

University of California, Santa Cruz

University Library

**"It Became My Case Study"**

**Professor Michael Cowan's Four Decades at UC Santa Cruz**

Interviewed and Edited by

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Santa Cruz

2013

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## **Introduction**

Michael Cowan arrived at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the fall of 1969 as an associate professor of community studies and literature and a fellow of Merrill College. By his retirement in 2004, Cowan had achieved a reputation as an outstanding campus leader who filled a variety of positions during his four decades at UCSC. These include two years as provost of Merrill College from 1978-1979; six years as dean of the Division of Humanities from 1983-1989; and multiple terms as chair of the departments of literature and American studies. Cowan is the only professor in UCSC's history to serve two (widely separated) terms as chair of the Santa Cruz Division of the Academic Senate, from 1979 to 1980 and again from 1994 to 1996. In 1997, he received the first Dean McHenry Award for Distinguished Leadership, given by the UCSC Academic Senate to acknowledge outstanding service.

Cowan was also the founding chair of the American studies department and a national leader in that field, serving as president of the American Studies Association from 1984 to 1986. In addition, Cowan served as vice chair and then chair of the (UC Systemwide) Academic Council and Assembly from 1999 to 2001. In 2006, Cowan received the Oliver Johnson Award, which biennially recognizes a member of the UC faculty who has performed outstanding service to the Academic Senate, an honor he shared with former UCSC Chancellor Karl Pister.

In this substantial oral history, Cowan brings this breadth of experience together with an intense personal and scholarly interest in the institutional culture of higher education and the singular, and sometimes experimental history of UC Santa Cruz. This intersection of experience and intellectual study infuses Cowan's oral history volume with deep insight and remarkable historical detail.

Michael Cowan was born in 1937 to a working-class family in Kansas City, Missouri. His father's family was of English and Scots-Irish background and was part of the great historic migration through the Cumberland Gap. His mother was of mixed Irish and Cherokee roots, although her family was no longer connected with their Native American heritage. Both of his parents were active in the Disciples of Christ Church. A scholarship from a food-processing magnate enabled Cowan to attend Yale University, where he found himself, in the fall of 1955, a working-class student amid mostly white and Anglo-Saxon, wealthy prep school boys. Personal experience with class, religious, racial, and regional differences in the United States would inform Cowan's future perspectives on diversity in higher education.

At Yale, Cowan enrolled in English courses, which taught him foundational skills in close reading which he later used in contexts as varied as teaching autobiography and analyzing UCSC planning reports as utopian documents. At the end of his sophomore year, he entered a relatively new undergraduate major in American studies and Yale's Honors Program. American studies offered the young Cowan an intellectual framework in which to

understand the somewhat alien culture of the East Coast. A Woodrow Wilson fellowship and a Danforth Fellowship enabled him to enter Yale's graduate program in American studies, during which he spent a year studying abroad in Cambridge, England, coming to understand the American political system and culture from the British vantage point.

Cowan accepted a temporary position as an instructor at Yale in 1963. He married and he and his then-wife, Anne, moved into an apartment above the library, where he wrote his dissertation entitled *Emerson and the City*. He also accepted a position as dean (equivalent to UC Santa Cruz's academic preceptor) at Branford College, one of Yale's residential colleges, an experience which he later drew on when he served as provost of UCSC's Merrill College.

Cowan began a national job search in 1968. His former colleague at Yale, Harry Berger, had recently begun teaching at the new UC Santa Cruz campus. Berger suggested that Cowan contact Professor Dennis McElrath, chair of sociology and an organizer of a new program in community studies. Cowan came to Santa Cruz and met with founding community studies professors William Friedland and Ralph Guzman. After a follow-up meeting with Founding Chancellor Dean McHenry, he was hired as a tenured associate professor and arrived in the fall of 1969.

Cowan was drawn to several aspects of the UC Santa Cruz vision, including the residential college system, the emphasis on undergraduate education, and an openness to interdisciplinary thought. The natural beauty of

the redwood-forested campus overlooking the Monterey Bay also appealed to him. "It just seemed like a wonderful fit," Cowan recalled.

Cowan's oral history is chronological, thematic, and sweeping—moving from the 1970s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, and visiting and revisiting topics which reoccur in campus history such as affirmative action, diversity, the ongoing struggle for an ethnic studies curriculum, and the dangers of fragmentation on a decentralized campus.

Oral history is a co-creation of the narrator and interviewer. Cowan immediately grasped the collaborative nature of this endeavor and was one of the most articulate, energetic, and organized narrators whom I have interviewed in my more than two decades at the Regional History Project. He provided me with a rich personal archive of materials for background research, including his curriculum vitae, articles, committee meeting minutes, presentations, documents, and references. During the course of the interview, Cowan generously began what is now an ongoing stint as a volunteer in the University Library's Special Collections Department, assisting with identifying and organizing collections of archival material pertinent to UCSC's history. This immersion in campus history refreshed his memory and enriched the interview.

I conducted eight interviews for this oral history with Cowan in the summer of 2012. We began on May 15 and completed the interviews on June 29, speaking together for a total of just over sixteen hours. It seems most appropriate that the site for these interviews was the Gloria Anzaldúa Study Room in McHenry Library. Like Anzaldúa, whose work Cowan taught in his American

studies and literature courses, Cowan finds meaning in the metaphor of bridges, borderlands, and crossroads, images he returned to throughout these interviews. "I guess I kept looking for ways in which various things in which I was involved could be crossroads," he reflected, "where there could be an honest, respectful exchange of talents, of goods, of all sorts of ideas, experiences.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Cowan carefully reviewed the transcript for accuracy and returned it with corrections that appear in brackets and a few written footnotes which are incorporated in the volume. I thank him for the precision and thought he brought to this endeavor. Thank you also to Cameron Vanderscoff for his assistance with transcription and Esther Ehrlich for copyediting the final version.

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 Elizabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Virginia Steel.

—*Irene Reti*  
*Director, Regional History Project, University Library*  
*University of California, Santa Cruz, January 2013*

## **Early Life**

**Reti:** Today is May 15, 2012 and this is Irene Reti with the Regional History Project. I'm here with Michael Cowan and we're starting our oral history today. We're going to start out by talking about where and when were you born, and your early life.

**Cowan:** I was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1937, significant years because they were late-Depression years, and I think that affected certainly my parents' attitudes. I was the oldest of two boys. I had a younger brother two and a half years younger than I was. Both my parents had come from small farm families in southwestern Missouri, the Ozarks, and come to Kansas City at different points in their lives, and then met in Kansas City and then gotten married about a month before Wall Street crashed in 1929. They were fortunate both to be able to hold onto jobs during that period of time.

**Reti:** What kind of jobs did they have?

**Cowan:** My father initially worked shoveling coal in a power and light company in Kansas City, and then during the war moved into a dress manufacturing firm, a family-run business in Kansas City that during World War II had switched to making uniforms for the Service. My mother worked in Montgomery Ward and then Sears, in the back room, essentially doing accounting and other things. She had enough high school training that was appropriate for that. I remember my

father leaving very early in the morning to drive to work and occasionally then we would go and pick up my mother during the war years. You remember things like rationing and food stamps, which were always fun. I remember we used to go to the grocery store and use ration stamps to get things.

But we grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Kansas City; I went to grade school there, which had classes from kindergarten through seventh grade, but we had one fewer classroom than there were grades, so inevitably one classroom or another would be divided between classes and I experienced that several times. It was an interesting, very small school experience. The school was literally right across the street from where we lived. There was a huge playground. The school sat on one little site in the midst of an entire square block that was nothing but playground, so we always had a playground experience. And then the backyard—it was essentially undeveloped. So my father bought some of the land from the city, in a distress sale that the city had on that property that hadn't had taxes paid, and proceeded to put in a basketball court for us. He put in a little miniature golf course for us. So it was a great time. I remember that very fondly.

Interestingly enough, about three blocks from us—and I hadn't realized it until I was a bit older—there was a small black ghetto, essentially, a rural ghetto. They had their own school. I remember my parents driving by it a couple of times. It was a quite separate world, and it wasn't until the early fifties that young black kids started walking up along our block. It was a symptom of the time. As I look back on that time—as an historian I find myself very interested in the way in

which my life and the events around it are symptomatic and reflective, in their own way, of larger forces. And that is one of those things that is vivid in my mind.

I went to public school in Kansas City, both grade school and then high school. High school was about two miles away and we would walk there every day. I love to walk and so that wasn't a problem, even in the midst of very cold Kansas City winters.

**Reti:** (laughs) And where had your family—just backing up a little bit—where had your family come from? Were they immigrants?

**Cowan:** No, my father's side of the family must have arrived in the eighteenth century. He was a mixture of English, Scotts-Irish background, had come during that period. And then his family had been part of the migration that moved through the Cumberland Gap, through Tennessee, Kentucky, then into southern Missouri. He was a part of that stream. One of the interesting things, or ironies of that, was that that movement somewhat paralleled the Trail of Tears, the displacement of the Cherokee during that particular time. And actually, those two strands came together in my life, in that my mother's mother was Irish but must have come in the mid-nineteenth century initially, and arrived in Missouri at some point during that period. But she was married to a man who was either entirely or half Cherokee, and I never knew which. So Irish-Cherokee background, Scotts-Irish background coming together in Missouri at that particular time and reflecting these larger strands of movement and history.

**Reti:** But you had no connection with the Cherokee part of your family.

**Cowan:** I have no memory whatsoever. My parents didn't talk about it. The thing that I was most struck by was my grandfather's (mother's father) very prominent cheekbones. He looked Indian. And my mother maintained a bit of that. So there's probably some genetic pool there that I have no memory of. One of my regrets is that I never interviewed my parents or aunts and uncles about their experience at a time when I was self-conscious of that. So the stories that I have would be effectively stories that I would have made up by knowing something about the larger history of the time.

But I think [about] that rural background, coming to Kansas City, immigration in that particular sense. There's a wonderful novel called *The Dollmaker* by Harriet Arnow that I used to teach. It talks a little about that movement to an urban area. Kansas City was a rapidly growing city. It was essentially a food-processing center. The railroad had come through; the Santa Fe Railroad was there. It had been built around that. It was located at the confluence of the Missouri River and the Kansas or Kaw River. There were a lot of major food-processing plants there. Grain and cattle would all come. We had a very large stockyard. So that was part of the experience. It was a different kind of a city from St. Louis, on the eastern side of the state, which was very German-American. Kansas City, in addition to [people] like my parents, people who had migrated from the East, or from the Ozarks, had a fairly large Italian American population, [had] a small black population, which was in part a product of the migration from the South during

and after World War I and the Depression, and was to grow very rapidly, as it did in many Midwestern and North-Central cities during my growing up period.

The high school I went to was still segregated. There were no black students there. There were two black high schools in the center city. So those kids who were in the small, rural ghetto fairly close to my house would have had to have commuted all the way downtown, several miles, to get to school. The high school that my mother went to when she and her family moved to Kansas City had become an all-black school by the time I was growing up, and so the black population there living in uneasy juxtaposition primarily with the Italian American community in the downtown area was part of the dynamics. But my suburban, working-class neighborhood was basically an all-white neighborhood; my school was all white.

Interestingly enough, I graduated in 1955 from that school, and in 1954 was Brown versus Topeka Kansas Board of Education. And two years after I graduated, the school desegregated, initially very small, and the growing black neighborhood began to [spread] out. It finally became a predominantly black school as the black population [spread] out of the center city and then grew. By that time we had moved out of the neighborhood. And I think, in part, my father moved from the neighborhood where we were to a slightly more upscale, middle-class neighborhood because—it was not just economic mobility, which was part of it, but he—I think [race] was a dynamic. It was one of those things that as a burgeoning young liberal in college I was always uncomfortable with.

He went into real estate for a while after he left the company. He was blocked in terms of his upward movement. He was a very creative man, had a high school education but that was all, but was very smart, was constantly tinkering. I always thought he could have been an engineer. He was always inventing things around the house. He invented a machine, for example, that would help lay out patterns to more efficiently use the cloth for cutting. So I always admired that side, but politically we—and he was a very kind man—but politically we found ourselves in the usual way of generation gaps. I remember at one point in the sixties arguing about whether Martin Luther King was a radical or not. He was a Democrat, and my parents were, but it was a kind of Midwestern Democratic party that reflected the ambience of the area. You would probably call them Blue Dog Democrats nowadays.

**Reti:** So when you were in high school what were your aspirations?

**Cowan:** Good question. The teaching in high school was, for the most part, fairly mediocre. I don't think there were many demands placed on us, with a couple of exceptions. There were always a few teachers who were noted for being unusually good teachers. But among those experiences that stand out was a very smart mathematics teacher. There were very few of us who went through all four years of math. This was in the days before pre-calculus. Trigonometry and solid geometry were about as far as we got. But the kind of college-tracked group ended up in that class. There was, interestingly enough, only one woman in that class, a woman I dated for a while—she became the class valedictorian. But she was not popular with other women in the school. She was smart and she knew it

and she didn't participate in the social activities of the school. And I went through a period of standing back from her because I was trying to be part of that group.

**Reti:** A classic high school experience.

**Cowan:** (laughs) Yes, it was. It was peer pressure. On the other hand, I had a fascinating English [course]—most of the English courses were not very good, but there were two courses that I remember, one that was taught by a woman who wasn't very good at it, in my senior year, essentially a composition class where we had to write all sorts of different things. We had to build our vocabulary, so my best friend in high school and I used to get out the *Reader's Digest* section called "Word Power," which had definitions of words. And we would then make it point of using those words in our papers and she was always impressed. She liked sentimental writing so we wrote to that. (laughs) But it was a good writing experience.

But the most important writing experience was actually a journalism class that I took in my junior year. It was [taught by] a very charismatic young guy who used to let the students in his class come in on Saturdays, which wasn't authorized. I remember climbing through the window (laughs) to get in. It was a class that brought together virtually all of the elements of the school, the socially in crowd, the cheerleaders, the Jewish intellectuals. We had a fairly large number of Jewish students. My parents were Evangelical Protestants. But that was a very important experience. Very bright people. And he gave us a lot of room. We

wrote a lot because we were having to put out the paper. But it brought together jocks and all sorts of people. It was a wonderful experience because it was really bringing elements of the school together, particularly because he was really encouraging us to be active. I learned a lot, I think, that I didn't fully appreciate until later. I was managing editor and my best friend was editor-in-chief. And it gave us, particularly him, visibility. He went on to be president of the student council, a very smart, interesting guy. We ended up going to Yale together, too. The one relatively vivid memory I have from that time was when I was writing—I used to write feature articles—I wrote one—I went through all the names of students at the school and looked for names that meant other things, like fox or river—and wrote an essay that brought all of that together. It's kind of trivial stuff, but fun.

**Reti:** Fun.

**Cowan:** Fun.

I did not consider myself a crusader, but at one point—we had a school constitution, a typical student affairs government's constitution. We had a student council. And there was a point system. In order to spread the opportunities for students, no student was supposed to be an officer or a major leader in more than so many activities. And I began to realize that there were some students, as you would expect, who were actually doing much more than that. It was the typical group of leaders. So I wrote an editorial on that, having looked at the constitution, basically saying, either the constitution should be

abandoned or it should be enforced. I was called into the principal's office. Being a principal, he was concerned about the public image and he didn't want it to be known that the school was not being well run. It was my perhaps first encounter with that kind of embarrassment. My journalism teacher, when I was called in he said, "You better be able to show that you can support what you did." And he [the principal] basically told me that I should never do that again without prior permission. So it was a bit of a freedom of the press issue and I was not about ready to screw up my chances as a well-behaved student. (laughs) But it was perhaps one of my first interactions with power and a lesson that I (laughs) —the very fact that I'm telling you shows that I remember the small trauma. But it was also a lesson in getting the facts straight.

The other course that was important to me was—well, actually two—a teacher who taught history. His name was Franklin and he was a rather rotund man, who unlike all of the other teachers would lecture. He'd sit at his desk and he would very slowly lecture. The first course was a course in European history. He started with Animism and Animatism, these early religious beliefs. He was clearly—you might have called him a village atheist. He was actually an agnostic, probably. I discovered later that he also wrote hymns. (laughs) So he was probably rebelling against his own background. He was clearly influenced by writers like Charles Beard and others who were interested in the economic interpretation of history. I think he had been at the University of Chicago. It was a strange place for him to end up as a teacher.

**Reti:** At a high school in Kansas City, yes.

**Cowan:** But he went slowly, and we didn't get in European history past the late fifteenth or sixteenth century. But we went through Greek and Roman very slowly. He would read. You had to take notes and then you'd have to memorize the notes. And on the exam you would be given the choice of five questions. If you didn't write on one of the first two you were marked off. You would essentially write back as closely as you could remember exactly what he had said, which is, on the one hand, not a really great way to learn. On the other hand, because his angle was so different from anybody else's angle—I mean, we didn't read a textbook or anything, we just had his words—it really had an impact. It was that perspective that, I think, was very important. I ended up writing a profile of him for a senior composition course that was submitted to an annual writing contest at the school. I won the prize. I called it "The Baffling Mr. B." It was his middle initial. It was my first experience winning a prize. He was such a vivid teacher, and I guess in some sense the vividness of a teacher was as important as the content of what was going on. But the perspective was also there.

So other than that, I was a joiner. I was also, by the way, in the Boy Scouts. Everybody was in the Scouts when I grew up. My mother was a den mother; I was a cub scout. The scout troop that I was in met in the grade school that was, again, just across from our house. But everybody else was in there too. So I've always thought that perhaps somehow the collecting of merit badges somehow affected me. (laughs) I like to collect things.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So I was a joiner, perhaps a person feeling a little out of the social mainstream in school, but I joined almost any club that I could. But it meant that I met a lot of people, saw a lot of parts of the school. I remember being on the yearbook and writing a lot of the student profiles, the senior profiles, those little biographical blurbs that grace them. So maybe that interest in biography and autobiography was early there. I don't know. But it was a busy time. It was something of a blur. I think that the education that I got, like I think many students' education—was often less in the classroom than just being a part of the larger social ambiance of the time.

