an absolutely beloved institution — and had been almost since the day it was co-launched way back in the mid-1980s by Audrey Stanley on the academic side, and Karen Sinsheimer, the chancellor's spouse, on the administrative and support side. The obvious challenge with Shakespeare Santa Cruz, which we successfully or unsuccessfully tried to communicate, was the company's ongoing and increasing budget deficit. If memory serves me correctly and it may not, the cumulative deficit that Shakespeare Santa Cruz owed the campus was something close to \$2 million. The company was supposed to be bringing the annual budget deficit down, and as I recall, that wasn't happening.

You could understandably conclude, and I think a lot of people did, that the program had such value for the campus, and was so beloved, and had such community relations value that the campus should have just footed the bill. But it was an organization that was supposed to be self supporting — and wasn't always during its UCSC years.

In the end, Chancellor Blumenthal and EVC Galloway concluded that something had to be done. And the arts dean, David Yager, was certainly of that mindset. There were costs that were coming right out of his division, impacting UCSC programs and UCSC students. So, campus leaders made the very difficult decision that they were not going to support this anymore, which in effect ended our sponsorship of Shakespeare Santa Cruz. I was heartened to learn several months later that the campus had been able to reach an agreement with the new organization, Santa Cruz Shakespeare, to continue to use the Glen. And then I

was sad to read [more recently] that that wasn't going to be more than a Band-Aid fix, and that in the end the organization was going to move its productions off campus.

Anyway, it was an especially thorny issue to communicate. When challenges like that occurred, I would usually try to get people to agree on a foundational press release that would, as transparently as possible, explain the issue — or at least our side of the issue. It was always a useful exercise, whether or not we actually sent out the press release to anyone. Doing a draft release helped people clarify the issue and what they were going to say, and the process regularly prompted a lot of fact checking. At least that way, we could be confident that what we were going to be saying was at least accurate.

If your work includes communicating challenging campus issues, you have to accept the fact that there are going to be people who — perhaps correctly — disagree with decisions that campus leadership makes. I just tried very hard to be straightforward and helpful during my interactions with reporters, regardless of the story's trajectory. And fortunately the chancellors I had the great honor to work for supported that approach.

Anyway, in the days and weeks leading up to the Shakespeare Santa Cruz announcement, I had many phone conversations with the Office of Planning and Budget about the organization's precise budget predicament with the campus. So

we put together a press release and everyone agreed on what the facts were as best we could.⁴¹ In that case, and in most cases, I thought it best to just call a reporter, or call multiple reporters, and say, “Here is what is happening. I’d like to give you some background information and make someone available to talk to you about it.”

While Shakespeare Santa Cruz was nationally known as a summer Shakespeare festival for the quality of its productions, I believed that this story was going to be more about the impact locally. Yes, we got a critical article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and probably some negative coverage elsewhere out of the local area. But this campus decision, it seemed, was going to be a real blow to the community.

So I called Wallace Baine at the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* because it seemed like he was the person who would be the most appropriate person to write about the campus’s changing relationship with the company. I gave him the opportunity to write about it first, and set up a time for him to talk to and interview David Yager for the story. Wallace did a very fair job with the story. Understandably, his coverage was tilted in the direction of what a blow this was going to be for the community. But it was a decision that, to at least some degree, absolutely was going to be poorly received in the community.

Reti: Right. How could it not be?

⁴¹ See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2013/08/shakespeare-release.html>.

Burns: Exactly. For me, part of the job was just reminding people in the administration that sometimes the news we were announcing is bad — and it's going to be received that way. In this particular case, I don't think I had to let anyone know that the Shakespeare Santa Cruz story wasn't going to be positive.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: I mean, George and Alison and David absolutely understood that.

Reti: Expect a storm, yeah.

Burns: With this one, especially. They knew that changing the campus's relationship with Shakespeare Santa Cruz was going to be very unpopular, especially if it threatened the summer performances. But they felt like it was the financially responsible thing to do, in part because it would protect our students from additional program cuts elsewhere.

I don't really recall having to do this with George or Alison because of their considerable experience. But, as I said, there were times, when we were helping other people communicate about a difficult subject, that it just seemed important to remind them that the reaction to their issue could very well be negative. But I'd quickly add that we should do the best job we could explaining our position. And then whatever happens, happens."

Reti: And would you write the press release? Or would you write it together with them?

Burns: I would meet with them and then I would prepare a draft for their

review. In the case of Shakespeare Santa Cruz, I wrote the first few drafts and then handed it off to Scott Rappaport in our office, whose responsibility was to promote the arts, humanities, and library activities of the campus. That particular release was reviewed by a number of people: David Yager and his budget people; Planning and Budget staff; George and Allison obviously wanted to look at it. And George and Allison, very smartly, believed that this was something that we also had to simultaneously share with the campus community.