**Reti:** Were your parents encouraging you to go to college?

**Cowan:** Very much so. Neither had been to college, although after my brother and I were in college, my father took a few junior college courses. And my mother went back to school and finally, late in my college career, early when I was teaching, got a bachelor's degree. My father was in real estate for a long time. We used to have debates about that because of the issues about who you could sell to or not. It was part of that issue of—

**Reti:** Restrictive covenants.

**Cowan:** Restrictive covenants, or just making sure that people knew that this was a "safe" neighborhood. He was, again, reflecting his time. My mother ended up working in Social Security, a supervisor in the regional Social Security office in Kansas City, and did that for many years before she retired. But they were—they

both cared about [my education]. I was lucky that there were a few high school teachers that encouraged me, and the counselor.

### **Yale University**

Getting to Yale was a surprise, because I think almost all the students in my class, and a fair number of them went on to college, would go on to local schools. And if they had ambitions to go to a larger school, they would go to either the University of Missouri or the University of Kansas. I had thought about journalism as a potential career. And so when I was applying to college, Northwestern University and the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri, which all had journalism schools, were among the ones I had considered. Yale emerged as a possibility because of a couple of things. I'd had two ministers in my church who had both gone to Yale Divinity School. I had no idea what Yale was like, but somehow that was an image and there was a while when I thought I might go into the ministry. It was one of those things that you would consider as a career.

**Reti:** Because you did grow up fairly religious?

**Cowan:** Yes, my family was a very religious family, very active in the church. My parents taught Sunday school. My mother was editor of the church newsletter. My father was a part of the lay governing structure.

**Reti:** In what denomination?

**Cowan:** It was called the Disciples of Christ, often loosely the Christian Church. It was a Second Great Awakening religion, again part of that Cumberland Gap experience, and very much a congregationally-oriented religion. There was no real hierarchy. The congregation would choose its own minister. It was a fairly large church. I do remember that the church itself moved from a neighborhood that was becoming black into a white neighborhood. So we were a part of that. So I was very active in youth groups.

It was an interesting experience in another way. In my senior year, the then-minister dismissed the service earlier and then proceeded to accuse unnamed members of the congregation of subverting his ministry. We in the youth group were shocked. We liked him and so we were all very supportive. It was only after I got home that I discovered that my parents were part of the opposition to him. He was something of a paranoid man. My parents were very kind people but he accused them and some others of a conspiracy against him. It led to bringing in an arbiter, and there were meetings where both sides presented their positions. He finally left the church as a result. The church essentially split. Many people who were his supporters left the church. So it was my first real experience with the politics of religion. And so, that's why I, in many ways, remember it. It reminded me that it too was a political institution and a social institution. I remember reading later a book by H. Richard Niebuhr called *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, which focuses particularly on the way in which a variety of Protestant denominations split in the time before the Civil War over the issue of

slavery. And it helped me understand another dimension of why religious institutions, like many others, were a part of a larger set of social institutions.

At any event, I thought that I might go to Northwestern or KU or MU. I thought, well, maybe I might be a minister. But I thought I might be a journalist. And I received a Naval ROTC scholarship— I was offered it—that would have taken me to Northwestern in journalism. But instead I ended up getting a scholarship for Kansas City boys either to go to the University of Kansas City (which became later the University of Missouri at Kansas City) or Yale University, by a guy who had made his fortune in wholesale food in Kansas City and had been at Yale and wanted to benefit that. I had a counselor also, who encouraged this. She always wanted to identify one or two boys to go to Yale, or to go to the Ivy League. So I ended up going there because one of my best friends, who was a year ahead, had gotten the same scholarship to go to Yale, [and] because my best friend in my year, the guy who had been editor-in-chief and president, had also gotten a scholarship to go to Yale. I had a need-based scholarship and I wouldn't have gone there without it. It certainly made me very much appreciate [the value of] financial support.

But I'd never been to Yale. I'd never been East. Outside of what I had heard from my friend, who would come back and tell us. We had traveled West. We had gone to the Rocky Mountains on vacation and we'd twice gone to California, once when I was very little and once when I was a little older. But otherwise, I was pretty much a Kansas City kid. We'd go on vacations down in the Ozarks with our extended family. I remember when I was a senior, because I'd gotten

active in church stuff, I went to a conference in Tennessee. It was the first time I'd been on a train. I was, I think, fairly typical of kids during that period. So for me, it was a big jump. Interestingly, my brother then two years later got the same scholarship and went to Yale too. So we spent some time together at Yale.

It was one of those happenstance—when you think about how history is contingent, how being in a particular place at a particular time makes all the difference. I've often thought about roads not taken, what would have happened if I'd gotten an ROTC scholarship at Northwestern and then ended up in the military at a time—

**Reti:** In Vietnam.

**Cowan:** A little prior to it, Korea, between Korea and Vietnam. But I would have been there at the start of Vietnam. It would have been quite a different experience for me.

It was quite a culture shock, being at Yale. I arrived in the fall of 1955. My friend's parents had driven him and me across the country and deposited us there. To see the East and also to be in a school, which was still, although it was rapidly changing in many ways, had the holdover of a kind of genteel, prep school tradition. I roomed in my freshman year with three other men. Two of them were from Choate Prep School.

**Reti:** Choate?

**Cowan:** Choate was the prep school that John Kennedy went to.

**Reti:** (laughs) You can tell I'm not from the East Coast.

**Cowan:** It was one, and there were many, many [prep school] boys—it was, of course, an all-male undergraduate population at that time. I'd come from a co-ed high school. So that was part of the shock. But lots of prep school kids there. And many of them were interested in the social networking. They were coming to Yale to do that. I remember that one of the Choate roommates had a picture book of all of the guys in the freshman class. He would go around campus and he would come back having checked off the ones that he had met. He was there, like George Bush was there, to make connections.

The fourth roommate was a very, very bright guy from Menlo Park, California. And with my provincial Midwestern background, I somehow had an image of Menlo Park as a trailer park. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** He was Jewish. He was small, rather dark. And he was picked on relentlessly by the other two roommates. He ended up going on to Harvard and an academic career. He was one of the brightest people that I knew at Yale, but ended up staying away from our rooming situation.

Yale had a lot of money. I was aware of that. We were living in what was called the Vanderbilt Suite. They had a series of residential halls there. The Vanderbilt Suite was named for Cornelius Vanderbilt, of the Vanderbilt family. It had walnut and gold paneling. It had been designed to be a place where Vanderbilts

could stay, because you would still have a lot of alumni children. It had been converted into a four-person dormitory.

Anyway, that was part of that world. But the other part of the Yale world was that it was rapidly changing in the wake of World War II, the influx of a lot of former people in the military on GI bills. Not many of them were coming there, but one thing that Yale was doing, like many other Ivy League and private schools, was to try to expand itself geographically by bringing people from the Midwest and the West Coast. One of the reasons I was there was that they were still sorting out applications between whether you could pay your own way, or your family could pay your way, or whether you were a scholarship student. I was in the scholarship student category. I probably wouldn't have been there if I hadn't brought money with me from my [Kansas City scholarship].

**Reti:** Did you find it difficult socially in terms of the class difference between you and the other students?

**Cowan:** I was most aware of the class [difference]. There were only maybe three black students out of a class of a thousand students there. You can imagine what it would have been like to have been one of them. But I was most aware of the class differences. And that was manifested partly in the prep school issue. For example, it was only later that Yale started turning its attention to some of the best Eastern high schools, and that meant bringing a lot more Jewish kids.

**Reti:** So there were very few Jewish students at the time you were there?

**Cowan:** That's right. I always was told it was an implicit quota. Interestingly enough, the faculty was probably diversifying more than the student body at that time. I remember several very powerful teachers who were clearly Jewish, although they didn't advertise their Jewishness, but that was a part of their background. So that was beginning to change. Young faculty coming back from fighting in World War II were then teaching at Yale. So you had a young, more progressive group. But it was an exciting group. Yale had an ethos of having faculty who were committed to teaching, even though it was an undergraduate program. I remember having in my freshman and sophomore year lots of lectures, but by very good lecturers, with some exceptions. But the sections of those courses were taught by instructors. I had people like Bill Goetzmann, who went on to Texas to win the Pulitzer Prize for a book on Western history. I mean, there were people of that nature who were available to us.

As an academic experience it was extraordinarily exciting. And I think that because I felt that socially I was somewhat marginal to the major ethos, I threw myself into my studies. I think that was true of many kids of a similar background. I did, they used the term, (laughs) "heel," compete for a seat on the *Yale Daily News*, which was the student newspaper. Henry Luce, who was the founder of *Time Magazine*, was one of the first editors there, managing editors of that [*the Yale Daily News*]. It had a long tradition of sending the top editors on to *Time Magazine*, or *Life*, or one of the Luce syndicates. And because I had been interested in journalism in high school, I competed for a slot. You essentially had to write articles, sell ads, not something that I was good at. I came from a family

that didn't drink. I remember going to New York to sell liquor ads for the junior prom or senior prom book.

**Reti:** Was it out of religious beliefs that they didn't drink?

**Cowan:** I think, yes. And my grandfather, my mother's father, died in a local bar. I don't think he drank a lot, but I think it was partly that. At any event, I'd learned to drink at Yale—didn't we all—but [I remember] as a freshman, wearing a very ill-fitting suit, going and taking the train to New York, and going to ad agencies to try to sell liquor. I think the reason I actually ended up probably getting a place on the *Yale News* board—every class had its board that moved up the ranks—was that a guy at one of the ad agencies took pity on me and bought an ad, which gave me enough points to get on.

But going to New York on the train and back and experiencing the city for the first time essentially on my own was quite an exciting experience and certainly a contrast with Kansas City. I loved to travel around Kansas City. My friend and I, or my brother and I, would often get on the street car. We would have student passes and we would ride the street car—and it was still a street car system in Kansas City—from close to our house all the way downtown, through the stockyards, over to Kansas City, Kansas, and to the end of the line, and then ride back, much to the displeasure of the driver, I'm sure, of the streetcar. So I loved to explore at that time and I think that was an impulse that stayed with me.

New Haven was a mid-sized industrial city that had seen its better days. It had a large Italian-American population and an old Yankee population, which had

moved out to the suburbs, or in a wealthy part of the city, and then a very large black population that was cheek-to-jowl with the university. So many of those themes were still there when I was growing up. But then seeing New York and wandering the city (laughs) in search of ads— And I had a cousin who had married a woman and they lived in New Jersey, and so I remember going down and being taken by him to a couple of musicals. That side of the city was all very exciting.

That aside, I think I basically kept my head down. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought I might want to be a minister. I thought I might want to be a journalist. I even thought I might want to be a Boy Scout executive, because I had been very active in scouting. All during my college years, in the summer I'd made my summer income by teaching and working at a Boy Scout camp in southern Missouri. But I did the usual things. The breadth requirements there meant that you were taking courses in all sorts of areas. And I fell into American studies there—

**Reti:** I was curious about that because it's not necessarily the straight and narrow track.

**Cowan:** No, I was thinking of majoring in political science, for example. It seemed like a good preparation for journalism. They didn't have a journalism major or anything like that at school. I'd taken a very good history course. I'd been turned off by the first course I took in English, which was taught by a young instructor according to what they called New Critical Principles, which is

that you looked very carefully at the text and you didn't look at the world that influenced the text. It was a course called *Seven English Authors*—from Chaucer and Spenser, all the way up to T.S. Eliot. All men. It was kind of the canon, as they would have said at the time. And you were supposed to look carefully at the text and do intricate analysis of the text. You didn't read secondary works. You were just supposed to do that. On the one hand, the technique of that close reading was something that stayed with me, and it affected the way I approached all sorts of other texts, not just poetry—that class was all poetry—but fiction, history, autobiographies, planning literature—all sorts of other ways. So it was a technique that I learned. But the thing that was uncomfortable was this lack of larger [contexts]. I had a good history course, as I said. I took the political science course, and with the exception of the first semester where a very interesting elderly professor was spellbinding, the teaching seemed to me dull and not very interesting. It focused on institutional analysis and I wasn't as interested in that at the time.

At the end of my sophomore year there was an announcement that people who were interested in examining this relatively new undergraduate major called American studies might want to come. A couple of young faculty, who were the ones involved in that course, explained what they were doing and that there was something called the Honors Program. I had miscellaneous interests. I had no clear focus. I said to myself, I think in maybe not a fully conscious way, I really don't understand this new world that I've come into. Coming from the Midwest to the East was like going to another culture. I think in part I ended up majoring

in American studies because I wanted to figure out how these two worlds could be part of the same country.

**Reti:** Oh, that's fascinating.

**Cowan:** So I think there was a personal reason, not just an intellectual reason. But the other thing was that it allowed me to pursue lots of merit badges. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs) Because it was interdisciplinary.

**Cowan:** It was interdisciplinary. I didn't think of it that way, but it was a place where I could do lots of different things. It was a fascinating program that I'm sure was one of the things that affected my interest in [UC] Santa Cruz.

In the Honors Program we had two years of seminars. It was a fixed curriculum. We didn't take any other courses, although we could audit courses that we were interested in. And I took advantage to audit courses in sociology and art history and all sorts of things. Students then took five courses at a time.

**Reti:** Was it a quarter system or a semester system?

**Cowan:** This was a semester system. In this program we had two double-credit seminars, one in American intellectual history and one in American institutions, my junior year, I remember. And then we had a tutorial where we read journals and [other] primary documents of figures from the early colonial period on. The American intellectual history course was taught by a very bright, young faculty member. These were all young faculty members. The American institutions

course was taught by two young faculty members. One was more literary in training; the other was more historical in training. And then another faculty member had the tutorials. And then my senior year we did the same thing. We had a course called *The American Character*. We had all these anthropological and sociological and social-psychological studies dealing with the issue of group identity and all the theorizing about that. Fascinating. [Also] a course in American literary history with the only tenured faculty member who I had that particular time, and he became important to me in graduate school also, in American literary history, a fascinating guy who turned out had been involved in the OSS during World War II, the Office of Secret Service, and had been stationed in London and was a part of that whole initial—became CIA eventually, I didn't know that at the time, but he was clearly a man of the world. A fascinating figure. He chain-smoked. I remember going to his office.

### **Senior Thesis on the Boy Scouts of America**

And then the other course that we had during the senior year was a senior thesis, where each of us was supposed to, for a one-course credit, work on a research project for the entire year. I decided to write on the Boy Scouts of America. I had been very much involved. I was working at scout camp and I thought, well, maybe I could be a professional scouter. Writing the thesis convinced me that I didn't want to do that. (laughs)

**Reti:** Why was that?

**Cowan:** I learned again something about the institution. The national headquarters of the Boy Scouts of America was in New Brunswick, New Jersey, just a little outside of New York City. So I went down there several times to work in their archives. My advisor had said, "Well, you really shouldn't just focus on contemporary Boy Scouts. You really need to do the history." So I ended up looking at the early history. I started with looking at Baden Powell's founding of the Boy Scout movement [in England]. It ended up being a thesis on the Americanization of scouting, or the Americanization of the rhetoric of scouting—how is it that a British organization can become seen as a national American organization? And because it was founded during the Progressive movement it was also a study in how Progressivism of the early twentieth century variety affected the movement. So I read psychological theory. There was something called recapitulation theory that was developed by a psychologist named G. Stanley Hall. It was a theory that involved children going through evolutionary stages, from savage up to civilized. So you would have exercises as you moved through stages, which would take advantage of where boys were at that particular stage. It was fascinating stuff. But I ended up looking at the interaction between scouting and the Protestant church, the Progressive Protestant church, Muscular Christianity, and the notion of activism, where the church would be involved in social change.

And so I was looking at all of that, but also became aware, especially through my visits to scouting headquarters, that it was also being run as a business. And it received a national charter. It started off, essentially, as a pacifist organization,

some international people who were involved in the YMCA and other movements, initially, who were looking for transnational possibilities of interaction and peace. But during World War I, in order to get support, scouting began to emphasize that although it was not a military organization it provided boys with the skills that would make them good soldiers.

**Reti:** Yes, I can see that.

**Cowan:** And watching that happen, and then watching the way in which it also realized it had to sell itself, because its growth was dependent on linking with its local sponsors, which were often churches, sometimes schools, but many churches, so it took on the coloration of the organizations. I had read a book by Sinclair Lewis called *Babbitt*, which talked about that Midwestern ethos. So after doing, I think, a pretty sober history, at the very end it had my little protest talking about how it risked being sold out. Anyway, it liberated me from thinking that I'd want to pursue professional scouting. But it also gave me a taste for being a researcher. I discovered that I loved working through old books and documents in the Yale library, which is a fantastic place for research. I loved going through the archives of the scouting headquarters and talking to some of the staff that were working there. I had thought of perhaps going into secondary education, but I loved doing this, and my advisor, the one who had taught also my American literature course my senior year, said, "Well, why don't you consider going to graduate school?"

### **Graduate Work in American Studies at Yale**

So that's what led me to graduate school. I really admired the teachers that I'd had, so it seemed like it was a fun career, and the notion that I could continue to study things and read and do research was also very appealing. I don't think I had many more sophisticated reasons for wanting to go on that way then.

**Reti:** And you stayed at Yale?

**Cowan:** I did. Because I had had this very tightly constructed [undergraduate] curriculum, which, when you think about having only seminars and tutorials for two years—even at a place like Yale, which had an eight-to-one student-faculty ratio—that was still a very rich experience. I'd applied to Harvard and to the University of Minnesota in their American studies programs, or American civilization programs. But there were a lot of teachers at Yale who were very important in the general area of U.S. studies, and I had missed out on them, and I think maybe that, plus the fact that my brother was still at Yale—I don't know all these reasons that would have kept me there, I decided to stay and have the experience of [many of the other faculty]. I was accepted at both Minnesota and Harvard. I had a Woodrow Wilson fellowship, which was to encourage people to go on that way. And also, I had been given a Danforth Fellowship. I was really lucky. I've been very lucky about getting financial support. It was a four-year support package. I decided to use it at Yale. So I moved on to graduate school at Yale.

The American studies office was located at the corner of a building. On one side was the English department office and on the other side was the history department office. Those were the two major programs that supported American studies. American studies might have been lost at Yale if it hadn't been for the fact that a wealthy Wyoming businessman had thrown in a lot of money to support an American studies program. He thought that it would be a program to breed patriots.