As the job evolved over the years for me, it did become much more obvious that when a significantly negative story was about to break we could not just focus on communicating with outside reporters. If it was going to be a major UCSC story, if possible we owed the campus community a heads-up about it in advance. Campus leadership, very understandably, didn't want our own UCSC people reading something quite negative about the campus in the *Sentinel*, or *San Francisco Chronicle*, or the *LA Times* before we had sent them any information about it. So, if the issues were particularly challenging, we would typically communicate with the campus community about the same time we were communicating with reporters. The campus communication usually took the form of just a straightforward email message from either the chancellor or EVC, or maybe from a vice chancellor whose position was related to the subject that was going to be part of the news coverage.

Cuts to Academic Programs

Reti: I also wondered if you were involved in managing the publicity around the cuts in various majors like community studies, about which there was quite a bit

of controversy about as well.

Burns: Managing might be a bit of an overstatement. But was I involved in helping communicate about those budget cuts? Yes, I was. There were many program cuts at various times during my years at UCSC, and the two that come to mind most readily for me were the cuts to community studies and to American studies. Those were especially difficult cuts to programs that were very popular with students and alumni.

Reti: Yes.

Burns: My recollection of those particular cuts, which may be flawed by fading memories, was that the backdrop for each was the campus's periodic need to cut its budget in response to reductions in state support. But it wasn't quite that simple. I believe in each of those cases, the faculty in those departments were not all on the same page about the future direction of the program, and that led to some challenges.

In the case of community studies, it had a somewhat unique structure because the person who really made the program all that it was for years, decades really, was Mike Rotkin. Mike had put the program on the map, but as I recall, there was a declining number of faculty in the actual department, due to budget cuts and the allegiance to the field study program by the faculty who remained seemed to be in decline. It would obviously be interesting and more reliable —

and therefore more informative — to get Mike's take on this.

Reti: Well, we have done oral histories with both Mike and with Bill Friedland.²

Burns: Well, there you go.

Reti: There are multiple perspectives that can be visited.

Burns: It was a very difficult time for Dean Kamieniecki and others in social sciences. Like other divisions on campus, Social Sciences had very difficult funding choices to make and many of their programs were very, very popular with students.

Did the division make the right call with community studies? I am not in the best position to say; but it was obviously pretty heartbreaking for a lot of people who'd seen that program and had admired the uniqueness of the program, to see it cut that way. And I think people were heartened, when through Oakes College, community studies was restored. I suspect the current program is different than the original program was in its heyday, but hopefully it was revived in a way that is meaningful to students and financially sustainable.

In American studies, my recollection is that it was less about the need to cut budgets and more related to the fact that there was a fair amount of

² For more perspectives on the history of Community Studies at UCSC see Sarah Rabkin, Interviewer and Editor, *Community Studies and Research for Social Change: An Oral History with William Friedland* (Regional History Project, 2013) at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/friedland> and Sarah Rabkin, Interviewer and Editor, *Mike Rotkin on the Rise and Fall of Community Studies at UCSC* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/rotkin>.

disagreement among the faculty about what that program should be like. Again, I would defer to someone whom you interviewed from that department.⁴³

Obviously, if the caliber of alumni from that program is an indication, American Studies had at one time been an amazing program at UCSC. But, in recent years, I think there was a fair amount of disagreement among the faculty about what that program should be like. And support had waned in the Academic Senate for the program. I think that particular cut probably, to some extent, got mischaracterized as another program that the campus was lopping off for budgetary reasons. Rightly or wrongly, I don't recall it that way.

Marketing UCSC

Reti: Thanks. Well, that brings us to some more general kinds of questions. You have talked quite a bit about the importance of transparency and telling the truth, which I really appreciate. This is a hard question, but there is a perception that (and this is not at all surprising; this is the world we live in), all universities have to market themselves at this point, whether they are public or private.

Burns: Yes.

Reti: We live in that world. And the campus is also depending more and more on private funding and also we all have to compete with each other to try to

⁴³ For a detailed perspective on the evolution and demise of American Studies at UCSC see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *It Became My Case Study: Professor Michael Cowan's Four Decades at UC Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2013). <https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/it-became-my-case-study-professor-michael-cowans-four-decades-at-uc-santa-cruz>.

attract students. So all of that is there. So how do you balance the value of transparency and truth, with marketing? Or can marketing encompass the truth?

Burns: Well, permit me to just riff for a moment about this.

First of all, thank you for suggesting that I was honest. I certainly tried to be. I believe the reporters I supported, and the senior administrators for whom I worked would say that I was honest and straightforward. But I don't think I should get a lot of credit for that. I think it's a reasonable thing to expect that someone whose job it is to communicate about an institution of higher learning should be honest. Even during the most difficult of times.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: (laughs) It wasn't particularly difficult for me to try to hold myself to that standard. I think that I have already said this, but I have to add that I was very fortunate to work for, and try to support a number of chancellors and other senior administrators who never suggested I should do anything but that. I appreciate that more than I can say. As you can imagine, the conversations about communication, especially during many of the challenging times, could be quite spirited: how we were going to communicate about a particularly thorny issue; what our options were; how it might play out. But that's the way it should be.

Let me give you a little background and context first that might help with this answer. When I started working at UC Santa Cruz, our office was called the Public Information Office. The name was reflective of an era when there was tremendous state support for the UC system, for the CSU system, and for the

community college system in California. And having the campus function as transparently as possible just seemed in keeping with that kind of taxpayer support.

I loved the simplicity of the office's original name: the Public Information Office. In fact, as I've said, when I began working at UCSC in 1984, our office functioned more like a university news office. We just wrote press releases, put them in envelopes, and mailed them to reporters. It would be fair to say that we spent little time using such terms as *marketing* or *issues management*. But over time that obviously changed.

Reti: Do you have any sense of about when it started to shift?

Burns: Oh, if I just had to guess I would say probably that I started noticing the shift to marketing somewhere around ten years into my thirty years at UCSC.

Reti: So in the mid-nineties.

Burns: Yes. People wanted us to do a better job of telling the campus's story because doing so would help the campus recruit better students, would help the campus secure additional federal support in the form of public grants, and obviously would help the campus increase the dollars it was raising in the form of private gift support. So there were a lot of reasons for us to reimagine and redesign our communications operation.

Initially, there was some tension within the office about the fact that the operation was transitioning away from just being an old-fashioned university news office. And, truth be told, in the old days the word *marketing* carried some

negative baggage. It may have made people think that we were going to be promoting UCSC in a way that was less straightforward and less honest. Reporters certainly believed that when the campus first began hiring people with a marketing orientation to oversee campus communications, including media relations.

But I thought it was a false choice, and I had a terrific colleague in our office who helped me understand why. Lisa Nielsen joined our communications office roughly five years ago as the new head of marketing for UCSC. She reinforced the notion that any marketing we did about UCSC — if it was to be successful — had to be based on reality: what the campus was authentically about, what its values were, and what it had actually accomplished. Lisa's perspective really resonated with me because I'd been trying to apply the same approach to web communications for years.

Maybe this illustrates the point: A lot of times people think of marketing as a clever tagline or something that you can build a brand around. In the world of computing, for example, Apple has done a terrific job of marketing itself. I think for years their tagline was: "Think different." (I always want to say "think differently," but I think their tagline was actually "Think different.") But, the real point is that consumers understood that Apple's advertising was indeed accurate. Their products really *were* different. They were trying to think outside the box in terms of how they imagined and designed products. Obviously, the company has been wildly successful because their products have been great. But their marketing also helped because it reinforced what was authentically true

about the company.

At UC Santa Cruz, there has been a recent push to have the campus use “The Original Authority on Questioning Authority” tagline or theme. As with most things in communications, there were people on campus who liked that approach and others who really didn’t. Personally, I think it certainly spoke to an essence of the campus that is true, and I think that is the reason that George [Blumenthal] and Alison [Galloway] selected it as the theme they wanted associated with the recent fundraising campaign.

Reti: My sense from doing some oral histories with faculty who’ve had some criticism of that tagline, and I think this was just an unfortunate accident of history, the perception is that the campus began to market itself as the original authority on questioning authority exactly during the same period that they were cutting programs like community studies. So there was an unfortunate coincidence of events — this is the perception I’m getting — is that people feel like: You’re marketing what’s disappearing. One hand is marketing and the other hand is cutting. That’s the perception that’s out there. It’s a painful and heartbreaking time for those faculty and staff who have been around a long time and are seeing the campus become more like other university campuses (this is the perception I’m hearing, again) and so using a tagline like that is a stab in the heart because it’s disappearing as we market it.

Burns: You can look at this a couple of ways. Is it a reasonable way to express who we are? Maybe the tagline’s critics were saying it’s a reasonable way to express who we *were* and not who we are now. I understand where they are

coming from, but I'm not sure I agree with them. I think that UC Santa Cruz, while it's significantly larger and therefore inherently less personal than it used to be, is still a place where imagining the possible is valued a lot. It was a campus where the word — geez, I hate this word — “interdisciplinary” was almost invented. Or, for goodness sake, an even worse version — “interdisciplinarity.”

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: Seriously, what that meant for people at UC Santa Cruz was an understanding that very transformative knowledge was often found at the edge or intersection of disciplines. In fact, some of the most interesting work that has come out of UCSC has involved multiple disciplines approaching the same problems from different perspectives. I do think that this was something that was done to a greater extent at UC Santa Cruz. And still is. I think some of that has to do with our heritage, that we were created to be a different place. And some of that probably has to do with our scale, that as a major research university we're still relatively small.

Reti: True.

Burns: And maybe some of that has to do with the fact that things are done a little less formally here than other places. Some of that probably has to do with our age, that our departments have not existed for 100 years and perhaps are more flexible in how they can or do evolve. It's true that we are not the same place we were twenty-five years ago, when the place was smaller and budgets were more plentiful. But I still think that there's a uniqueness about this place

even at our current scale, and even with our current budget challenges, and even with our current class size, that makes us just a little bit different — and different in a very positive way. I guess that's a wordy way of saying that I think that the "Original Authority on Questioning Authority" theme or tagline is still true.