**Reti:** Very interesting. I'm sure we'll talk about this later, those contradictions within American studies, those tensions—

**Cowan:** Right. Absolutely. Yale was a very liberal program. It was caught between Cold War politics and progressive liberal ethos. And we can talk about that later.

But I, therefore, interacted in courses with people with both literary and historical interests. Early in the process, my mentor, the same person who had been my senior mentor and was heading the American studies program, said, "You really need to have a disciplinary base, because there are not many jobs in American studies. And so I started taking a lot of courses in English literature. I do remember there going into a course in English Renaissance poetry with a peer of mine in the program, and the teacher looked at us—he didn't have us on his course list—and when we said we'd been advised to take the course he said, "What? They don't have enough to keep you busy in American studies?"  
(laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So there was that amount of tension. I think our relations with history were better, though. We all, with the entering history students, took a double credit graduate course, essentially in historiography, taught by four of the leading Yale American historians, a powerful experience. So I had some really good team-taught experiences. They would lecture, but we would read a lot and then we'd have sections with them. So I've never been one who's felt that lectures are bad. It depends whose doing the lectures. Developing a sense of how you can interact with a person who is lecturing, how you can carry on a silent dialogue with them even if you are not engaged in talking with them directly, is a theme that is very important.

Anyway, like many of us in the program, I became close friends with this small group of graduate students, and we studied together and prepared for our preliminary exams and our doctoral orals together. I maintained friendships with a couple of them for a number of years. It was a congenial group. The faculty was a caring group. It was a great experience. I can talk about my American studies experience perhaps a little bit more later, some of the tensions.

But at some point, I got a little restless. I had been at Yale an awful long time. So although in my third year there I had gone on a blind date to Bennington and met a woman who I then got engaged to, I decided to go abroad, if I could, for a year. So I looked around and I applied for a Rotary fellowship. These were sponsored by the local Rotary clubs and my home was still in Kansas City, in

effect. So I got a Rotary fellowship from my home district. I think my scouting background probably helped me, because Rotary clubs in the Midwest were fairly conservative, very small business—

**Reti:** Yes. I can imagine.

**Cowan:** But I ended up then going abroad. We had to find our own location abroad. I had been when I was a graduate student, a freshman counselor, very much like a residential preceptor in our UCSC dorms—but I, for two years, had been a counselor in a freshmen college dorm. And one of the freshmen had been at Cambridge at one of the colleges. He said, "Why don't you apply there?" So I did. And since I didn't need any money from them—I had my fellowship that I could take with me—I ended up for a year at Cambridge, which was a fascinating experience. It was in the early sixties. The year I was there they had the coldest winter in 170-some years. The pipes, which were buried barely below the surface of the ground, froze. They started running out of coal supplies. England was still recovering from World War II. They had a Conservative government and it essentially brought the Conservative government down. The themes of the present day. (laughs)

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Cambridge was, of course, a world to itself. It was still a place for the wealthy, a more English version of what I had experienced, in part, at Yale.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** I ended up living outside town at an old Tudor estate that had been used by U.S. soldiers in World War II. But it had become an international house for graduate students and a few faculty, from all over, from the British Commonwealth. So there were people from Australia, Canada. There were people from India, Iran. It was a fascinating group of people.

I was attached to one of the Cambridge colleges. They had a small graduate table, where every week a small group of graduate students would get together, subsidized by the college, and have sherry and a meal and conversation together. So I was able to interact with students, many of them in the sciences, from other areas. It was a great experience, both in meeting people from all over the place, including other Americans who were there, and seeing the United States from the point of view of people outside the United States.

One of the things I had to do as a Rotary fellow was to talk to Rotary clubs. And so [I was] looking at the style of Rotary clubs there and what it meant to be a business [or] professional person in often small cities, small towns in Britain and the United States—the contrast between them. Typically, the professional or the people who were members of British Rotary clubs were more informed about world affairs, more literate. I had a series of set speeches, little talks, followed by questions, that I would give at lunches. One had to do with the form of U.S. government, state-federal relations. And the other was a kind of contemporary American issues lecture. They were fascinated by the American government system. They just couldn't understand it. It was so different. But the other thing they spent a lot of time asking about was civil rights, race relations.

**Reti:** By now we're in the early 1960s.

**Cowan:** Yes, this was the early sixties, 1962, 1963. Civil rights has heated up. And again, they were very proud, even complacently so, about their own race relations. (laughs) "We have no problems," they said. Of course, this was before the huge influx of people from the former colonies, the British colonies. (laughs) Their race relations were at a distance. But in order to explain that to them in a way that wasn't offensive, because they would go after you if you looked like you were too serious—you had to have style when you defended or explained the United States. Cambridge style often admired style over substance. Think of Oscar Wilde.

**Reti:** Okay.

**Cowan:** Wit was valued, style. You had to bring that to bear. I had another American who was with me at Cambridge, who used to get teased mercilessly because he was constantly defending the United States. My view was to stand back and try to explain what was going on, to not let them have the last word, necessarily, but to try to adopt to their particular style. But having to answer questions, and then to read *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, the London and British papers, as they looked at the United States, was fascinating. It was a theme that maintained itself when I came to Santa Cruz and through my career.

But it was a great experience for me to travel around. One of the points of Rotary clubs throughout England was that you stayed in Rotarians' homes and talked to their families. They'd show you their local businesses. I remember being shown

an abattoir, where they slaughtered animals. (laughs) But all of these places. And then going to London quite regularly. And then, of course, we'd get over, as I did in the spring with some friends, to travel around Europe, the continent, in a VW bus. That's another story. I won't bore you with that.

It was a great experience. I, like many of the people of my era, hadn't been thinking very much about jobs. I was working on my dissertation but I was also taking courses in English literature to try to solidify my disciplinary credentials. In the winter I started thinking, well, maybe I better start thinking about jobs. I could come back and spend another year [on the dissertation], but I thought maybe I better get employment. I hadn't thought very much about it. But my mentor had come with his wife to London. He knew London well. He had lived there for a while. I remember meeting him at a swanky place down near Parliament, his old stomping grounds, and mentioning this. And before I knew it, I had gotten a job offer to be an instructor at Yale, in English. It was the old boy network.

### **Teaching at Yale University**

**Reti:** That's how it worked then.

**Cowan:** Absolutely. I've been lucky that way, in ways that people now are not. So I, with the dissertation still uncompleted, came back to the United States in the summer of 1963, got married that summer. And my wife and I—she was from Oklahoma. Her father had been a professor of engineering at the University of Oklahoma. We headed East, found a little house we rented our first year, and I

spent the first year scrambling to teach essentially three sections of a basic English course at Yale and finish my dissertation. She got a job in the library. (laughs) So we'd go in early. We'd teach. I had a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday class, because we all taught three courses at a time. I had a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday section of this class that met at 9 o'clock, and then one at 10 o'clock. And then I had a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday 8 o'clock in the morning class.

**Reti:** Saturday!

**Cowan:** Yes, as an undergraduate I had Saturday classes. My language courses were always on Saturdays. And for that period we were still teaching Saturday classes. So I would teach classes and then go back to the office and work on the dissertation. My wife would be in the library.

**Reti:** She was a librarian?

**Cowan:** She was not trained formally.

**Reti:** Staff.

**Cowan:** She was working in the stacks and the checkout desk, these kinds of things. And then we'd meet for dinner. Then I'd go back to my office and we'd go home late. That was our pattern for a whole year. I got my dissertation finished that year, though, which was in that sense lucky, because there were no other demands on my time.

**Reti:** Your dissertation was literature-focused.

**Cowan:** It was on Emerson. One of the most powerful courses I'd had was with a guy who had taught nineteenth century American literature. I was looking for a topic within that, and I settled on Emerson, for reasons that I can't fully explain now, except that he himself was a scholar. In addition to writing some seminal texts dealing with American character and culture, he had himself gone abroad. He had even written a book called *English Traits*, in which he had looked at the nineteenth century. So I was very interested in American writers who had gone abroad, Hawthorne, Emerson and all of that. Anyway, I settled on him for some reason. I had also gotten very interested, as an undergraduate and particularly as a graduate student, in urban studies. So I ended up writing a dissertation on Emerson's attitudes toward the city. It was kind of an intellectual history project. Emerson is not known as somebody who cared about cities, so I was going against the grain.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** I guess that's the way you did that. So that was my dissertation. It was called *Emerson and the City* and it ended up being my first book, finally.<sup>1</sup>

But again, doing research, just reading a lot of these old manuscripts—I remember going to Harvard and looking at some of Emerson's handwritten

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<sup>1</sup> *City of the West: Emerson, America, and Urban Metaphor*, (Yale University Press, 1967).

lectures and journals. It was a fascinating experience. I really liked that kind of stuff.

But that first year was, in essence, kind of a blur. I was keeping my head down, teaching my courses. But still a little restless. I had been a freshman counselor at Yale with a group of students, and I was very interested in that. So I had maintained a kind of informal tie with my undergraduate residential college, and in the spring of my first year there was asked by the master of the college—a master would be like a provost of a college here—if I'd be interested in becoming the dean of the college. Now, *deans* were not high falutin terms. They used to call us *deanlets*. As a matter of fact, Yale's colleges were going themselves through an evolution. They had been founded in the 1930s by a guy who had given a lot of money to Harvard and Yale to convert some of their residential quarters into residential colleges and to build more of them.

**Reti:** Why?

**Cowan:** He thought this would be good for undergraduates as part of the texture of life. When I was in graduate school all the freshmen were in a quad. It was like Harvard where all the freshmen were in a freshmen yard quad, and then we were assigned to residential colleges for our last three years. We lived together in dormitories. We ate in the dining halls.

**Reti:** But not the first year?

**Cowan:** The thought was that you would want to orient students and there were particular issues about orienting freshmen. And you'd keep them together—there was a dean of the freshmen year; we had freshmen counselors who reported to that dean. And then there was a freshman curriculum that you would be moving through. So the thought was that this would orient you to Yale. That was beginning to evolve, though. We then moved into residential colleges and stayed there for [our] other years.

But about the time I started teaching, the administration decided that they wanted to have more focus on using the colleges as a source of advising. So they moved to a system of having deanlets. A dean was like an academic preceptor in every college who would be there to help students with their advising. Students then, although they were living on the old campus, were from the outset assigned to a college. So you had a group of freshmen who were also members of your college from the outset. It was an attempt to make the colleges play a more active role in that system. Colleges didn't offer courses, with some exceptions. There was a grant by Mellon, the Mellon Foundation, that made it possible for a small number of sophomore seminars to be offered in every college, essentially versions of campuswide courses that would be offered in small sections in the college. But otherwise the colleges had many features that Santa Cruz did. For example, there were faculty fellows. Not all the faculty in the university were fellows, but these were faculty fellows attached to each college. They were given free meals a couple of days a week. So they would meet and usually sit with each other. The thought was that they might interact with the students there but they

were just visible. Anyway, I was asked in my second year as an instructor to be a dean. I was still only an instructor. You didn't become an assistant professor until several years into your experience.

**Reti:** Would an instructor be equivalent to a lecturer here?

**Cowan:** It's sort of like that but you're on the ladder [toward tenure]. So it was a way of paying you less. (laughs) And we were, as I say, teaching lots of courses then. All of my courses for my first three years were being taught in the English department. So I became a dean. They had an apartment for us. So my wife and I moved into an apartment in Branford College, the college that I was in. It was at the base of Harkness Tower. There was a neo-Georgian look for some of the residential colleges and a neo-Gothic look for some of the others, even though they were built in the 1920s, thirties, and forties. So it was very elegant. They had that kind of Cambridge-Oxford look about them.

It was a wonderful apartment up above the library that we had. Every college had a little library. So I would see a lot of the undergraduates, do what preceptors did here. I, given my restless nature, when I went in as dean decided that I wanted to organize more interaction between the faculty and the students. So I tried to organize faculty-student tables around specific subjects, to try to encourage one day a week the faculty to eat with students. I had a colleague, a young colleague who I had known in graduate school and who had stayed on to teach, who was also very social. So he would be there and meet a few undergraduates. So we would often eat in the dining hall at dinner, my wife and

I, and then after a year my young son, the baby, when he came along. So undergraduates would be around the table. So it was all of that experience, a very powerful experience for me, but we also had a lot of fun. We also had fellows' tables, where faculty from lots of different disciplines would get together. We would once a month have a fellows night where you would come and eat in the dining hall, dinner, and then discuss.

**Reti:** Were they all men, *fellows* in that sense of the word?

**Cowan:** All men. With very few exceptions. Yale was still an all-male undergraduate institution. A few women with me in graduate school. But the number of women on the faculty were less than a handful. In the English department there may have been three women. A lot of the hiring at Yale, in many fields, less so in the sciences, but particularly in the humanities and social sciences, was that you would hire a certain number of your own graduate students. You would not expect to stay at Yale. Very similar to patterns at Harvard and Princeton and many others. But you would essentially have a teaching postdoc for a certain period. And then, instead of being promoted to a tenured slot there, you were expected to move on elsewhere. Very few faculty at the time that I was there were coming up through the ranks and getting tenure. That had not been the case, say a generation earlier, where you did have a lot of old blues who were teaching there. But the expectation was we'd be there for a certain number of years and there was a winnowing process. There were, I think, eight of us in English who started out teaching, and then there was a winnowing and five of us went on into the assistant professor ranks. But we knew that very

few of us, if any, were going to move on into the next rank. But it meant that that was an intense experience. You were getting your own work done.

I, though, liked my extracurricular, semi-curricular part. I liked being a dean. I do remember, though, at the end of my second year when I was told by the chair of the English department that I was going to be promoted to assistant professor, he said that I would be well advised not to continue on as dean because it was not a good thing to do for my career.

**Reti:** Because it would take you away from your research?

**Cowan:** That's right. There was also the thought that it was perhaps palling around too much with undergraduates. I had gotten involved with—because I'd been on the *Yale News*, although never in a major position—with several of the students who were involved with that organization. They were moving on and I interacted with them. And even for a while when I was an assistant professor I wrote a column for *Yale News*. That was not exactly the kind of thing that you were supposed to do.

**Reti:** And your politics at that point, what were they like?

**Cowan:** Liberal. Democratic liberal. It took on the coloration of the faculty. The civil rights movement was heating up. Our minister, the campus chaplain, in the early sixties was a guy named William Sloane Coffin, a major figure in the civil rights movement.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Students were beginning to get involved. I remember seeing that. But it was still a somewhat insulated campus that way, as I think many were in the early sixties, although some students were beginning to go South for the civil rights movement.

**Reti:** But you weren't?

**Cowan:** No, I wasn't. I had a kid. I had my job. I was doing that. But I was watching this happen. And, of course, in our American studies classrooms we were teaching this. I remember teaching Gunnar Myrdal's book on race relations in the United States. So we were already doing that but it was kind of from a distance, although it was beginning to happen. Interestingly enough, the year after I left Yale, the summer of 1969, the following year the Bobby Seale trial happened. And that really created an explosion there, as well as at Cornell. It was happening all over the United States. I experienced that when I got here to UC Santa Cruz.

Anyway, it was a fascinating experience. I was happy to have been at Yale. One other piece of that perhaps is most significant. In addition to the fact that I had a lot of extracurricular as well as a curricular life—I liked that notion of faculty [getting] involved in things with students simply beyond the classroom—in the following year after I was there was a movement by undergraduates to have Yale go coed. I had a work-study student, we called them bursar students there, a guy who ended up going on to law school and is now the dean of the law school at the University of Hawaii, who was one of the major organizers of the movement.

And at one point they organized a—what did they call it—“a lie in.” Women used to be invited down from the colleges around [the area] and they’d have to stay in apartments and hotels, or they would come down for the day and then go back. Or guys would go out up those colleges and then come back. But there were parietal hours. Women could not be in the dormitories. But he pushed, and they had one of the weekends in the fall, one of the football weekends, a kind of civil disobedience where they brought a lot of women down who stayed over, stayed in the rooms. It created a kind of crisis. The president of Yale at that time, Kingman Brewster, worked with the Yale Corporation. They looked at alternatives. For a while they thought that they would see if they could get Vassar to move to New Haven so that they could be like Radcliffe and Harvard, sister colleges, and you could mix classes. But that didn’t work out. Vassar didn’t, finally, want anything to do with it.

So finally in the spring year the Yale Corporation voted to admit a small number of women. We were admitting about a thousand students a year, and the Yale Corporation and the president said, “Well, we will admit them, but we don’t want to deprive any qualified man of a space.” So a hundred women were admitted the year after I left. One of my regrets is that I wasn’t around to be part of that.

**Reti:** So that was in 1970.

**Cowan:** The first group came in 1969-70. Late, right? Late. What happened was that after a few years that notion of restricting broke down and by the mid-

seventies half the class was women. And, of course, it's made an extraordinary difference. In addition to the fact that [there were] very few black students, very few Latino students, any of that. A lot of that was happening. The civil rights movement began to really have an impact. The feminist movement began to have a major impact. So standing back from it—when you are there you don't see it as much except in these symptomatic moments—you realize that a lot of stuff was happening. It was inevitable that it would have happened. So it was interesting to be there at that moment of transition.

Among my many juggling acts was that I was, for a couple of years, on the Yale admissions committee. A new dean of admissions had come to Yale from a private male prep school in New York City. He came and did two things. First, he persuaded the administration to admit people on a need-blind basis so that you would no longer separate those who could afford to come to Yale in one category of admission, and the others, all the scholarship people, would have to compete with each other for a limited amount. He said, no, let's first admit people on the basis of their qualifications and then provide them with whatever they needed to make sure they could come to Yale. The other thing he did was to bring a number of faculty on the Yale admissions committee, which had essentially been run by the staff. Many of those staff had their circuits, circuits that included a lot of the major prep schools. So each prep school would get a certain number of slots. By doing this, what he did was to open up opportunities for people who couldn't have been admitted. And to a lot of the Eastern public schools that happened to have a lot of Jewish students, among others there, but

suddenly students from New Rochelle and a lot of these schools were coming—very bright. And it changed the character and I'm sure it was—since that was happening when I was still there—began to affect the nature of the student body, and perhaps the politics.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Because you were bringing in people who were probably more liberal Left, more inclined to be part of that. As I look back on it, that was important. He was a very controversial dean, as you could imagine. Because the faculty, when they were looking at applications, were saying, "We don't want just somebody who knows somebody. We want to have very bright people." They could be nerds. They could be musicians. They could be talented in all sorts of ways that were not being considered as seriously. So we ended up with a much more diverse and interesting group of undergraduates. And those were the ones I began to teach when I left there. But they were also beginning to make waves in terms of the student culture and I think that was part of what was leading to the admission of women at the time it did, and to the increasing number of ethnic minority students. So all of that was going on when I ended up leaving Yale to come to UC Santa Cruz.

**Reti:** Today is May 21, 2012. This is Irene Reti and I'm here for my second interview with Michael Cowan. Michael, you wanted to start today by sharing some reflections and wrapping up from our interview last time, about your time at Yale and your early life and career.

**Cowan:** Yes, thank you for that opportunity, Irene. I was thinking about our first session, that there are several themes that, if I could highlight them briefly, might give some insight into the kind of work experiences I had here and my perspective on those experiences. It occurs to me that there are maybe five themes that might summarize this.

The first theme is luck. I've felt very lucky in my life. I've been often at the right place in the right time, and given the Protestant ethic out of which I emerged, (laughs) the notion [was] that luck required work to deserve the luck, that one had to do something good with the luck one had. So I think that's been one kind of motivation. I've always felt that I was always in a place that I wasn't sure I quite deserved, but I'd better work to earn wherever I was.

I mentioned a little glibly, perhaps, last time what I called merit badges and Boy Scouts. But I think the merit badge factor, if I could use that rather awkward phrase, suggests something about that structure, which is that the merit badge system in one sense was a kind of general education. The expectation was that you developed some skill, some competence in a large number of fields. I was thinking the other day about one author that I wrote about and then taught for many years, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in his essays celebrated people who tried lots of different things. He used the phrase, "People who are cats who've landed on their feet," in that sense, you tried lots of different things.

**Reti:** I like that.

**Cowan:** And I suppose the notion of that was that, although you tried to be very good at a few things, the goal was to be pretty good at many things. I remember as a kid, for example, first taking piano for several years, and then the violin for a year, and then the clarinet for a year—that sense of scattering through a whole range of things. I actually rather enjoyed that. But the issue [was] how one could establish some sort of expertise in some area of interest and at the same time be a kind of informed amateur, know enough about things outside of your area of expertise to appreciate the excellence of achievement in those areas and an appreciation of what it took to achieve that kind of excellence. So I think an early belief in general education and liberal education and its virtues were embedded at a time, although I would certainly have never used that language to describe what I was doing.

There are two areas in which I think in general I've tried to develop some kind of expertise, or at least specialty—I'm not sure I could say I'm an expert. One was expertise in making connections between diverse experiences and materials, diversity in quite different things, for example, between small things and larger things; for example, between texts and their contexts; or between things that are close by and things that are remote; between different areas of life and disparate areas of knowledge; the desire to find ways of tying those together, even unlikely things to be tied together. I remember when I was an undergraduate in an introductory philosophy course, a very charismatic, wise professor named Brand Blanshard, at one point during his lecture took a piece of chalk and tossed it across the room and said, "The coast of China has now been changed."

**Reti:** Ah.

**Cowan:** That sense of the interrelationship of everything and how very small things in one area might have an impact in others. I guess chaos theory is, to a certain extent, built around that, but so is the notion of ecology. And it seems to me that in ecological sensibility that sense everything is related is important.

And I think that's related to my other particular interest or specialty, which is liking to read closely a very wide range of texts. And I don't just mean printed text, but visual text, physical things, places. Much of what I've done has involved going in and looking at things closely and trying to figure out what they implied, how they were connected. I suppose semiotics was one term I have used for that interest at one point in my life. I think my interest in planning and a lot of other things is reflected in looking at various kind of objects or texts, as I would call them, in a general sense, and trying to figure out how you could read them in larger ways.

I suppose one danger, among others, in all those miscellaneous interests, is the danger of wandering, of getting off track. (laughs) And I certainly find myself often doing that in conversations. Friends used to chide me gently for stopping in mid-sentence as my thought veered off in some other direction, or changing topics, a kind of free associative mode that's both a blessing and a curse. To me, for that reason, writing became very important. It was a kind of discipline. It was a way of creating a structure. I loved as a kid, maybe in eighth grade—I can't remember where I learned to diagram sentences. We learned to do that. I don't

think they do that in school any longer. I used to spend hours just taking sentences from newspapers and books and diagramming them just for fun. There was something wonderful about taking something that looked a little miscellaneous and chaotic and creating some sort of structure out of it, discovering a structure in that. I think it's often reflected in the way in which often when I write I first tend to overwrite, throw a lot of stuff down on the paper, often in not necessarily an orderly way, and then to do a lot of editing to try to pull it into a structure. I find if I start by trying to get it right the first time, I get blocked.

**Reti:** I have to say I really relate to what you're saying, as an interdisciplinary thinker myself and as a writer, it's a very familiar process.

**Cowan:** (laughs) Trying to find a balance between that wandering and structure is important. I remember when I first had to give a lecture course when I was an assistant professor at Yale. One thing that they don't teach you in graduate school is how to teach. You may learn by osmosis by watching faculty you have, but there was no mentoring of that nature. And to be thrown into a three-hundred student lecture room, taking over a course that had been taught by a very eminent faculty member, who had been one of my teachers who I admired, was an occasion for panic.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** I remember, I had to give three lectures a week. I would stay up until midnight, or one o'clock in the morning, come home, get up at four or five and

keep writing, and literally tear the last page of my lecture out of my typewriter and go in. The trouble with that is that I had lots and lots of words on the paper, but it's not the way in which you try to engage an audience. And it really wasn't until I got to Santa Cruz that I began to develop a style, which would mix a kind of outline of what you're saying with a more discursive way of talking so that you can look up from your lecture notes. It's a kind of mixture of outline and narrative. I think we all find our own way into a mode of communicating effectively.

For me, though, writing out those lectures, as writing almost anything else, was also, as I think many writers find, a mode of discovery. You often don't know what you think until you look at it. So that was a very important discovery. But it also was a dynamic in which writing was both exhilarating and painful. There was always something a little traumatic about writing even though it was also tremendously exciting to try to figure out what you think and to try to get it right. You keep trying to do that.

The fourth theme that I think has helped me in thinking about my life and work, and certainly about my Santa Cruz experience, is the notion that every desirable thing also comes with a cost. There is no free ride. Everything good that one gets you pay something for. I suppose if you are an optimist, you like to believe that the gain is going to be greater than the cost. If you're a pessimist, you tend to believe that the cost overrides the gain. The price, though, doesn't necessarily have to be paid in the short run; it may be paid over the long run. When we think about the environmentalist movement, or we think about the way in which

industrialization has, on the one hand, an enormous number of gains in terms of productivity but also has environmental costs and costs to human lives in other ways, it's also the case that the price may not be paid by the individual group that gets the gain. And a lot of our political debates nowadays have to do with that. I don't think it's possible to get away with anything that's cost-free. You'd like to believe that the gains are a little better than the cost, but that isn't necessarily the case. And I think in the case of this campus, there was sometimes in the early years a hope that the gains, the goods, would be greater than the costs. I want to believe that. But I also believe that there was an underemphasis of some of the costs that were paid for certain decisions that were made in the campus's planning to get some of the goods that they— And that's something that we can talk about a little more later.

**Reti:** Oh, absolutely. Let's bookmark that theme.

**Cowan:** And then the only other theme is that I think all experiences are, or at least can be, learning experiences. And that means we can learn from so-called failures as much as from so-called successes. And whether that's learning from your writing, from your teaching, from your committee work—there's always a way of learning and even roads not taken, or dead-ends that you find themselves can be learning experiences if you approach it in a certain way. So that trying to find a way in which, when you identify a problem in, say in the Santa Cruz experience, there are ways in which you can learn from that and then try to avoid that again.

So those are the general themes that I thought might be useful to highlight.

**Reti:** Great. Thank you. Okay, so now, let's return to this moment in your life when you had been at Yale teaching, for what, six years?

**Cowan:** Yes.

### **Coming to the University of California, Santa Cruz**

**Reti:** Tell me how you ended up coming to UCSC.

**Cowan:** Well, as I said, those of us who were teaching as nontenured faculty there knew that Yale, as is true of a lot of Ivy League schools, hired very few of their own, that is promoted very few of their own. When a position was open for a tenured position they would search nationally, or at least they would try to get the best person that they could. That was fine. I'd had a great experience at Yale. I'd been there for an awful long time and was perhaps in danger of becoming a little ossified, although I was constantly trying new things out there.

So my wife and I decided we needed to start looking well before I knew I was going to be out of a job there. So we got out a map of the United States. This was a time when there were a lot of jobs. It was the mid- to late sixties. Universities and colleges were growing all over the United States. And none of us, I think, in my cohort, were worried about getting a job. That situation was to change very soon, speaking about luck and being in the right time and right place.

So during the summer of 1968, we drove to Kansas City. And then my parents and I and my wife and our two very small children drove out to California. We had relatives in Southern California and stayed with them. But while I was there I stopped to see an old friend and former colleague at Yale, who was teaching at Riverside. And then we visited the Irvine campus, which in 1968 (it opened the same year as Santa Cruz) was in its third year, which was like a great Egyptian landscape, with these monoliths rising—

**Reti:** (laughs) In the smog.

**Cowan:** (laughs) There were no trees on this large ranch, the Irvine Ranch. So we saw two different UC campuses, and then drove north to [UC] Santa Cruz, where I had several former colleagues who were teaching here, including Harry Berger. I remember my wife and I being invited over to Harry's house, where he had a small party that included faculty from literature and from some of the other colleges. It wasn't exactly a job search but it was a kind of looking at the environment, and, of course, it was the first time I'd been in Northern California. Then we went on up to Redding, California to visit my brother, who had graduated from Stanford Law School and was practicing law up in Redding, and then went back to New Haven for the year.

But Harry had suggested that if I was interested in exploring anything out here I might write to Dennis McElrath, who was at that time chairing what had been combined as the anthropology and sociology board in those early years—they did a little of that combining—but who was then chair of sociology and who had

[been] one of the organizers of a new program, the community studies program. I wrote him saying I was interested; I had some urban studies interests, which I thought might be of interest. It was not exactly a letter of application. It was more of an inquiry.

These were the years, of course, before affirmative action, which was only a couple of years down the line. There were not open searches, for the most part. Essentially it was networking. And that was true in the early years of this campus, where a provost, or Dean McHenry, or another faculty member would identify somebody they thought might be good. They'd come out. They'd be interviewed by the appropriate parties. And if that didn't work out they'd go and try to find somebody else. But it wasn't that the positions were advertised in an open search. That didn't happen until, I guess, until Title IX, affirmative action, begins to kick in. It was just about that time, 1972.

So I was the beneficiary of the old boys' network, or the young old boys' network. Because before I knew it, I'd been invited out, in January of 1969 that winter, to a session involving planning community studies. And it wasn't that I had been told that this was a job interview, but Bill Friedland, who had already been identified to chair the program, and I, and Ralph Guzman, who was the other founding faculty member of community studies, showed up with Dennis McElrath and a few students, as I remember. And we spent two days talking about what a community studies major might look like.

In the course of that process, I had a meeting with Phil Bell, who was the provost of Merrill. He was living at the Cardiff House. That was the staging house. Dean McHenry lived there for a bit. And then various provosts were using that before the provosts' houses were built.

**Reti:** This is the house that is currently the Women's Center.

**Cowan:** That's right. And had a meeting, I think rather informal—I don't remember it as a formal interview—with people from the literature board. I did not give a formal talk. None of those apparatuses.

So after the two days here I got back on a plane and flew back to New Haven to teach. We were in our spring semester at that point. About a month later I received a phone call from Dennis McElrath. Dennis said, "Michael, did you see the chancellor while you were here?" I said, no. He said, "Well, we're going to have to bring you back out."

It turned out that Dean insisted on interviewing every tenured faculty member—I don't think he interviewed assistant professors at that particular point—and was rather miffed that he hadn't seen me. So I flew back out in February and Dennis accompanied me to an interview in what is now Hahn (it was Central Services at that time). And it started off as a very uncomfortable interview. As Dennis mentioned, Dean felt that community studies should be an applied program, as it became. But he thought that he wanted people who had strong social science backgrounds and could do statistical analyses. And he really thought it was rather strange to bring in somebody from a literature and history

background. And so it started off as a rather uncomfortable interview. He asked me a few token questions. And he then, at some point, as I remember, maybe wrongly, there was a pause and then he got out, my resume was in front of him and he went down and he said, "Oh, I see that you won a prize for your history essay at Yale. Could you tell me a little about that?" I said, "Well, it was a senior thesis for American studies. It was on the early history of the Boy Scouts of America and its relationship to the Protestant church." He suddenly seemed to perk up, and he said, "Oh! Were you an Eagle Scout?"

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And I said, yes. We talked for another, I don't know, ten or fifteen minutes. He was all smiles and seemed very (laughs) pleased. We left and Dennis said, "I think that saved your job." He said, "But I'll never tell anyone (laughs) given the Santa Cruz atmosphere." I don't know what—maybe he thought I was a safe appointment or something, or community minded. My Boy Scout, my merit badge experience did somehow pay off. Even though what I did not tell him was that in the process of writing that—it was a study of scouting during the growth of the Progressive youth movement in the United States; it involved the Americanization of the movement from English—so it was a case study in nationalism, and also that I was rather critical at the end. But I didn't talk about that.

Anyway, about a month or so later I received an offer and came out as a newly minted associate professor with tenure here, which meant that I didn't go through the trauma of—

**Reti:** So you already had tenure when you got here.

**Cowan:** I was hired with tenure as an associate professor.

**Reti:** Of community studies.

**Cowan:** And literature. It was a joint appointment. And a fellow of Merrill. So I had a three-way split, which is part of the story, also, of my experience.

**Reti:** So let's just back up a little bit. Why did you want to come here?

**Cowan:** I think there were a number of things that appealed to me. I hadn't been looking in a lot of other places. It was early. But there were several people who I knew, or I had known at Yale, who had come, people like Harry Berger; Tom Vogler was here, Tilly Shaw. I had known them all, not well, but had known them all at Yale. And they all seemed to be happy.

Yale was a place that valued undergraduate teaching a great deal. I remember that ladder faculty were constantly involved in the instruction of undergraduates and spent a lot of time doing their lectures. Even young faculty there, in a time before they had teaching assistants, would be teaching the sections. So the notion that you could be at a place that would value both undergraduate and graduate

teaching—because I had already done some graduate teaching at Yale, too—seemed like a nice combination.

The college system was very important. I'd been an undergraduate in a residential college. I had been a fellow and a dean, a deanlet (laughs) of one of the residential colleges. And I very much valued that as an experience. I read, and had been reading, like many others, a lot of articles on [UC] Santa Cruz that were talking about it as an important public, liberal arts experience, that praised the residential college system. There were articles in *Saturday Review* and all sorts of magazines that I was looking at at the time. So I think the college experience was important.

My own interdisciplinary work was also very important. It was advertised as a university that valued interdisciplinary work, and I had done a lot of it, and to go to a place where I thought I could continue that— And, of course, the community studies connection was as close as I supposed I could get to my American studies.

In addition, the fact that I had developed a strong interest in urban studies while I had been at Yale, and had even been involved in a project that was going to be called *The Scholar of the City*, where a group of faculty from diverse areas at Yale had been getting together to see if they might be able to pull together a program which would involve studying urban phenomenon but also involving having students move into internships in urban areas, seemed to be a nice fit with what I saw community studies would be likely to be here.

The other, I suppose, influence within that context, was that I'd been, as I mentioned last time, in an honors program where I had taken only seminars as an undergraduate, and where I had done a very substantial senior thesis, and where during my senior year we received no grades. All we received was "satisfactory." So not only did I have the experience of the no-grading system, but experience with having small groups, and experience with being able to engage in significant research. And those all seemed to be things that Santa Cruz was doing or aspiring to be doing. So it just seemed like a wonderful fit.

I'd never seen Santa Cruz until I came out here, but, of course, it was a gorgeous campus, and that was a plus. As a child, my parents had taken my brother and me to the Rocky Mountains year after year hiking, and I'd also, when I worked at a scout camp, worked at a camp where there was a large river and a bluff that you could look out. And so I think that notion of a natural environment where education could take place—I thought I wanted to be a geologist for a while, I was so enamored with the experience of being out in nature, and studying nature as well as experiencing it. All of those were probably themes that played into my—

**Reti:** So there is a little bit of a paradox in somebody who is interested in urban studies wanting to come to UC Santa Cruz, a very rural campus.

**Cowan:** Yes. That's right, that's right! Santa Cruz in its early years, as you know, was planned for 27,500 students. The decision was made to locate it in a very small community. The rationale for doing that, in addition to the fact that they

got the land much more inexpensively than if they had tried to pull together parcels over in the Santa Clara, in the Almaden area was—and the great beauty of the place, which obviously wowed Kerr, McHenry, and the Regents—was that the city seemed to be hospitable to the notion of bringing in a university that itself would turn Santa Cruz from a small town, a small city, into a major metropolis. So that rather than coming to a major metropolis, which they would have if they had gone over the hill to San Jose, the University [of California] would come here and would be a major engine in creating that metropolis.

**Reti:** Fascinating. I'd never heard that interpretation.

**Cowan:** If you read the early documents— There had been studies as to where you would locate the three new UC campuses. Those studies were done in the late fifties. [Irvine] was an obvious choice. La Jolla was an obvious choice because you had the Scripps Institute [of Oceanography] already there; you had a large urban population. The consultants that engaged in that study said that factors that should determine the location of the University had to do with its being close to an urban area because that's where you would have a student body that would come. Jobs would be available for them, both during and after their school years. There would be housing stock. You would have consulting opportunities because of the businesses in the area. All of those factors were built into the initial criteria. Santa Cruz was placed here in spite of those criteria.

**Reti:** That's right.

**Cowan:** And the major factor, in addition to the fact that they could get a large piece of land easily, was the extraordinary beauty of the place. And I think the plan, the academic plan, and other aspects of the planning of this campus were obviously affected by that, by trying to preserve, honor that natural environment. It was a good for which a cost was paid. But it was a cost that was underemphasized in the initial excitement of the campus and was to a certain extent rationalized away.