But to be fair to critics of that theme, I think it's reasonable to say that we could have rolled out that theme a bit more effectively. The decision to develop a more robust marketing effort as a way of launching the Comprehensive Campaign was something that came to University Relations fairly quickly. It made an abundance of sense to refocus campus marketing efforts in a way that supported the campaign, but the timeframe for working on the marketing elements for a number of reasons became squeezed. And with deadlines rapidly approaching, I think our division — and campus leadership — was unable to do as good a job as possible of getting buy-in from other areas on campus about those marketing elements.

I was often confronted by the same deadline challenges during different roll-outs of a new campuswide web presence, and I know that it is impossible to get complete consensus on a campus like ours about marketing strategies. But, ideally, we would have been able to get more buy-in — or at least communicate more broadly — about what we were doing in the area of marketing to prepare for the campaign. Doing that spadework, I think, is an important element to any successful marketing campaign on a campus as diverse as UCSC.

So, in fairness to the people who might be critical of that, they probably weren't consulted. And their opinions weren't considered before the tagline was

launched. Had they been consulted, maybe the theme would have been exactly as it was. And I think it would have been reasonable to have it be exactly as it was.

But I do think that the process for developing and implementing the theme wasn't as good as it could have been, just because it was done in a very condensed period of time. So any criticisms of the work that exist are understandable, at least from that perspective.

It would also be fair to say that, since this was the campus's first Comprehensive Campaign, building a more reasonable schedule will be one of many lessons learned. I'm a year removed from it, but I sense that there's probably more integration than ever already occurring in our marketing efforts, and I give Lisa a ton of credit for that.

So, again, I don't think it's a bad marketing theme for the campus. It wasn't necessarily my first choice, but I think somebody could successfully make a case for it because it speaks to a lot that is still very true about UC Santa Cruz. But, we didn't do a good enough job of describing it to the campus during the planning phase. And that's an important step that we could have done a bit better. It would be an important step anywhere. At Santa Cruz, where it can be even a bit more challenging to get consensus, it's probably an absolutely critical step.
(laughs)

Reti: I think the positive side of the campus culture here is that you have a very engaged community of faculty and staff and students who care about this

campus. The challenge in that, perhaps — and I don't know if you dealt with this in your position; I would imagine you did — is that there's this — sometimes we in Regional History call it the narrative of decline. For example, you can see reflected in some of our early oral histories that just a few years after the campus was founded there was already group of faculty and students who felt that the campus had moved away from the vision of what it was meant to be. Different people will pinpoint that moment of decline in different decades, depending on when they came here and what their ideals were. But that is part of the culture. It's something that I have encountered in doing a number of oral histories for the 50th anniversary; different narrators have expressed that to greater or lesser degrees.

Burns: Well, on some levels I'm sure that that's true. I want to say, Irene, I don't consider myself an expert on the rise or fall of the campus, but — like everything else in an oral history, I guess I'll give you my opinion about the subject (laughs).

If one of the measurements for determining quality is the intimacy of the educational experience, it probably would be pretty difficult to argue that the quality hasn't in fact declined.

Reti: Right, since that pioneer class of 1965.

Burns: Yes, I'm sure that a class of 652 students is going to have a very intimate educational experience.

Reti: To get that value for the price of a public education, to have that kind of low student-faculty ratio, is unheard of these days.

Burns: Again, someone with more knowledge of this subject than me would have to weigh in; perhaps Robert Sinsheimer, as the chancellor when UCSC moved away from being a college-first campus, did in his oral history with you.⁴

But if one of the measurements for determining quality is the breadth of the academic offerings, it would be pretty difficult to argue that the quality hasn't, in fact, increased manifold since the early years. And given that UCSC has needed to grow in order to accommodate many new waves of students and has wanted to grow in order to develop a more mature curriculum, I think the campus has done a pretty good job of staying true to its essence.

There is still a lot that is very unique about this place — and in that vein, I think the Question Authority thing works well. Especially, because people here are not at all inclined to accept the prevailing notion about anything.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: That's a terrific spirit that's still very much alive here. I think it has to do, probably, with the fact that we were born to be a little bit different. We're located in the community of Santa Cruz, which is a little bit different. We have this absolutely amazing setting for a place, which I think fosters lots of creativity. And we're still pretty darn young, just now turning fifty. And yet we're doing

⁴ See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Robert L. Sinsheimer: The University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987*. (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996). See: <https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/sinsheimer>.

amazing things. Are we the same as we were in the early years of the campus? Absolutely not. And I don't think we'd want to be.

May I add one more thing to our conversation about campus marketing and the marketing theme?

Reti: Of course.

Burns: Well, as I referenced in the Apple example, I think the thing we could do in marketing the campus would be to just *tell* people who or what we are. The best kind of marketing is when we *show* people who or what we are. So you can develop any tagline you want, or any marketing theme you want. If it isn't supported by content, by something real, it's not going to be successful.

I'm probably biased, but I thought that was a real strength of our office and our operation. Whether we were called and functioned as the Public Information Office, or whether we were called and functioned as the Communications and Marketing Office, my colleagues and I always tried to authentically promote the campus. If we represented the campus in some way, or if we marketed the campus for some value it possessed, we tried to provide the evidence for that. And, we were always looking at ways to do a better job telling the campus's story.