At any event, I saw this first plan and I said, what a great opportunity, to come to a place which, although small, is going to be developing as a major metropolis. So it would be a fascinating case study in how that could come about. It turned out that my early involvement in some of the city activities, the planning activities, came out of that too. Anyway, that was a motive for coming, although I think those other motives were also very important. I can't sort out which ones were the most important. They all came together in a nice little package of motives.

**Reti:** Okay, great. So then you arrived in the fall of 1969.

**Cowan:** That's right.

**Reti:** And where did you live?

**Cowan:** Moved into the house that I'm still in, on upper Western Drive. Western had been paved. It had been a country road, a dirt road coming up from Mission Street until 1960. And then several houses were put in there. They had put in a

sewer system up that road. They didn't have sidewalks or curbs. They had just put in asphalt over it. So it still had a country feeling, large pieces of land. But my wife and I had lived in temporary quarters that summer while we were looking for a place, and wanted to settle into something before the fall came. I had had the desire to have a walker's relationship to the campus. When I was in New Haven, I lived about twelve blocks from the campus and I may have mentioned that I used to walk in most weather, certainly good weather, to and from my house. It was about a twenty-minute walk. It was a good, brisk walk and I enjoyed going through the city streets, from the residential area to the campus. Here I discovered that, although that was about as close to the campus as you could get in terms of housing, it wasn't exactly a walker's relationship. It required extra effort to do it. Because the decision had been made not to build the campus, as it had been initially planned, in the meadows, what became the Great Meadow and the east side meadow, close to the entrance to campus and therefore connected to the town, but to put it up in the redwoods. That was another fateful decision.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Anyway, that's where I lived. But it was close and that was great because I could get back and forth. When you've got kids and you want to be helpful there, and also do your work, it was a good experience.

Putting the campus aside—the city was 25,000 people, very much a retirement community, and 25 percent of the population was over 65 and was on Social

Security. The people who had money were down in Monterey and Carmel. And the sidewalks, as you might say, were rolled up downtown at the end of the day. There wasn't much student or university orientation down there at the time. The Catalyst had come in at the time. But the campus was isolated from the town and more than the initial planners had envisioned. Town-gown relations were all complicated from the start, partly because—but not only because of that. The Capitola Mall had not yet been built, so if you wanted something major, [if] you wanted to go to Sears or to Macy's or anything, you had to go over the hill. San Jose was the place for large shopping. [Santa Cruz] was a very small town, rather enjoyable, but there wasn't much life down there.

**Reti:** And driving Highway 17 was a death-defying experience, even more so than it is now.

**Cowan:** (laughs) Oh, yes. Oh, no question about that! Nevertheless, I think I, like many of the faculty in those years, was very campus-focused, although I did, along with a number of other faculty (and community studies stimulated this) attempt to get involved in the life of the community, the Santa Cruz community at large.

My wife got very involved in the founding of the day care center down at the base of the campus, along with many other wives.

**Reti:** What is your then-wife's name?

**Cowan:** Her name was Ann.

**Reti:** Ann Cowan.

**Cowan:** Ann Cowan.

**Reti:** Just for the historical record.

**Cowan:** Yes, that's right. And so my son was four when I came out; my daughter was two. And like many women at the time— That's another story, when women started coming to the campus. Dean McHenry and Page Smith both claimed, and I think they were both sincere about this, that they very much wanted to hire women at the outset. The use of networks rather than open searches inhibited that. If you're looking for people at Harvard, and Yale, and Princeton, you're not going to find any women. That didn't start changing until the 1970s, and then escalated. But anyway, you had a lot of bright women who were wives of faculty, who in addition to being mothers were restless and needed something to do. My then-wife ended up coming back to school here and majoring in environmental studies. So it was great to have the campus as an opportunity for her. Anyway, she kept busy. I was throwing myself, as many other people were, into twelve-hour days up on campus, building the campus.

It was an exciting time. As I say, I had a three-way split. The literature board was already up and running. It was the largest board on campus at the time, very diverse in interests because they had tried to, in effect, create an interdisciplinary program within literary studies. Instead of having separate English departments and French departments and German departments, they were all going to be in one place and it was going to have a somewhat comparative literary dimension.

They were hiring a lot of people who had those particular interests. That had not been the center of my interests. I was doing more U.S. literary studies. I had been hired here more because of the community studies initiative than the literature initiative. I had a quarter-time appointment in literature; a quarter-time in community studies, and, of course, as we all had at the time, a half-time appointment in the college.

### **Teaching Community Studies**

That three-way split was exciting. I was, again, doing lots of different things, but it led to a lot of different meetings. And finally I had to give up something. That was pulling me a little too much in too many directions. But my initial experience in community studies was very exciting. I taught the introductory course for several years, a large lecture course. Here I was, coming out of a historical literary background and trying to teach a course which was as much about the idea of community. I was reading sociological studies, but I was reading novels, I was reading plays and trying to talk about the way in which community was configured in different kinds of contexts in and outside the United States. The students who were coming into the major, though, were very much interested in wanting to change the world.

**Reti:** By now we are talking about 1969, 1970.

**Cowan:** That's right, 1970, yes. And so I continued having to adjust. The first year I taught that course there was clearly lots of dissatisfaction. Oh, we were still having protests and periodically the campus would shut down because there

would be a strike. I remember the invasion of Cambodia led to one. So you had to find ways of organizing your classes to cope with that. I was very fortunate in that I had three teaching assistants that year. They were all in the history of consciousness graduate program and they were all New Left students, one of whom was Mike Rotkin, who had been brought from Cornell by Bill Friedland, and had come out here. They were extraordinarily helpful to me in orienting my course because they could talk the language of the student activists. And I learned a lot in that process. I think I learned much more than I taught. But it did give me a chance to continue to work with urban literature. A lot of the interests were in urban areas. There was interest, of course, in the farm movement, the labor movement, Chavez's [United Farm Workers] movement. All of those things were happening. But there was also a lot of interest in urban areas, particularly poor parts of urban areas, and they were very helpful in helping connect the students with those interests.

Community studies also had a very strong fieldwork program; it was built in from the very outset, where students would take some introductory courses, a field preparation course, then spend six months full time in the field, come back and write a senior thesis. It made perfect sense to me, given my experience at Yale. It was also a program, though, where faculty were expected to engage in some community activity. And both Bill and Ralph had done that quite a lot. My contribution was to try to get involved in community planning efforts. And so I accepted an invitation to be a part of a committee called the Citizens Planning Advisory Committee for Revision of the General Plan for the City of Santa Cruz.

Every city, in order to get certified by HUD, Housing and Urban Development, and therefore be eligible for certain kinds of redevelopment funding, needed to have a revised general plan. It also needed to have citizens' input in terms of various elements of that plan, including housing. And so I was invited, and was happy to be a part of it. It was a very large committee headed by a local physician and there were several UC administrators and faculty on that.

### *The Santa Cruz Housing Study*

So I joined that group, and one of the things that came out of that group was a desire to study Santa Cruz housing. Bill Friedland was working with a group of students on looking at transportation, an attitude study. It was a hot topic, as you know, in the early campus history, whether we should have ring roads and so forth. Bill got some funds from the Office of the President and I agreed to form a group of students, mainly community studies majors, to do a survey of housing conditions and attitudes in Santa Cruz. I had never had any experience in doing this kind of a study, but I thought it would be a useful contribution and it would be a great experience. So I pulled together about a dozen students and we spent the spring developing a questionnaire that I passed by this citizens' committee. And then we, during the summer, interviewed about eleven hundred residents of Santa Cruz, a substantial number. We were interested not only in their assessments of their own housing conditions, but were also interested in their attitudes toward their neighborhoods and their communities. And so, as a result

of that experience, I published a report called the *Santa Cruz Housing Study*<sup>2</sup> highlighting certain aspects of our study. And we turned it over to the city council. I don't know that it did anything, but it did reveal some things which I think were also being confirmed by other kinds of studies at the time. For example, among the things in our report we looked at people's attitudes towards recycling and discovered that the community was generally favorable toward doing more recycling.

We asked about historical preservation of the old Victorians and other houses and discovered that a large majority really wanted to see something being done to preserve some of the housing downtown. This coincided, by the way, with projects [by] people like Chuck Abbott, who was a major figure in restoring a series of Victorian houses downtown, and represented a kind of shifting sensibility. Santa Cruz being a kind of backwater, in some senses, and not a candidate for major development, had had a lot of those houses preserved in ways that they might not have [been in] other [towns]. Many of them were in bad condition, but it provided the basis. It was the gain that you got from the cost of being a small town.

Another attitude that came out was that people were very opposed to skip out development. They wanted to preserve the North Coast.

**Reti:** "Skip out?"

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<sup>2</sup> *The Santa Cruz Housing Study: An Introduction to Its History, Aims, and Methods*, Report prepared by Michael Cowan for the Community Studies Board of Studies at UC Santa Cruz, June, 1971.

**Cowan:** Skip out development. Where you would have a development project that was not contiguous to the built-out city. There had been a big proposal from a major development firm that wanted to build some large housing up the coast, about halfway between here and Davenport.

**Reti:** Was that what became the Wilder Ranch property?

**Cowan:** It was just on the other side of the Wilder Ranch property. And people were very much opposed to that. They were also very much opposed—there was some talk about building a nuclear power plant up in the Davenport area and there was a lot of opposition to that.

Another thing that the survey revealed is that people were very much in favor of building small neighborhood parks. And, in fact, that started to happen in the seventies and eighties and you've had those spotted around various parts. People wanted amenities.

The other major conclusion of the survey was that the vast majority of the Santa Cruz population was very much opposed to the 1964 city and county long range plans, which called for the university of 27,000 and for an urban area of about 200,000 by 1990. This was built into that initial plan, which was very much led by the business community. It was quite clear that the residents of Santa Cruz, and you have to remember there were a lot of elderly too, on fixed incomes, but others too, did not want that to happen. This university was beginning to come also to the understanding that there were all sorts of reasons that it was going to be impractical for them to build to that scale. And that was really before the state

and the University of California as a whole began to predict that the student age population was going to decline significantly. So already you had that anti-growth attitude here that was then going to be an ongoing theme, of course, in university-community relations.

One of the fascinating things that I discovered as a part of that survey was that the political diversity in Santa Cruz itself was quite remarkable. I got several letters from residents as a part of that. One was from a friend of Bud McCrary of Big Creek Lumber—a very important supporter of the university, and actually in the early years was a fan of bringing it here—who refused to be interviewed by one of our students who was a friend of hers, because there had been a report generated by some group of students here that harshly criticized Big Creek Lumber.

**Reti:** Right. *Santa Cruz and the Environment*.<sup>3</sup>

**Cowan:** And then accused him of that. So I wrote him this personal a letter and we had a very civil letter exchange back and forth. He said, "No, I appreciate that the university is doing a lot of good things. I'm glad it's here. But that really hurt McCrary and he thinks of himself as a friend of the environment, as well as the community, and I'm afraid I can't."

But there were two other letters that show the extremes in the town. One was a copy of a letter I received written to a woman who complained about being

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<sup>3</sup>Dorann Boulian ed., *Santa Cruz and the Environment*, (Santa Cruz: CA, University of California, 1970).

interviewed. One thing I stressed to the students, and they were, I think as a whole very good, is that they should go out neatly dressed. They should be polite. They should not try to force themselves on anyone who didn't want to be interviewed. But you got a certain amount of push back. And one woman had written to Ann Garney, who was then a city councilperson. She was also a member of the John Birch Society. She sent me a copy of a letter that she had written which basically attacked the university for invasion of privacy and then said, [reading from letters pulled from a folder]: "Many good Americans through their ignorance and gullibility have supported the political takeover of our great country by the socialists who are centralizing all power in Washington," and then went on to attack all those people who take handouts. And then, "To be taxed to support campuses that are turning out more revolutionaries than engineers is revolting." It went on and on that way. So that was one side of the population. Now, that group was going to not be as strong, of course, a decade later. But it represented a significant part of the population in what was still a very Republican city.

**Reti:** By the time you arrived on campus in the late 1960s, the political climate in the city had shifted dramatically from the climate which you would have encountered had you arrived in 1965.

**Cowan:** That's right. No question about that. It was a highly politicized community where anything that happened would be seen politically. So even a study like this, which was designed to be helpful to the community and was

written in a very neutral way, we weren't trying to push a particular line, was seen as—

The other letter, though, would show us the other side—This was, "Dear Michael Cowan. At the moment I am okay with housing needs. But this could change at any moment in a rented house. For instance, rent went up ten bucks last month, with no raise in my retirement, naturally. I favor a revolutionary solution: the complete overthrow of the establishment and the institution of a socialist cooperative instead of the failing private enterprise, private greed set-up. Anyway, more power to you in your efforts, as not enough people are involved. Sincerely, Tom Scribner."

**Reti:** Oh, my goodness!<sup>4</sup>

**Cowan:** A wonderful old Socialist. There was that small cadre of people in town. Anyway, those were the two extremes going in the community. So for me, it was a fascinating case study of getting involved in the community via the housing study and to be aware that there were these tensions. So when I read awhile back Bill Domhoff's co-authored book called *The Leftmost City: Power and Progressive Politics in Santa Cruz*, I was reminded of the dynamics of those early days.

My relationship with community studies was wonderful. I had great colleagues. I loved the students. I liked their activism. I was learning a hell of a lot from

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Scribner was well known in Santa Cruz as a player of the musical saw on Pacific Avenue and a folk hero. He was a tree cutter in his early years and active with the International Workers of the World [IWW].

them. I taught that introductory course quite a bit. And I started teaching a course in what I called, initially, urban planning and design. I got very interested in the planning process and in the documents of the planning process. When you think of planning documents, they are really utopian documents, that is they are projecting an ideal world that the planning is going to lead to, or at least a more ideal world, within constraints. And, of course, the results, the outcome of that is never quite what the plans project, but it was looking at those too.

So we would study Santa Cruz as a case study. I would go over to San Jose; I'd take the students over there. We went up to San Francisco and looked at housing and other things, and urban environments, and asked ourselves, what's working and not working? What spaces are working? You go to a public space that's designed to serve a lot of people. What happens if you don't see anybody there? And I looked at San Jose State and San Francisco State. We went to the Berkeley campus. One of the areas that I got interested in was the way in which universities in those settings were themselves related to their communities and playing their part.

**Reti:** Especially public universities.

**Cowan:** Especially public universities. So I was having a great time doing that. We were both reading about planning at large, looking at urban development, but also looking at campuses in that context. And it was certainly in that context, in part, that I got very interested in this campus. And it became a kind of case study. I would often start here, by asking students simply to look around here, to

read the initial planning documents of this campus and to look at what was happening. It was a kind of rehearsal for movement out into the world. But then for me, it became my primary case study, that is personally, and in many ways it became my fieldwork site for much of the rest of my career even after I left community studies.

I finally left that program, although I continued to teach for a while in the program, simply because, as I said, there were too many meetings. I had getting community studies going—a very demanding program, very exciting. I had the literature department. It was a large department. We were constantly meeting, doing personnel actions and so forth. And I was very much involved in Merrill College. I finally had to choose to let go of one of those commitments so I could focus enough on the others.

### **Merrill College**

Merrill was an interesting experience. I came in the second year. There were only six tenured faculty members in Merrill when I first arrived. Many of the tenured slots had been allocated to the first three colleges because they needed to have leaders of each of the boards of studies, as well as leaders of the college. So there was a limited amount of money for faculty positions, and so inevitably the colleges that came after the first colleges proportionally didn't get as many tenured faculty. Merrill was one of the smallest of the colleges at that time and therefore it had a smaller contingent of faculty in any event. So as one of the six

tenured faculty, I ended up having to chair the Merrill faculty for my first two years here, thrown right into it.

**Reti:** Wow.

**Cowan:** Now, a lot of the faculty were not just assistant professors, they were acting assistant professors. I was counting, looking back over the list and I think something like eight or nine of the first faculty at Merrill from those first few years had not finished their dissertations yet.

**Reti:** Oh, when you say "acting" you mean they were "all but dissertation."

**Cowan:** That was the technical term for being employed not as a full assistant professor until they got their Ph.D.

**Reti:** So they were trying to finish their dissertation—

**Cowan:** While they were doing all these other things. Merrill, like all of the colleges, was engaged in what I call the barn-raising phases. And when you think of it, every college founded went through a kind of barn-raising phase of trying to build its own curricula, faculty getting used to each other, trying to develop modes of governance and interaction. I think that's certainly what happened at Merrill. Add to that the fact that it was, in many ways, an activist's college. Its theme focused on the international Third World and some of its domestic counterparts, focused on poverty, focused on social change. It drew a student body, as well as a faculty body, that was very much interested in those activities. So we were constantly talking about those issues, not only talking

about them, but students were [for example] out boycotting Safeway because of the grape strike.

And like community studies, Merrill had a very active field program and through Volunteers in Asia and local organizations was sending a fair number of students out into field studies, and we even had a fieldwork program [run by] Nick Royal [who] came the same year I did. So it was an exciting time. I was with a bunch of young, New Left faculty.

**Reti:** And was that what drew *you* to Merrill?

**Cowan:** Merrill is the college I was assigned to. We didn't have choices in which college we went to. But the social commitment was something that drew me. I don't think I had fully appreciated until I got here what that actually meant in the Merrill context. It's something that we could talk about a little later, perhaps, in terms of the ways in which those dynamics of getting hired at a particular college, given its themes, affected us.

In any case, I was thrown into Merrill governance. We met endlessly (laughs) it seemed like. We must have met two or three times a week in either fellows meetings or steering committee meetings—I was chairing the steering committee—or in what were called Town Hall meetings. Our provost, Phil Bell, had not been the founding provost, but had come in because the person initially designated to be provost had decided not to come. Phil had come from Haverford College. He had also been very much involved in some projects in Africa through the Rockefeller Foundation and other things. So he had come

believing that sending students out, making students aware of the larger world, particularly the Third World, as it was called then, and taking courses on Africa, India, parts of Asia, the Middle East, would be very good for students. And then doing fieldwork projects.

He was also a Quaker. So he decided that he was going to set up a government structure that would be basically operating all out of consensus. I've learned a lot about consensus and how it can be used and abused. Phil was a sincere Quaker and really wanted to make a consensus ethos in which all the members of the college—faculty, staff, and students—were equals. That's why the town meetings were there. They were even run by students. And the notion was that decisions would be coming out of the town meetings, where you would have to achieve consensus if you wanted to do something. At the same time, Phil was a part of the UCSC bureaucracy and, as provost, had to be an administrator.

It was also the case that consensus works best in communities that have a long history of consensus, the small Quaker communities, where people over a long period of time have learned how to use consensus in a way which forwards the community-building project. When you bring a bunch of strangers together who are not used to that, students, faculty, and staff, it becomes much harder, and especially such a large number of people coming together. So town meetings would often be chaotic. Town meetings faded, I think, after several years. Because one of the things about consensus is you try to persuade respectfully others to your viewpoint. But if somebody believes strongly, in principle, that a particular proposed action is not right, that individual can block consensus. His

or her objecting has to be respected, or is by convention respected by the other members of the community. So all it would take would be one student or two to object on principle to something and nothing would happen. So you would talk and talk and talk.

**Reti:** What kinds of decisions would be at stake?

**Cowan:** It ranged from whether the students at Merrill wanted to join a forming campuswide student-governing group— There had been a proposal, for example, for a tripartite commission to involve faculty, staff, administrators, and students. There was a concern, not unique to Merrill, that having a student-wide organization or campuswide organization would take away from college power. But also there was a skepticism that that would just be another Mickey Mouse, high-school type student organization. There were views that were expressed all during 1968-69, not only at Merrill, but elsewhere, about these matters. But anyway, all it would take would be a few students who would object to that to make it impossible to do anything. [Another] issue is, do students participate in the hiring of new faculty, or at least have their input in that matter? So it wasn't just those elements that would normally be seen to be student life elements that—

**Reti:** That's what I was wondering.

**Cowan:** —it had to do with a lot of other aspects of the college. But the same problem, we found, was in the faculty group. The faculty were empowered by the Academic Senate rules and regulations. We were an agent as a faculty

[members] of the Academic Senate and had certain powers, in terms of curriculum, in terms of hiring, and several other things. Well, Phil Bell was often put in an awkward position where the faculty would want to do something and he was uncomfortable with it, I think because of the pressure he felt from the central administration. And so he would raise as a matter of principle an objection to an action, and use the Quaker language for what was really not a matter of principle as much as more a matter of trying to maintain a certain amount of provostial authority. It was perfectly appropriate for him to do that, but not to use consensus as a way of doing that. So there was a constant tension between Phil and a number of the faculty. And as chair of the faculty, I was in the position of often having to mediate or deal with that. Phil would periodically become a nervous wreck from all of the tensions. So he would take short absences. And Noel King, who was then vice provost, would step in and act as provost for a while until Phil would come back.

Phil then left in 1972 as provost, and a short time later went to a university in Texas [Rice], a private university. And John Marcum became provost in 1972. At any event, being at Merrill was exciting. I was interacting with faculty from lots of different fields. That was a great pleasure. The core course, like core courses in many colleges, was constantly under assault. Students didn't like it because it was required. I taught a section of the core course, and we were having to teach sections of the core course and we would divide up the lectures to teach. But the core course disappeared, that version of it, early in Merrill's history, and area-

specific courses emerged instead, that is a course on India, a course on Africa, a course on the Middle East.

**Reti:** In the fall of 1978, I was a Crown student. I took the Merrill core course, which was called *The Third World and Us*.

**Cowan:** Yes, that's right. It was reinvented. And Alan Sable was one person who taught the course. And by that time, graduate students were starting to serve as teaching assistants—

**Reti:** Yes, Kevin Danaher was a teaching assistant. Dilip Basu was the professor. But that was a reinvention.

**Cowan:** Yes. That was the case in many colleges. But Merrill also, as I think was the case in many colleges, allowed us to teach a lot of things we might not otherwise have taught in our boards. I did a lot of team teaching with colleagues in Merrill. And one of the most memorable of such courses, for example, something that we could never do now was—Jack Schaar had come the year after I did, from Berkeley. He and Sheldon Wolin had come to Santa Cruz partly in protest of the way the administration had handled all of the student protests up there [at UC Berkeley]. He had brought with him one graduate student, Marge Frantz, who became a good friend and one of the mainstays of American studies, as well as women's studies.

Jack, and Wally Goldfrank and I, in 1972, decided it would be interesting to teach a course that we ended up calling *The Quality of Public Life*. So we decided

that each of us would offer a five-unit course under our own boards, and we would require that the students take all three of those courses simultaneously. So we had about a cluster of about twenty students, both graduate and undergraduate students, by the way, for an entire quarter. And we also—this is Jack Schaar's influence—we decided that we would require some summer reading. So we required that all students, to take the course, must read *War and Peace* and Fanshen's *A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*. And we would meet four days a week. Each of us would take turns giving mini lectures, and then we would have a general discussion, and then we would break into small groups. So we were spending a lot of time together. And we read everything from Thucydides, to King Lear, to Lincoln's speeches, to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to contemporary books on technology and international relations, all within this frame of looking for what constituted leadership, authority, community, equality, democracy within different kinds of frameworks, a meditation on those themes very much influenced by Jack's political theory but also by our perspectives. Again, one of those extraordinary learning experiences that you couldn't possibly replicate.

Merrill, because of its interest in the Third World, especially under John Marcum's leadership, began to pay particular attention to trying to help faculty organize around areas. So Latin American studies, as a program, emerged out of there. There was a Southeast and East Asian studies emphasis that emerged out of Merrill. And American studies emerged as a kind of area studies out of that. I had been there and had been very much interested in that, in looking at the

United States in a larger context. And this was a fascinating new context for me to look at the United States in. We can talk about that later. But those were the kinds of things that were emerging. Colleges were developing their own majors. Modern society and social thought, Western civilization, aesthetic studies—those were emerging out of different colleges. And Merrill, because of its particular cast of characters, was doing that.

One of the things that happened at Merrill, as elsewhere, is that it was a very intense, exciting experience but it also was an experience where you could easily get burned out. We were spending endless amounts of time planning, teaching new courses, spending time in meetings—doing all sorts of things that are involved in getting something up and running. Then faculty would take a sabbatical. When they'd come back they would begin to back off a little. Our doors in Merrill were almost always open, our office doors, and students were constantly coming by. It was an open door policy. We were interacting with a lot of students.

When you look at those early years and see the number of independent studies that we did— In community studies I was also sponsoring field studies and senior theses. But we would have all sorts of independent studies, people who were doing that, independent majors. American studies emerged out of a series of independent majors that students were taking, and the faculty who were involved in that decided that it was more responsible to the students if we tried to create an advising structure that was a little more orderly for them. But we all were doing that a lot. And if you look at people's bio-bibliographies of that

period, you will see just a huge number of independent studies. Sometimes people were taking on—and this created a problem in terms of reputation—were taking on forty or fifty independent studies. And, of course, you couldn't possibly do that much. So it began to call into question the quality of that. But I think most of us were handling a fair number, but we were trying to be responsible. We were meeting with students an hour a week each, or in group independent studies, all sorts of things happened. That was very exciting and I think it was great for the students. But it couldn't sustain itself. How do you sustain something like that when you have a 16:1 faculty-student ratio? I had come from a university with an 8:1 faculty-student ratio.

**Reti:** So this seemed big.

**Cowan:** So you were trying to do in a public university with that ratio, to do something that was hard enough to do in a university such as I came from, with a dedication to undergraduate education, but with a much richer student-faculty ratio.

So faculty, during the seventies, began to back off just a little, still with a real commitment there, but trying to find a way of pacing themselves, particularly as faculty began to come up for promotion, and as you started hearing stories and seeing examples of people who didn't get tenure, who had thrown themselves into that. Virtually all of the faculty that I was working most closely with in Merrill ended up getting tenure during that time. Many have gone on to rather productive scholarly careers since then. But when you start with a very young

faculty in a volatile environment, barn-raising, there are particular challenges. And that, of course, became one of the motifs in the crisis of the campus.

### **The Climate at UC Santa Cruz in the 1970s**

I can perhaps say more about the colleges later, but I think maybe the other thing to note in that time is that, simultaneously with the colleges trying to settle into place, was the volatility in the world as a whole, and in the local area. The Vietnam War, the civil rights movement (which were happening simultaneously), the United Farm Workers, politics in California being extraordinarily volatile. The university here was founded in great [economic] times in the early sixties, when universities as a whole were growing; there was a huge flood of population. And we had, of course, and it makes a real difference when you have leadership like Clark Kerr, somebody who very much believed in a small multi-campus university and in experimenting and was very much in favor of the kinds of experiments that took place here. And then with his friend, Dean McHenry, who cared about this a great deal too.

But there were all sorts of ways in which there were tensions within that enterprise. It depended on an influx of students but also an influx of resources. And at a time when, after Reagan became governor and Kerr was fired—he was hostile to the universities because they were seen as beds of protest. Then in the fall of 1968 the Regents' meeting here, where students had blocked the Regents and lobbied, and Reagan was there and was not happy with that. And I think, although it was true throughout the system—Berkeley, for example, is what

brought Clark Kerr down more than Santa Cruz—I think the Santa Cruz campus became an image in his mind. And then the budget cuts, the recession of around 1970, and the Reagan budgets then. And then Jerry Brown in his first round as governor inheriting a bad economy, and also in a rather kind of monastic way feeling that the University didn't need the kind of resources. So he was also a part of the process of budget cuts.

And then a slowdown, in fact, almost a stoppage in growth of the University, which, by the way, I think could have been anticipated more than it was here. I think, as I was talking about costs and gains and perhaps not looking at the costs, this campus was very popular in the early years, lots more students applying than wanted to come here. It was planning to grow at a rate of five hundred up to a thousand students a year in the early years.

**Reti:** That's a huge growth rate.

**Cowan:** Very rapid growth in the early years. In percentage. It was down to about six or seven hundred a year. But what was interesting was that by 1970-71, shortly after I arrived, we were still growing in the number of students, but the number of applications was already falling off, that is, the rate of increase of applications was falling off, and actually began to decline around 1972-73. That was happening, but I think the campus was still caught in the early halo of the fact of great publicity and everything. So it had not developed an outreach program or a program to try to attract more students.

**Reti:** What was driving the decrease in the rate of applications?

**Cowan:** I think systemwide, and statewide, and in fact university-wide, the baby boomer population was beginning to—

**Reti:** It was a demographic shift.

**Cowan:** It was a demographic shift nationally. Nevertheless, Berkeley, and UCLA, and many campuses were still having an increase in their population. It was Santa Cruz and Riverside, Riverside before Santa Cruz. Almost all of the other campuses were still having an increase in the number of applications during this time. Our rate of application increase was slowing down. But nothing was being done, I think partly because the administration was so distracted by lots of other things. Partly because Dean [McHenry] had— He cared immensely about the campus. He threw himself into the campus. And he cared so much about it, that like a proud father he was a little overprotective. He wanted to make sure that things were not happening which would create problems for him as he tried to negotiate with the Regents and with the legislature and others. He didn't develop a very strong middle management group, in bureaucratic terms. He himself, [in an article he wrote in the 1980s], acknowledges that he didn't leave much of a leadership. He had counted on the provosts to be that, but there was a turnover in provosts. He appointed major figures to head boards. They were very much focused on their boards. But in terms of outreach, very little was happening. He didn't have much of an admissions office.

There were some additional problems then with the EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] head, a guy named Roberto Rubalcava who was pushing

to bring in a lot more Chicanos but was a contentious person. Dean very much wanted to build a minority population at Santa Cruz, and I think his appointment of Herman Blake was a sign of that, hiring people like Ralph Guzman, whom I think he probably knew when Ralph was an older graduate student at UCLA. Dean very much wanted to do that. This was a hard place to bring them, by the way, a small town, very little local Hispanic population. They were over the hill. And it's working class. And this was a campus which was attracting upper middle class, white kids initially, and was seen not necessarily as a place which was going to be focused on jobs. So that working class population, which was an important part of the Hispanic population, was not coming here. That was part of the issue. That population was growing systemwide, but it was going to the urban campuses, it was going to the CSU campuses. But it wasn't coming here.

**Reti:** Was Merrill an exception to that?

**Cowan:** Merrill was something of an exception. But you're still dealing with a very, very small population of minority students. When I arrived on campus, I think there were only three black students at Merrill, a handful of black students on campus. They complained. Herman [Blake], of course, was very important, because when he moved into the provostship, leadership position of what became Oakes College, College Seven, he himself organized some very important outreach efforts. So that was beginning to happen.

But the campus was not as attractive. It wasn't attracting as many of the traditional constituents that it had been. And then, a series of other things happened, a kind of perfect storm. A couple of murders in the area.<sup>5</sup> Then, of course, there was the town-gown tensions, so that the town was hostile to building up the campus rapidly, wanted to, in fact, keep the population much smaller on campus. Students who were coming were also enamored with, and in part attracted by the natural environment, although when you read a lot of early oral histories with the students, they were also attracted by the narrative evaluations. That was very important. The college system was attractive. Narrative evaluations may have been the single largest attractor. But the thought that they would have a lot of freedom to engage in their own curriculum. All of that was important. The population that was attracted to that was not increasing, or attracted enough to Santa Cruz enough to help it build.

And then the murders, which caused Santa Cruz to be labeled as the Murder Capital. And the fact that the campus, because of its college system, was not building many of the typical kinds of central student support facilities, the new student union that some students wanted. The fact that we were focusing on liberal arts majors and not the kind of majors that were going to build jobs. The failure of getting an engineering school here in the late sixties. Not having a business program at that point, or a business economics program. Those kinds of programs. The applied programs would have been things like community

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<sup>5</sup> In 1973, with the discovery of four bodies in Henry Cowell State Park, then District Attorney Peter Chang mumbled a comment about "Murderville, USA." It was picked up by a reporter and went to wire service as "Murder Capital of the World."

studies; environmental studies was beginning to emerge and became an extraordinary success. But all of those factors were all, I think, coming together. So that by 1974, the campus, which was taking its first redirect class— Students were able to apply to only one UC campus at a time. They couldn't apply to multiple UC campuses. And Santa Cruz was having to take other people's castoffs.

**Reti:** Was it primarily Berkeley?

**Cowan:** It was primarily Berkeley. Most them were coming from Berkeley, a few from Davis.

**Reti:** So they'd apply to Berkeley—

**Cowan:** —apply to Berkeley, wouldn't get in to Berkeley, and then would come here. But there was also a retention problem. A higher proportion of Santa Cruz students were leaving. Some of them just dropped out. But some of them were transferring to other schools, because they came here and didn't find the range of programs, or because they weren't used to a small town environment, or because they wanted fraternities or sororities. Or whatever. Enough. There was a strong group of enthusiasts; there's always been that extraordinary, wonderful core of enthusiasts here. But there wasn't quite enough to keep the campus growing.

So we took our first redirects. That was the first year, by the way, the first year that [Chancellor Mark] Christensen came. Dean McHenry retired in June of 1974, just before this hit, although you could have anticipated it. And Dean, in his oral

history, which was done in 1968 and 1969, had indicated that he really was planning to retire around 1970. He thought that ten years—he'd been appointed in 1960—was enough. And I think he was getting a little tired. But I think that he really got tired after that. I think he was just holding on out of a sense of responsibility, in part, to the campus, but at a time when it was difficult for him to reach out. A lot of people have talked about feeling that he became more and more isolated, not just from the students, but from the faculty in those last years. So he was really tired. He himself, I think, suffered from burnout. And that's one of the sadnesses. But he also, I think, could not quite acknowledge that there were things that he might have done that might have headed off some of the most unfortunate things that happened. But it was a perfect storm. There were a lot of things outside of his control that couldn't have—

Anyway, in 1974, because systemwide was saying we need to have the system as a whole plan for slow growth, very little growth in most campuses, and Santa Cruz then was at about sixty-five hundred as I recall, and so in 1974, our first year of Mark Christensen, a committee was formed chaired by Karl Lamb, who had been one of the founding faculty members of the campus—he had actually come around 1962-63, a professor of politics, one of the few Republicans on the faculty, a moderate Republican, very much an Earl Warren kind of Republican. They planned for a campus of no more than about seven thousand. So our academic plan that was revised in 1974, and then the long range development plan thought of the campus as being basically frozen at about seven thousand. That meant lots of different things in terms of planning. You had [originally]

planned to build out rapidly, scatter things, and then gradually fill in. And we suddenly discovered we had a campus that was very spread out, not much connection.

**Reti:** Right, and the whole east and west side schism.

**Cowan:** Yes, and that's a whole story in and of itself, that maybe we can talk about later. But in addition, I think there was the faculty, who were trying to catch their breath from the barn-raising years, and a kind of crisis that came from feeling that the campus wasn't as popular as it was, and therefore the sense that it would be a city on a hill, a beacon on the hill, was beginning to become a more contested understanding. I've often thought the city on a hill was a nice image. Page Smith was a U.S. historian and he was the one who brought that term. We have it embedded in the student newspaper. It was used by John Winthrop in founding the [Massachusetts Bay Colony]. Winthrop was the first governor of that first group of immigrants, migrants from England to Massachusetts. And we were a bunch of immigrants who had come together. That was a vision of a community. But city on a hill had two images. One was that it would be a light that you wouldn't put under a bushel. It would be an example to the world, to higher education, of what could be done. Powerful. But it was also an elevated perspective on the world. And there was by no means loss of full confidence in that, but a feeling that maybe there was going to be more difficulty in achieving that here than the founders had initially hoped. And [then] the battle with the city that we were beginning to get. I remember some colleagues from other campuses also sniping at the campus: "Oh, you thought you were so great. But

look, you're in trouble now and it shows what happens." There was a lot of that in the atmosphere. I think most of the faculty remained dedicated. Most of the students were enthusiastic. But there was this doubt that crept in. And I think that the campus turned during the seventies as it was trying to figure out what had gone wrong, how you could right things again.

Mark Christensen came in during that period. A lot of people have talked about the way in which he wasn't a successful chancellor for a lot of reasons and I don't know that I have any perspectives that I have to add to that story. But I think he also got caught in this turmoil and didn't read the situation well enough early and didn't, for whatever reason, have the skill to try to build some sort of a way out.