As I said, initially we were typing and mailing press releases; then we were leveraging email to better reach reporters and other constituents; we created newsletters, newspapers, and magazines; we helped the campus create a web site; and when social media came along, that gave us all kinds of opportunities to

leverage our content. But the consistent element in all of that work was that it was about storytelling. It was still about a foundational press release, or about a web story that had been produced by one of the writers in our office, just as it might have been decades earlier. Obviously, marketing campaigns, email communications, the web, and social media have greatly expanded our ability to promote this great campus. But, in some respects, the core work hasn't changed: people in the communications office hear about something newsworthy, they interview the principals involved, they work hard to write the best and most engaging story about the activity or event, and then share or market the heck out of it.

Reti: Right. It's getting the story out there.

Burns: Yes.

Developing UCSC's Web Content Management System

Reti: Okay. Didn't your office coordinate another web redesign in recent years? How did that tie into getting the story out there?

Burns: As you know, the web is a terrific storytelling medium. And with a web presence that was pretty fractured, it had become difficult to leverage that medium for telling the campus story in an integrated way. It was a tremendous challenge to try to figure out how to do better. I certainly wasn't doing that alone; it was a partnership with many other people around campus — including my communications colleagues, Rob Knight, Trung Tran, Lisa; key people in ITS like David Turner and Leslie Geary; staff in the library like Bryn Kanar. Our goal

was the same as it's always been with the web: to provide a better structure for people who visit the campus online to actually find what they're looking for, provide a better way to market the best of UCSC, and in the process create something that allows us to do a better job of telling the campus's story.

Chancellor Blumenthal deserves a lot of credit for initiating the project, as he challenged our division, University Relations, and the ITS division to develop a more integrated and effective web presence for the campus.⁴⁵ George and many others had observed that UCSC had a very fragmented online presence, and the web shortcomings had also been discussed by the Academic Senate. There was little or no consistency in terms of "look-and-feel," information architecture, and content. In a way, it was pretty much the same issue that we spoke about earlier with desktop publishing. Because there were applications that could help you with this, seemingly everyone on campus had become a web designer. It was done very inefficiently. Information wasn't presented to visitors in a uniform way, using an information architecture that in essence said to visitors, "Here's where you're going to find this kind of information on UCSC's web site. Here's a top navigation structure that's reasonably consistent. Here's a left navigation structure that's reasonably consistent. Here's a look and feel that's reasonably consistent." Prior to this project, when you bounced around the UCSC web site it was sometimes difficult to know that you were still even on the UCSC web site.

⁴⁵ See: http://webprogram.ucsc.edu/about/images/web_program_charge_signed.pdf.

From a marketing point of view, if you define marketing as presenting information in an effective and helpful way to visitors, I think we weren't doing the job well enough.

ITS, to its credit, initiated a sub-project that ended up recommending to campus leadership that we purchase an enterprise-level content management system — something that had the capacity and bandwidth to be able to host sites from every corner of the campus. It was of that scale.

Reti: “Enterprise level”? What does that mean?

Burns: Sorry. It means large. (laughs)

Reti: Okay. (laughs) Jargon that I'm not familiar with.

Burns: In other words, it was a system that was built for a large organization. UC Davis had started using the system that ITS recommended UC Santa Cruz purchase. ITS — with David, Leslie, and others involved — did a great job getting this phase of the project going.

While we then had the system, we still had to figure out how to create a suite of templates that people could use and that we could embed in the system. And so we ended up hiring a firm, Rolling Orange, that helped us tremendously with the design issues and the information architecture issues. They interviewed lots of people to figure out what their web needs were, on and off campus. That's what led to the current look and feel of the UCSC web site. What we call the Web Content Management System — WCMS — allowed us to lock those templates in. So the system itself really prevented people from creating their own designs.

While I was in a position that led the University Relations effort, I certainly had a terrific partner in Rob Knight, who I had recently hired as a web developer. Rob's work was absolutely critical to implementing the Rolling Orange templates and addressing a ton of other issues on the design and information architecture front. And the people in ITS deserve a lot of credit for the success of the project.

I think the implementation of that project was very successful on campus, and I guess I'll take some small amount of credit for that. But, quite honestly, there was another phenomenon at work that may have given the project a bigger boost than I or anyone else was capable of doing. Around the time we were asking for division and department partners, there had just been massive budget cuts across campus — to departments, to divisions, to offices, and to activities. Some of the same people who had once had been fascinated by the thought of creating their own web sites and creating them in their own unique way, increasingly just didn't have the staffing capacity to do that anymore. So, the fact that the campus could give them a system and a look-and-feel that had enough acceptance around campus was a good thing. It was a big help for people who didn't know how to write code, for people who maybe were doing this as just part of a job — and with staffing cuts, that increasingly is what was happening. People were doing web work as a sliver of some other full-time job. The WCMS project came along and allowed people to maintain their web sites and provide useful information in a format that would allow visitors to find it; the project allowed people to keep their information reasonably current; and in the process, it allowed people to more successfully market their particular area of the campus.

Overall, it was a very successful project. I gather from talking to my former colleagues in University Relations that the UCSC web presence may be about due for a refresh. Web sites — you can't put one up and have it last for ten years.

Reti: I guess it gets stale after a while.

Burns: Yes, so they'll have to be a whole new process that I should probably say I'm thankful not to be part of.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: In all seriousness, I was very honored to be part of the last major web project, the one that really allowed us to do web content at a campuswide level for the first time. Doing it that way is not only more effective, it's more efficient. For example, if we have a particular story that we're writing in our office that is calling attention to some remarkable achievement in the social sciences, we can just tag the story and it can appear dynamically on that division's and that department's web site. There are a lot of reasons why it made great sense for the campus to develop its web presence this way. And one reason is that when it's time for a redesign, it will be much easier to do that with a lot of divisions, departments, and offices already part of a common system.

Reti: Yes.

Town-Gown Relations

Something we haven't talked about, although we touched on this issue when we were talking about Shakespeare Santa Cruz, is the connection between the

university and the city. In preparing for this oral history, you called it the “reputational connection to the city of Santa Cruz.” Shall we talk about that?

Burns: Sure. Maybe we should back up a little bit and recall that the City of Santa Cruz and the County of Santa Cruz lobbied the Regents very forcefully to get a UC campus here. But the love affair, at least from some in the community, probably faded pretty quickly. I’m sure that the fact that UC Santa Cruz was launched in the mid-1960s, when college campuses everywhere seemed to be leading a lot of social change, may have made the campus a bit less beloved to some in the community. And it also probably didn’t take local residents very long to become understandably concerned about campus growth.

Anyway, by the time I started working at UCSC in the mid-1980s, the politics of the community was such that it seemed as if anything related to growth on campus was challenged by the Santa Cruz City Council. I realized just how acrimonious the town-gown relationship had become when we were legally challenged for building a parking structure. And this was at the time when the city was itself building multiple parking structures downtown. I’m only guessing, but I suspect the sense in the city was that our parking structure was going to be another development that ultimately would be growth-inducing.

The fact that the campus and the city were at odds so often wasn’t helpful for our reputation, as it seemed as if there was a seemingly endless number of local, regional, and even national stories about the campus that focused on the fact that the city was suing us. That story arc, based on conflict, made it a bit more difficult than it might have been to get reporters to actually cover the academic

and research strengths at UCSC.

In looking back at it, I think the fact is that the City of Santa Cruz, itself, had a reputation for being a countercultural haven — and deservedly so — also impacted the campus's reputation. The city's own quirkiness somehow seemed to reinforce the notion that UC Santa Cruz was something less than academically rigorous. Certainly, the campus was responsible for many of its image issues. But our relationship with and to the City of Santa Cruz only seemed to add to those communication challenges.

Thankfully, the campus has emerged from that era. People, much more universally, now understand that there's a lot happening on campus in terms of engaging academics and impactful research. There's still a very robust social sciences program. But we are also now better known as top-notch in many of the physical and biological sciences. We now have an engineering school; in fact, we've had one since the mid-1990s. There's still a highly regarded humanities program with lots of amazing fields of study. And the arts division has become a cutting-edge combination of traditional and newer-age disciplines.

And at the same time, I think it would be fair to say that our relationship with the city is much improved. Chancellor Blumenthal and former Santa Cruz mayor Ryan Coonerty deserve a tremendous amount of credit for that. When there were lawsuits aplenty over the campus's most recent Long-Range Development Plan, a small group of people representing the university and the city really went to work, saying that this degree of acrimony wasn't working for anyone. The campus was continuing to grow and the city and others were continuing to

mount expensive lawsuits. So, led by George and Ryan, I think there was a real effort to hold the campus accountable for the impacts of its growth in the settlement agreement that was reached in 2008.⁴⁶ And, in the process, there seemed to be a renewed appreciation within the city of the value of having a University of California within its midst.

In a way, the improvement reminded me of how the relationship between the city and campus changed after the Loma Prieta Earthquake did so much damage to the city in 1989. Prior to that, the town-gown relationship between the city and campus had been very strained. But with the downtown in tatters and local businesses barely hanging on in the months and years that followed, it seemed as if people in the city realized just how beneficial it was to have a stable economic force like the campus in the area. At the time, the spending by 10,000 students and the campus itself was a tremendous boost for the many small businesses that were just trying to survive.

Anyway, the town-gown relationship since those LRDP discussions in 2008 has changed immeasurably. It's become so much more positive, and I think our current chancellor [George Blumenthal] deserves a lot of credit for that.

Reti: Yes. It's certainly an ongoing theme.

Burns: Yes. And, and I think I already said this; thankfully, I won't be employed

⁴⁶ See: <http://news.ucsc.edu/2008/08/2366.html>.

by UC Santa Cruz at the time the campus publishes its next Long-Range Development Plan.

Reti: (laughs) The next LRDP. Right. And then related to our semi-rural location, we're also away from a major media market. How did that affect your job?