### **Reaggregation**

One of the things that had happened the year before he came, and that Dean McHenry was very much opposed to, was a first phase of what was called reaggregation. One of the problems that the colleges had faced, and it was the cost side of the virtues of having faculty from lots of different disciplines in the college—it was the flip side of what John Marcum called once "the Noah's Ark problem." Two historians, two anthropologists, two physicists, two of this and that—

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** (laughs) It wasn't quite that simple. But you are trying to build a liberal arts college in each of the colleges. It meant that faculty, although there was the excitement of dealing with colleagues from all sorts of areas and even co-teaching with them and interacting with them and learning a lot about their fields—that was certainly exciting to me—meant that the people who were in your own field were other places on campus.

Now, the scientists, of course, were a part of disciplinary clusters from the outset [and] although they were affiliated with the colleges, were in laboratories that were adjacent, and their offices in their boards were together. So they had that support structure. I know sometimes scientists were blamed for the demise of elements of the college system, the compromising of some elements of the college system. And that's only a quarter truth, I think. Scientists needed graduate students because they depend on work with cadres of graduate students in their laboratories to get on with their work. Scientists had to spend a lot of time raising external funds to support their research because the University only provides their salaries and basic facilities, labs and so forth. But a lot of the money they need for the specialized facilities and to hire graduate students comes from grants. They have to spend an enormous amount of time doing that. They are also, overall as an area of investigation of knowledge, used to communal activities. There's a lot of competition within the sciences but they also depend on an apprentice system. You become a junior member of a research group. And your name appears as the tenth name on the list of authors in a publication. Then you gradually move up that hierarchy, to the point where then you yourself have

to apply for a grant and organize your own group of graduate students. That's an immensely time and energy-consuming activity. And to survive, even those scientists—and there were many here and still are many here—who cared a great deal about undergraduate education, had to devote a great deal of attention to it. So from the outset, you had scientists with their offices together, forming their research cadres, both because they needed to do that to advance professionally, but that was because of the nature of their modes of inquiry. A few of them had second offices in their colleges, but the colleges couldn't afford many such offices. They were, if they interacted with the college, having to come over from Science Hill to whatever colleges they were in to eat lunch (no luncheon facilities were, of course, in the natural sciences areas at those times), to attend meetings, often to teach their college seminars. And although a ten-minute walk isn't the worst thing in the world, it was one more additional task that they had to face, that their colleagues who had faculty offices in the colleges didn't.

So gradually, with some significant exceptions, most particularly exceptions in the first couple of colleges, for reasons maybe we can talk about [later], faculty, although they continued to teach college courses, began to teach versions of their discipline courses and began to come around less frequently. So that dynamic was already happening.

**Reti:** All faculty, not just science faculty.

**Cowan:** That's right. But particularly science faculty were beginning to have that. And then faculty in social sciences and the humanities, although they valued the

interdisciplinary connections, including connections to scientists, were beginning to feel perhaps more isolated than they wanted to be from their own disciplinary colleagues. I had literature colleagues scattered all over the campus. But I was going to meetings, I was teaching literature courses. And to try to build a coherent curriculum you needed to interact more with faculty.

So after that barn-raising phase, faculty in some of these other areas began to say, "We need to talk more with our own [disciplinary] colleagues." So we began to look for various ways of doing it. And so-called reaggregation that was taking place with the stimulus of the committee, which was then called Budget and Academic Planning, BAPL—it became the Committee on Planning and Budget, the senate committee—began to look for ways in which enough faculty could move around to create small clusters of faculty. And they did a survey when I was on the committee where they asked faculty how many of them thought that clustering faculty in boards as a whole, or subdisciplinary clusters, would be desirable. The majority of faculty thought that would be a good idea, not necessarily clustering an entire board in a college, but they were particularly in favor of clustering subsets of boards, so then you would end up having a particular board only in a few colleges, rather than scattering them through many colleges. It was an attempt to bring together people who had disciplinary interests at the same time they would be a part of other disciplinary clusters. So you'd try to have the best of both of those worlds.

Now, Dean was very unhappy about that, because he thought it was backing away from the notion of a liberal arts college, and I know Clark Kerr was also unhappy about that. He didn't block it.

**Reti:** This would have been his last—

**Cowan:** 1973-74, his last year. So a number of faculty moved—it may have only been 8 or 10 percent of the faculty that moved. The rearrangements were rather modest, but it was enough to try to create a few clusters here and there. It was complicated by the fact that the college bylaws for each of the colleges gave the college fellows supposedly control over recommending new hires. And some of the colleges, particularly the early colleges, Stevenson and Cowell, as I remember, were adamant that they vote in any new faculty member who wanted to come into their college, even if it wasn't a hire from outside but simply a movement of somebody who had already been hired. So there was a whole issue of how you interpreted that. It didn't stop the movement, but it was just one more tension, where there was a feeling, at least in some colleges, that they were losing control of their own destiny.

I think that was a good move. It preserved some of the interdisciplinary elements of the college but also strengthened the elements of the college, your relationship with your own discipline, in many cases. But because Dean wasn't very interested in it, he didn't encourage it. And then when Mark Christensen came in, the swirl of those two years meant that not much more progress took place in what could have been a multiyear project.

### **The UCSC College System in the 1970s**

If I were to identify three other issues that created some problems in the early years— First, the determination of what the optimal size for a college would be. Dean, and Clark Kerr, and others who were involved in the founding had gotten some advice and the feeling that the colleges should be around five hundred to eight hundred students—somewhere in there would be just about the right size. I think Dean would have preferred the smaller size. The thought is that you wanted an intimate community, and as Clark Kerr said, "You could know everybody else in the college by name," that you would recognize them, at least, by face. And Clark Kerr's experience at Swarthmore was a way of marking that. One of the problems was that those colleges that typically had that small factor had a much richer student-faculty ratio. So that, for example, if you had a five-hundred student college, you would have maybe fifty faculty. And so the size of the faculty— In a small college, even if they were in separate departmental structures, they were all close together and they could interact in the faculty dining hall and the student union and so forth.

Here, we initially had a rather rich start-up of about twelve to one, but very quickly it moved to sixteen to one, which meant that you were only going to get thirty-some faculty. So you couldn't have the variety and you couldn't build any depth, much depth at all, in the college. So the issue of what it would take to balance the desire for a close-knit community and adequate resources to run a liberal arts college in each of the residential colleges was not fully thought out.

Another thing that was not fully thought out was the impact of having a large number of students living off campus. The campus was designed to have, initially, about 60 to 70 percent of its students, two-thirds of the students on campus, but certainly at least 50 percent on campus. And in the early years, at Cowell, for example, in its first years, with the so-called trailer phase, there was a small group of students living off campus, but all first-year students and all transfer students were living on campus. And that was the case for the first couple of years.

But first, the colleges didn't have enough room for that. They had only been built to house about 50 percent of the students. But secondly, you had a lot of students, particularly transfer students, who never lived on campus after the first couple of years, and therefore didn't go through the core course, didn't have the on-campus dorm living experience of interacting, and they were already commuting, if you will. It's not that they didn't come to their college, but a lot of what they were doing was going to wherever their classes were on campus, going to the library. And so their relationship to their colleges was somewhat more mixed, some, very much engaged and enthusiastic, but many of them not having that same kind of interaction. Whereas in many of the liberal arts colleges that were used as models for UC Santa Cruz, students were basically living on campus for all four years, which meant you had a lot of seniors and juniors in the dorms, which meant that you had a certain ballast, intellectual ballast.

We were creating what one colleague, much too simply and not very generously, called lower-division ghettos, students coming just from high school, just away

from their parents for the first time, all living together. And what you needed then, was a structure of preceptors and residential preceptors to both be support *in loco parentis*, but also to enforce regulations, parietal rules, intervisitation rules, and drug use regulations and all. But not having the example of upper-division students around, who were already pursuing their majors, and who could provide advice and informal advising and set examples—you didn't have as much of that in the colleges. So those were problems here. Could we have built more housing to do that? Well, probably not very easily because at least initially they were just building dorms. They started building apartments in the mid-seventies because a lot of students, after having a year or two in the dorms, wanted to go off where they could—

**Reti:** Yes, cook for themselves.

**Cowan:** Cook and have the other privacy that you would want there. But also, it was clear that you weren't going to get that many students— We were already housing a higher proportion of students than other campuses but you weren't getting that upper-division leadership. So the question is, if we had instead of building lots of new colleges, tried to create larger colleges, as we eventually ended up doing, would that have made a difference in terms of the number of faculty you could have attached to the college, in terms of the number of upper-division students you could be housing? That began to happen, as we know, but later, and almost without planning.

**Reti:** Yes, more out of a sense of desperation due to overcrowding as the campus grew.

**Cowan:** And I think it's had some good results. But it was one of those things that was not fully considered. The other was that the colleges had been designed primarily, and understandably, to benefit students. Faculty were seen there to be available to interact with the students. The thought [was] that the faculty would interact with each other to plan a program. They would build a sense of community among themselves. But the colleges were not initially designed to help faculty research. We wanted faculty who had active research agendas of the sort expected by the UC system. The scientists, from the outset, were in a physical as well as a professional structure that supported the research aspirations as well as their teaching commitments. But in other areas, the notion was not that you would bring together faculty who might have cognate research interests in the social sciences and humanities so that they could reinforce each other.

**Reti:** So you are talking about having an intellectual structure.

**Cowan:** That's right. Well, even having faculty with adjacent offices or offices on the same floor who are engaged in related research would create a proximity breeding program dynamic.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And that is part of what we wanted the colleges to do. It wasn't that some very significant research didn't come out of faculty members' proximity with faculty from other disciplines. I can think of some examples—the famous chicken book that Charles Daniels and Page Smith did.<sup>6</sup> And there were some other places. John Isbister talks a lot about his being influenced as an economist by interacting with other people who were interested in ethnic and minority and immigrant issues. And I think you had that elsewhere. But it wasn't happening in a fully thought through way. Serendipity was a major part of that.

I say that as a background to the fact that reaggregation of faculty into small clusters was an attempt to begin to address that. But it was not fully thought through. And it was only later, as various kinds of research groups—for example, in the early eighties, the Feminist Research FRA began to emerge. Or in other places. College Eight was initially not a residential college because they didn't have their facilities, they weren't built until thirteen years—actually longer than that, after the college was founded. Nevertheless it was a place where a lot of environmental studies faculty clustered. So you had an interdisciplinary program, but with faculty from various angles working together so that the college as a location for interdisciplinary research as well as disciplinary research was very promising.

In fact, the restructuring of the campus over the years has made that more possible now than it was. I could give you lots of examples of the fact that the

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<sup>6</sup> *The Chicken Book*, (first edition, North Point Press, 1975).

restructuring of the boards or of the colleges to house, in some cases entire boards—linguistics would be a good example, philosophy—I could think of others—or significant portions of boards—a very controversial move, but nevertheless created structures that could function both as teaching and research units. And I think the fact that the colleges initially [did not think much] about how you would facilitate, not just encourage but facilitate faculty research in the colleges. Faculty were given sabbaticals to go off, but the thought was that they'd go off on their own and then they'd do [research]. It wasn't that they'd be using [in-residence] time, as were the scientists, to do that. I think it was something not fully thought through. It finally moved in that direction, and I think to the good of the campus, but there was a lot of controversy involved in moving that way. And it was moved almost without planning, that is, self-consciousness about that didn't start happening until into the second decade of the campus. And that has its very interesting stories.

**Reti:** And that's a good place, maybe, to pick up next time.

**Reti:** Today is June 1, 2012. This is Irene Reti, and I'm here with Michael Cowan for our third interview. We're going to start today by continuing to talk about the college system of the 1970s.

**Cowan:** Oh, a big, complicated story. I think that the colleges were founded out of two impulses, at least as I read Clark Kerr's memoirs and Dean McHenry's memoirs. One was to try to make an educational virtue out of growth management, and how could you continue to grow and be a large university and

still, as Kerr said, "seem small," keep some sort of human scale. But it was also a response to the decision to locate Santa Cruz in a very small town location, which meant that there wasn't going to be as much housing, despite the summer vacation housing that was available in the winter. So the thought was to house a much larger proportion of undergraduates than was the case with all the other UC campuses, on campus. And then the issue is: well, how do you organize them when they're on campus: So that part of it was a response to a combination of a set of economic and physical challenges, but it was also a response to some educational ideals—how do you achieve intimacy, individual empowerment and development, informality, community, sense of loyalty, human scale, civility—all of those things were involved in founding the college system, both practical issues and idealistic issues.

Maybe I should start by saying that I have very fond memories of my ten years at Merrill. I came in 1969 to Merrill and didn't leave until reorganization in July of 1979. And I think some of those memories are related to the excitement of the barn-raising days that was affecting all parts of the campus and not just the colleges. Some of my fond memories are related to aspects of faculty college life that were true to various degrees in all of the colleges, and some of my fond memories are very specific to Merrill and what it was about, or trying to be.

For example, one of the things that I appreciated as a faculty member was being able to talk (as I think I've said earlier) to colleagues in a variety of fields. It certainly broadened my own perspectives and it raised a whole series of questions that I began to ask in my own research and teaching that I don't think I

would have been as likely to pursue if it hadn't been for the particular group of faculty I was with. It was also a chance to teach with colleagues in other fields. I think I must have co-taught at least a half a dozen courses when I was in Merrill. I think that was true of faculty in lots of other colleges, too. It was one of the pleasures—I taught with anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, historians. It was a really stimulating experience.

**Reti:** Now, these co-teaching experiences would emerge because you would start to form collegial relationships, so to speak, with—

**Cowan:** That's right. We were expected to teach in the college but we found ourselves interested in common topics, and we'd say, what if? For example, I mentioned the *Public Life* class I taught with Jack Schaar, a political scientist, and Wally Goldfrank, a sociologist, which was experimental in lots of ways. We had all fifteen units of students work together in one quarter. We went through about four or five books a week and had intense discussions. We had both graduate students and undergraduate students in the course. We were doing all sorts of things that would have been very difficult to do in other frameworks. And, of course, [it was] the chance to teach interdisciplinary courses, courses that I probably couldn't have taught within the board framework, although I certainly was able to do that in community studies. But it would have been harder in, say literature, to do that.

And then there were some things that were specific to Merrill that were very important to me: the global perspectives that were emphasized by the college

themes, particularly attention to the Third World internationally and also domestically; the college's commitment to public service, a very active field program that often involved students in community agencies not only in the U.S. but abroad. Volunteers in Asia, for example, was an important part of the field program. And that was also in synch, of course, with the community studies emphasis.

The ethnic diversity of the student body in Merrill was also very important to me. Santa Cruz at the outset, as everybody has said, was a very white campus. But Merrill, before the founding of Oakes, had by far the most ethnically diverse student body. And even after Oakes was founded, it still maintained a great deal of that diversity. That was a conscious commitment of the college but it also had all sorts of other benefits. The kinds of issues we were debating in the college, the interactions that the faculty were having with the students had a lot to do with how does one maintain civil discourse, how does one develop and maintain an appreciation and respect for people from other backgrounds? So we were engaged in a kind of practicing that led to lots of fights (laughs), endless meetings about these kinds of issues. But it was a very important learning experience for me and it certainly affected the way I was to come to think about, for example, American studies, and ethnic studies on the campus, as a whole.

Another aspect of that diversity was the college's commitment to supporting interdisciplinary majors and programs that would be open, not just to Merrill students, but to students throughout the entire campus. The Latin American studies major was founded in the college in the early 1970s. That was before it

became the Latin American and Latino studies major. But it was designed to appeal to students wherever they were on campus. It also sponsored work in East Asian and Southeast Asian studies.

**Reti:** Merrill.

**Cowan:** Merrill did. And again, it was a program that was designed to appeal not just to Merrill students, but to a campus constituency. There was a research cluster in South Pacific studies that was located physically in the college. And although that's one of those enterprises that I think finally faded from the campus—

**Reti:** It did.

**Cowan:** —at some point, it didn't have as much of a teaching component to it as a kind of research component, but it involved bringing scholars from elsewhere, and a number of things that happened in Merrill were stimulated by that.

Then finally, American studies began to emerge out of that multicultural emphasis, which was not only domestic but was in important respects international.

The other bonus that I can think of during my time at Merrill was having John Marcum as provost from 1972 to the end of 1977, a little over five years. He was an extraordinarily fair, principled, compassionate, supportive, thoughtful provost. Everybody in the college liked him. He listened well. He had [gained from] his own research and experience a broad, global vision. He was sensitive to

lots of differences. I think that he was a very important factor in the college's morale and the way in which it developed both academically, socially, and culturally.

So it was in many respects, I think, my gratitude for my Merrill experience, a desire myself to continue supporting its traditional strengths—those factors I think were much of what motivated me to accept the invitation to become provost, which I did in January of 1978. John was moving out of that position. He was within six months going to become academic vice chancellor.

I think I got two things, at least, out of my appointment. So it wasn't entirely altruistic. First, I got [Chancellor] Robert Sinsheimer's agreement—he had been chancellor for about three or four months then—but I got his agreement to authorize a search for a faculty appointment in African American literature and cultural studies, which I thought was critical to the literature board and to the developing American studies program. I used the argument, both the larger argument about the importance of diversity in both of those enterprises, and also the fact that I was not going to be teaching as much for the board because I would have an administrative responsibility. I have to say that he readily acceded to that request and it ended up in a very interesting search. There were not very many African American Ph.D's coming out of universities across the United States at that point, but we had some of the five most interesting ones apply. We finally hired Nate Mackey in that position. The appointment was in literature, but for a number of years he taught in American studies as well as literature. We really lucked out in that appointment.

But the other thing that I got out of the appointment was strong support of my own coming out as a gay man. I had been divorced in 1976. I had retained custody of our two children from our marriage. And I had in 1977 established a relationship with Byron Wheeler, who then was an assistant professor of theater arts, taught modern dance. And he was very openly gay. So I couldn't exactly stay in the closet being in a relationship with an openly gay man. So I was inching out of the closet, but I was very concerned that an openly gay provost might create problems for Merrill, concerns that parents might raise about having that as a role model for the college. I thought even some students might find it awkward to have an openly gay man [as provost]. It just says something about the times, because one of my colleagues, Alan Sable in sociology had come out, and was even teaching courses in the area. There were a few on campus. But mainly it was still a quiet and somewhat closeted community.<sup>7</sup>

**Reti:** When I worked on the Out in the Redwoods GLBT history project—<sup>8</sup>

**Cowan:** Yes.

**Reti:** —the impression I got was that under Dean McHenry the climate was not very accepting. The times were different.