Burns: Well, it would be fair to say it made it more challenging to promote the campus. The San Francisco Bay Area media was and is important to us, and I do think that the location of UC Santa Cruz "over the hill" from Bay Area sometimes provided just enough of an impediment to make it so that the campus was a little bit invisible to Bay Area reporters. So, yes, I think that our location in Santa Cruz made it more challenging to promote the positive aspects of UC Santa Cruz — the great work that our students were doing and our very important research achievements. I would occasionally lament the fact that driving over the hill wasn't too much of an impediment when Bay Area reporters were interested in coming to campus to cover a building occupation, a tree-sit, or some other large-scale protest. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: But, seriously, our relatively remote location at times was an impediment in promoting the campus to the greater Northern California region, but our group did work very hard — sometimes successfully and sometimes not — to overcome that challenge.

Final Reflections

Reti: What were the biggest challenges of your position? We've talked about

quite a few of them.

Burns: I am quite certain that this would be the case with a great many campus employees, but I guess I would just say the sheer volume of work. But, really, I tried not to focus too much on that or other challenges — and maybe that was a strategy unto itself. I was blessed to be able to represent a campus as fantastic and stimulating as this place. We're near the end, and I'm repeating myself, but I can truthfully say that I never had a dull day in thirty years. In retrospect, I probably could have used a few of them. (laughs) But there was always just so much work to be done. For better or worse, I'm the kind of person who keeps a long to-do list, so I just tried to keep focused on the next thing on my list.

To honor your question, though, I'd be misleading you if I didn't acknowledge that there were stress points during some of the real difficult challenges that the campus had during my time here, especially during the last ten or so years of my time here. And getting everyone to agree on a strategy for communicating about those issues — that could at times be stressful. But, really, it just comes with the territory.

Reti: How do you manage that stress? Let's say somebody was considering taking a job like this. Do you have any advice for them in terms of how to manage that stress?

Burns: It's probably like a lot of other jobs. You have to just roll up your sleeves, work as hard as you possibly can, try your best to be a good colleague, be straightforward, and be optimistic.

In my case, I had the good fortune to work for chancellors and others above me who trusted me, even when there were times when I wasn't at all certain how to advise them. Did I earn their trust? I'd guess I'd like to think I did. What were the elements of earning their trust? Again, probably working hard, presenting options for them, having some track record of success, and being honest. Those were probably the core competencies. I suppose in this line of work it also helps to be somewhat calm. Certainly there were moments where I was anything but, but I always at least aspired to be composed under pressure.

Reti: Okay, so that's a question I have. I know you started out literally working in fire prevention and firefighting, right? When you were a Forest Service hotshot.

Burns: Yes.

Reti: I was reading the story that appeared about you in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* when you retired.⁷ Chancellor Blumenthal was quoted as saying that you would be this calm voice, or something to that effect, in the middle of the night. Staying calm when you're the crisis guy — how do you do that?

Burns: It helped a great deal that I got to work for leaders as authentically good, honest, and fair-minded as George Blumenthal, Karl Pister, Alison Galloway, Dave Kliger, and many others in the No. 1 and No. 2 positions in my career. I felt

⁷ See <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/article/ZZ/20140627/NEWS/140628001>.

like I had very open and very honest and very productive relationships with almost everyone who occupied those positions during my tenure. Heck, I used to tell George and Alison that I was grateful that they just picked up the phone when I called. Because if I was calling, it often meant that something bad had happened.

I was given an opportunity to work with great people, both at the senior leadership level, within my office, and in offices throughout the campus. My colleagues in our office certainly didn't always agree with my approach. But I considered myself lucky to be surrounded by such very smart, capable people, even if we disagreed about an approach to a communication challenge. They usually had opinions about our options, but in the end, it's helpful to get that kind of input. With it, you're in a better position to choose an approach that seems like it has the highest probability of success.

Reti: Right. You've got to pick something.

Burns: Yes, I guess that's true. With respect to the composure that Chancellor Blumenthal mentioned, I certainly wasn't always so calm on the inside. For example, I don't remember feeling very calm the day that the tree-sit began. As you recall, there had been a point of real combustion when the protestors tried to get past a police line in order to get food and supplies to the people up in the trees. The protestors pushed; the police officers defended themselves and tried to protect the line they had established. Before I knew it that day, there were TV cameras swarming all over the site, prompting me to organize and give an unscheduled press briefing on the site. With six or seven TV cameras pointing at

me and a very tense protest occurring nearby, I probably didn't feel all that calm and collected. And by the way, in case it's not clear, the Bay Area media had been very willing to come over the hill to cover that story.

Reti: (laughs)

Burns: Why do I mention that? I guess it goes back to your question about navigating the challenges of my former position. One of the strategies, if that's the right word, that I employed in my career was to try to take something positive from every difficult experience. That particular day, I remember realizing that I needed to do a better job with internal communication during a major protest or other similarly challenging activity. There were things happening on campus that people were going to read about with big headlines the next day, and we — I should say I — did a pretty poor job advising about the need for internal communication that day.

So you just try to be avoid being defensive and learn something from every single event, activity, or incident. And if you're lucky enough to get to stay in a job like this for the number of years that I did, you *should* get a little better at it.

Reti: Is it unusual to stay at a job like this for thirty years?

Burns: Yes; I think it is very unusual. In fact, I suspect it's almost unheard of — at least in the UC system in communications. I don't know whether my longevity speaks highly of me or poorly of me. (laughs)

Seriously, I consider my career to be such a blessing, Irene. In fact, I feel fortunate to have had almost multiple careers at UCSC over that thirty-year period. I

started out really more in the publications realm, where I was producing periodicals. I got the chance with Jim MacKenzie to help create and launch a campus magazine, the *UCSC Review*.

And no one was doing the web site when I and others helped get the campus going in that medium. It helped me that I had an interest in technology and how technology could support communications.

Reti: Yes, that's fascinating.

Burns: So, with help from others, I almost did that early web work on the side because it wasn't really part of my job description. In that same vein, I remember sitting in my garage one Sunday afternoon trying to figure out how to launch the campus's first podcast site because Chancellor Denton, to her credit, was feeling like the campus should have one. She was right; it was going to be another way for us to tell the campus story — yet another communications channel. So there I was, trying to figure out how RSS feeds work so we could get a podcast site launched for Chancellor Denton. In all honesty, it didn't really feel like work; it was just something that I was interested in.

And then there was the so-called "issues" work. There were other colleagues along the way who had been assigned that kind of work; but they always ended up leaving the campus. So, for one reason or another, the communications work related to hot-button campus issues just kept coming back to me to handle. Eventually, it came back to me enough times that I had a lot of experience doing it.

Reti: Issues work meaning the crisis management?

Burns: Yes, I'm sorry. Crisis management work or, more to the point, communications related to crisis management. The work ranged from something that you knew was going to be a challenging issue for the campus and therefore could plan for it, to something that occurred completely without notice, to something that was an outright emergency. In the end, I guess campus leaders grew comfortable enough with how I handled these communication challenges to just let me do it.

Reti: When we first met to discuss this oral history, you mentioned a former UC PIO by the name of Ray Colvig. Tell me about your Ray Colvig moment.

Burns: Anyone who has been as fortunate as I was to work in a job as infinitely interesting as the one that I had, probably has experienced that kind of moment — an exchange or interaction that helped put them squarely on a career path, or maybe got them to think about or understand their job a little more clearly.

In my case, my moment was with Ray Colvig, the legendary PIO at UC Berkeley. It was in the late 1980s, I would guess, and I was filling in as our office's representative at the quarterly meeting of UC communicators. At the time, it was a meeting of directors of public information.

Ray was someone I'd had the pleasure of getting to know through those meetings. As the longtime PIO at Berkeley, Ray was the dean of PIOs in the UC system. He had created and nurtured a tremendous relationship with reporters everywhere — from the Bay Area to Los Angeles to the East Coast. Ray was

phoned by reporters at any odd hour at work or at home because he was helpful by nature and had an encyclopedic knowledge of his campus. He seemingly was an expert on every topic, or at least knew who at Berkeley was. Completely unflappable, he had been the PIO during the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. In short, he had the most amazing of careers.

Anyway, to close that particular UC-wide meeting in the late 1980s, we had planned a dinner to celebrate the fact that Ray was retiring after about thirty years at Berkeley. It was my great fortune that night to spend the entire evening sitting next to Ray in some East Bay restaurant that I can't recall. He was a gentleman. He was very smart. He was unbelievably accessible, before cell phones or the Internet. And he was just fun to be around and engaging as heck.

Anyway, to cut to the chase, our discussion during dinner that night left an absolutely indelible impression on me. As I said, Ray had tirelessly promoted research breakthroughs; he'd seen the Free Speech Movement unfold almost outside his Berkeley office. But the thing I most remember about him was the fact that he was genuinely eager and excited to go to work each day, really buoyed by the power that our campuses have to transform lives and to transform society. He believed that the work that was happening on our UC campuses — whether in the classroom, or the lab, or on the protest line — advanced our *thinking* about matters that were important to society as a whole.

During my years on my own UC campus, I often thought about that conversation, and more than occasionally drew inspiration from my dinner with Ray. He passed away maybe five or so years ago,⁸ but in my own going-away note to my UC communications colleagues I mentioned my “Ray” moment. My career doesn’t come close to comparing to his, but it was my way of saying to my UC colleagues that we are all blessed to get to do this kind of work for the University of California. Ray told me that night that it had been a real privilege to work at UC Berkeley. As I have reflected on my own career, I’m honored to say I feel exactly the same way about UC Santa Cruz.

Reti: Beautiful. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about, Jim?

Burns: Yeah, but we should probably turn the tape recorder off first. (laughs)

Reti: (laughs) Okay. Well, thank you so much for doing these interviews with me. It’s been so rich.

Burns: Well, to the extent that it sheds any light at all on campus history or offers even a slightly different perspective on some chapter of campus history, I’m so very happy to have helped. I was honored when you asked me to do this, Irene. And it’s been fantastic to get to spend all these hours with you.

⁸ See: <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Ray-Colvig-announced-UC-Berkeley-news-to-nation-3390479.php>.

Reti: Thank you.

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