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<sup>7</sup> See the oral history with Alan Sable in the website for the Out in the Redwoods Project at [http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/alan\\_sable](http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/alan_sable)

<sup>8</sup> See *Out in the Redwoods: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at UC Santa Cruz, 1965 – 2003* at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/index> This three-year project had three components: A series of twenty-seven oral history interviews were conducted by a team of UCSC students trained in an internship class; An expansion and development of GLBT library archives that represent each of the four decades of GLBT history at UCSC; Narratives by GLBT alumni, staff, and faculty. The interviews are available in a paperback book, in archival volumes deposited in regional libraries, and online.

**Cowan:** The times were different. It was true. I think it wasn't just Dean. Certainly, if you are an assistant professor, you worry about something like that and how it might affect you. I had tenure so that wasn't an issue for me. But I was concerned about a whole range of things, ranging from— I was dealing with my children, my ex-wife, on all of these matters. But I approached several colleagues and friends in Merrill and said, "Look, you have to know that I'm gay. I don't want to take this position if you think it would create problems for the college." They were very supportive of me. They said they would watch my back, that it didn't make any difference to them. That was very important, to have that kind of support. So I suppose I was the first openly gay academic administrator on the campus.

**Reti:** I think that's right.

**Cowan:** Not politically active in the gay movement, but that. And being out does affect lots of things. It did affect my teaching in various ways. It became a part of a repertoire when I was teaching, where letting it be known to my students that I was gay was a way of testing the waters, and also trying to establish a certain kind of relationship, I found myself advising a number of gay students working on projects and senior theses and other things. And that certainly affected the way I approached some of the writers I was teaching, say in my literature course, and some of my American studies courses. In any case, my being at Merrill at this time was another example of my good luck and being at the right place at the right time.

Anyway, my perspectives on the Santa Cruz college system in the years prior to reorganization in 1979 were strongly influenced by those ten years at Merrill, but my perspectives on the college system during that period were also influenced by the fact that I was, to varying degrees, involved with several other colleges. For example, as an early member of the Ethnic Studies Committee on campus, I had been involved in the initial planning of Oakes College. And then I got involved, partly, I think out of my senate activities, and also the involvement of some students I had been working with, with some planning of Kresge [College] as it was beginning to move from the notion of itself as an environmental studies college to the particular kind of human relations emphasis that it had. And like many faculty who were involved, we were invited to come to those colleges as members. I was having such a good time at Merrill that it didn't seem to be a good thing to do. But I got involved in that sense and was watching those colleges emerge. Also College Eight—interestingly enough, through friendships I was developing with Jim Pepper and Paul Niebanck and some others, out of our common planning interests, I got very interested in what it was doing as a nonresidential college. So I was paying close attention to that. And of course I had friends and colleagues in the other colleges.

I became very interested, even during that period, in what the colleges were doing and not doing. For example, I got interested in the question of the impact of opening colleges on the west side and then not clustering them, but scattering them on the west side, and what that did to their work as individual colleges,

and also what that did to the college system as a whole. But I will come back to that.

I suppose a big question that some folks have been debating for years is the question—could more elements of the college system in its early form have been saved? Carlos Noreña, in his book *The Rise and Demise of the UCSC Colleges*<sup>9</sup> puts the case rather sharply in his rather dramatic or even melodramatic use of the term *demise*—that even though the college had maintained some good elements, the heart of the college system had been pulled out through reorganization. I tend to think not as strongly that that was the case. I think more elements were saved, perhaps, than Carlos acknowledged. But looking back, I do think that there were some changes in the college system that were inevitable, whether or not Bob Sinsheimer had shown up, or whether or not we had had the enrollment crisis we did in the 1970s.

But I think some of the changes might have not been so major if a couple of things had occurred. I think if more thought had been given in planning the system in the early colleges as to what would ensure their individual and collective stability and vitality as academic, and more generally, intellectual units over a long period of time, in a way that could survive the changing of provostships and the retirement of faculty and the coming of new faculty who weren't founders and so forth—I think if there had been a little more attention to that at the outset there might have been a way of maintaining the elements of the

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<sup>9</sup> (Institute of Governmental Studies: Publications), 1999.

system after the barn-raising phase had passed and the campus had grown larger and larger.

**Reti:** Say more about what you mean by attention.

**Cowan:** Yes, I think that's a really important thing. I think one aspect is that there wasn't in place a more formal and self-conscious mechanism for evaluating the colleges as they emerged. I think that, as an experiment, if you think of an experiment in a serious sense, you set up a set of hypotheses of what you think a particular thing or set of things you do is going to [effect] and then you monitor it, which means that anecdotes help, all those things help. But a systematic way of looking at people's behaviors, of surveying attitudes, of asking how things change, of looking at the colleges in comparison to what was happening on other campuses. Did having a residential college system as opposed to a dormitory system really make a difference in the kind of attitudes that students had, the kind of education they received, and so forth? All of those things. I think if we had really been monitoring we might have learned some things that could have affected it.

I think what happened was that that kind of examination didn't start happening until some of the problems were too major to be amenable to minor adjustments. I'll maybe say a little bit more about that in a minute. I think if the campus from the outset had given more attention to actively attracting enough UC-qualified undergraduates to meet its steadily increasing enrollment targets, we wouldn't

have confronted the enrollment crisis the way we did. And I can come back to that when I talk about that later.

**Reti:** Yes, I think we talked about that some in the last interview.

**Cowan:** But I think it was a little too much of a field of dreams aspect to the first colleges—if you build it they will come. And they did come in the early years, but I think that [we] were caught off guard in the seventies. And in the scrambling to remedy that I think some elements of the college system were thrown out. I don't think the campus threw out the baby with the bathwater (laughs), the college system, but I think they probably threw away a couple of beloved tools and maybe some other tools that had been valuable to the college experience.

But I think that the important thing to remember is that the college system was initially intended to be a mechanism, or rather a series of mechanisms, that had been developed in part, as I've suggested, in a problem-solving way, of the decision to locate the campus near a small town.

**Reti:** So you're saying that they had not originally intended to have a college system at UCSC until they selected the Cowell Ranch as a site?

**Cowan:** That's right. If you read McHenry's— Now it's true that Kerr had already, in his *The Uses of the University*<sup>10</sup> talked about the desire to find a way of bringing a human scale and individual attention back into the system. But how

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<sup>10</sup> (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press), 1963.

that was going to manifest itself in particular mechanisms for doing that was something that didn't happen until after the Cowell site had been chosen. And then, if you read Dean McHenry's memoirs, he said, well, we knew we were going to have to house a much larger number of undergraduates on campus and so what could we do with that was a challenge.

**Reti:** I hadn't realized that. It was another case of geography driving campus planning.

**Cowan:** That's certainly a factor. I think, again, in many ways it was a creative response to that, because there were, again, all these other notions. But the idealistic aspect of that mechanism was very much not itself innovative. It was very much in line with what was current in the thinking of educational reformers throughout the United States in the fifties and early 1960s. In fact, you can trace it all the way back to, say Progressive reformers like John Dewey and William James, and even back through American Romantics like Emerson and Thoreau—the [integration] of living and learning, learning as action and action as learning, nature as a text—all of those things. And then all the way back to Cardinal Newman and to maybe Plato. You can go all the way back. So the notion of trying to establish a liberal arts ethos, a living-learning ethos, was longstanding.

What Clark Kerr wanted to do, of course, and Dean McHenry, was to bring that to a large public university, or a university that was going to be very large. So that was, if you will, the innovative part. To reach the whole person, not merely the students' minds, to take the individual students seriously, to broaden the

students' horizons by interacting with lots of different people, and by providing them with a general education that involved their learning something, gaining an appreciation for fields other than the ones they were going to focus on, to gain a bigger sense of the richness and complexity of the world a whole—standard and important goals of liberal education. Also, of course, to close the gap between the student and the teacher through close, supportive interaction. And then to bind all of those elements together in a mutually supportive civil community that might model the kind of communities they would want to help build and nurture and protect when they moved on out into the world. So it was a kind of practice for living; it was both a living experiment, but a practice for future living. The term *human scale* was often used in some of those early planning documents to capture that. But both taking the individual seriously but also taking the community seriously, bringing the body and the mind and the feelings together. As Page Smith often used to argue, "learning ought to be a joy." A pleasure. He wanted to bring that kind of pleasure. I think that was fine, although I think learning is also a chore. You have to sometimes work at it. It's both a pain and a pleasure that somehow work together.

One of the questions that I think the campus didn't fully raise at the outset, in their focus on the colleges as the locus for this, was why those goals applied primarily or only to the college, and not to the general campus as a whole. For example, what if at the outset one had said: Every board of study, every department should itself be trying to create a humane learning environment for its students, both for its majors, but also for the students who are taking their

courses as part of a general education. What if every board said, we want to honor a student's bill of rights and make sure that they have an opportunity in the course of their education to interact closely with at least a couple of our faculty members? What if individual departments had said, much of what we do involves not only strict work within some sort of narrow, disciplinary framework, but because of our own curiosity as scholars it makes sense for us as scholars to make contact with people outside our own disciplines.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** I remember Michael Nauenberg at some point, when he and I at some point were arguing about interdisciplinary work, (laughs) "Well, you know, physics itself is an interdisciplinary program." And I had to pull back a bit. But I think what he was saying was actually what looks like from the outside like a rather monolithic field actually consists of lots of different parts. And those parts themselves are interrelated to each other. Michael also was very interested in the history of science. And an example of the way in which many scientists I knew were very curious about things outside, not just as a hobby, but in fact it had an impact on the way often they thought about their own particular research. But what would have happened at the outset if we had been saying, we want to make sure that all parts of this campus respect the liberal arts ethos in their teaching and in their research? And what if the central administration had said, we are going to make our allocations of resources to boards, to divisions based in part on whether they are manifesting their commitment to undergraduate teaching as well as research, including lower-division teaching, effective lower-

division teaching, their commitment to providing a humane experience and to encouraging students to ask not just specialized questions, but larger questions. Now, road not taken, although actually, to a certain extent taken in the years after reorganization. But I think there was a set of questions like that that perhaps could have been [raised].

In any case, the college system was certainly a noble dream and it achieved many important things. I certainly can personally testify to that in the life of my own work and that of many of my colleagues. But there were some tensions and problems that I think if they had been looked at more directly at the outset, or as experience began to have these problems and tensions emerge, if they had been addressed more directly then, or worked to be solved more directly, then some of the things that finally happened in the college structure might not have. But let me—

**Reti:** I want to ask you a couple of questions and you can tell me if you are already planning to address these.

**Cowan:** Okay.

**Reti:** I would be remiss if I didn't ask these questions. Some people have said, looking at the early UCSC, that faculty were not rewarded for college service, and that there was an embedded problem. So that's question number one.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> There's no simple answer. The weight given such service, even in the "barn-raising" years, varied not only from board to board but even from college to college. I think that, in general, the Senate's Committee on Academic Personnel, which played an important role in the tenure review

Another question is, can you create a utopian experiment in education within the larger UC system, which is very traditional in terms of how it rewards faculty for publishing?<sup>12</sup>

And the third question is about the additional cost of the college system compared to a traditional university infrastructure. I don't know if you were planning to get to all of these?

**Cowan:** Oh, those are great questions! I'll make sure that I touch on them. Those are all really central questions. Maybe I can begin by saying I think that the 50-50

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process, took excellent service seriously, as did the Chancellor. That said, service demands by a college declined considerably for most faculty after the college passed its start-up phase of development and its processes became more routinized. High quality service continued to be seen favorably by CAP and the Chancellor—but not to the exclusion of teaching and research. To take only my Merrill experience from 1969 to 1979, I think that every one of the founding assistant professors with excellent Merrill service records got tenure *if* they also had excellent teaching records *and* could show some high-quality research, even if the latter was modest in quantity. In the case of several assistant professors I knew of who didn't get tenure in those early years, mediocre teaching was generally a contributing factor in those decisions. If I remember correctly, here were fewer than a handful of high-profile negative tenure decision cases during the Sinsheimer years that turned on whether service had been sufficiently counted—Michael Cowan.

<sup>12</sup>With the exception of a few visionaries—I think particularly of Page Smith—most of the founding leaders were from the outset essentially educational reformers looking to carve a bit of creative space out of the UC system rather than departing radically from the values of that system. For example, Dean McHenry set his sights on attracting excellent, productive scholars who would *also* be committed to excellent undergraduate teaching and to close interactions with undergraduates outside as well as inside the classroom. He counted on the reputation (and competitive salaries and benefits) of the UC system as a whole, as well as the reformist ethos of the campus, to attract such scholar-teachers. I think he viewed as rare exceptions those positive tenure decisions he made in the case of "founding" assistant professors who had excellent teaching and service records but little or nothing in the way of publications. Like subsequent chancellors, he believed in the appropriateness of the UC-wide standards for tenure and academic advancement. The key question was how creatively or flexibly those standards might be applied in individual cases—a question not at all unique to the Santa Cruz campus. I do think that both most boards and at least some colleges were applying the UC-wide criteria, if flexibly, to tenure and promotion cases well before reorganization—for example, stressing quality more than quantity of research. And I think excellence in undergraduate teaching, as well as unusually distinguished service, has continued to play a positive role in tenure and promotion decisions, *if* accompanied by high-quality scholarly achievement that is certified by external referees—Michael Cowan.

percent college-board split of appointments was perhaps an overly mechanical way to staff lower-division general education. As I've said, I think if the boards had been given some responsibility in that too this notion of the tension between the board and the college would have been less severe. And I think not only the goodwill of the faculty was involved, but the structure that created part of those tensions. We wanted to deal with the whole student, but there was a way in which we perhaps were not dealing with the whole faculty, assuming that the faculty member had a research load and a teaching undergraduate load. Whereas if we had challenged all of our academic units on campus to think a little more holistically that might have been useful.

The 50-50 percent, to a certain extent is explicable, I think, by Dean McHenry's experience as a political scientist of U.S. politics. It was a kind of checks and balance system. And we know that checks and balance systems are designed to make sure that various kinds of perspectives and interests are taken into account. But we also know, as we look at Congress today, that it can be a recipe for a stalemate. (laughs)

**Reti:** Well, you don't have someone who is on the Supreme Court and at the same time, they are a U.S. Senator. That is a different sort of model, making the checks and balances be within one individual.

**Cowan:** Yes, if there had been more incentives for cooperation, maybe is another way of saying this. There were probably some tensions, but if one had looked for ways for creating incentives for cooperation, say between boards and colleges

very early in the process, some of the issues might not have emerged. And it would also have, I think, perhaps mitigated what did happen to some junior faculty, which was that they got caught in these tensions and were then hung out to dry when they came up for tenure. I can say maybe a little bit more about that.

In fact, I think a related point is that not enough attention was given by the founders to the ways in which the colleges might benefit their faculty not only in their capacities as teachers but as researchers. Again, separating the notion of the faculty as teacher from the faculty as researcher may have been something of a mistake. What would have happened if the colleges had been seen as places to support faculty research as well as providing for faculty teaching?

I think that relates to one of the things I talked about last time, I believe, which is the college size, which had been focused on what would be the ideal student body, but not on what might be the ideal faculty body for purposes of having both the breadth that allowed for cross-disciplinary engagement, but also enough depth so that there would be enough support with faculty in one's own area, so that you could have a research support structure as well as a teaching support structure. What size would that have been? I don't know that we have any magic numbers but I think that question was begged in some humanities and social science disciplines in the early years because more of those appointments in those areas were loaded in the first two or three colleges. So that, for example, Cowell and Stevenson did have significant clusters of faculty in certain disciplinary or board areas. I was just looking at some data the other day and in 1970-71 there were five colleges that had their full contingents, or

almost full contingents of faculty, all the way up through College Five. Now, the literature board had nineteen of its thirty ladder faculty housed in Cowell and Stevenson during that period of time, which meant that there were only two or three in the other colleges, and eleven of the sixteen tenured faculty in literature were housed in Cowell and Stevenson. So those two colleges could very well say, what's the problem? Whereas the problem that the so-called Noah's Ark dynamic faced was being experienced more by the newer colleges, which didn't have those kinds of clusters, again, particularly in the social sciences and the humanities.

I think that relates, also, to the issue of college themes. It occurred to me that there are two issues there—one question is, to what extent were the colleges' themes supposed to work for the benefit of the students, and to what extent for the benefit of the faculty as well, for example, to benefit faculty members' research as well as their teaching. Now, the themes of the first five colleges, I think, as many people have pointed out, were, with the exception of Merrill, pretty conventional. That is, they were pretty much oriented towards almost the administrative structures. There was the humanities-oriented college; a social sciences-oriented college; a science-oriented college; and an arts-oriented college. I think the problem with that conventional label of college themes is that it begged the question of how, academically speaking, it could be a comfortable home for faculty and students with other academic interests.

And so there were several ways of addressing that, some of which begged the questions. One way of addressing that was: well, people shouldn't take the

themes too seriously. They are just an orientation. In fact, I remember Glenn Wilson, in his memoirs, essays, he protested against the notion of college themes and felt that Stevenson, for example, should also be a liberal arts college, that all the colleges should be basically saying, we are liberal arts colleges. So the functional meaning of the theme became a real issue. If every student was supposed to be liberally educated, why would one want to encourage an entering student to go to a college where a much larger proportion of students in that student's own areas of specific interest were? And what happens if that student's interests changed, as they often did?

**Reti:** You could end up at three different colleges, which is what happened to me when I attended UCSC.

**Cowan:** That's right. So a lot of things were happening. It's also interesting that students, of course, had already been exposed to the general liberal arts areas in their high schools. They had taken breadth requirements there in order to get to UC. So the issue is, why would one necessarily want them to replicate that in the colleges?

Anyway, there was a tension, I think a bit, between the college themes and the notion that each college was a kind of liberal arts entity. I'm not sure it was an unproductive tension but it was something that could have been talked through a little more. And it also affected the way in which faculty experienced their relationship to the college.

And then there were additional problems with the theme, as again, has been pointed out by a variety of people. What happens as you move into more and more colleges? We planned initially fifteen to twenty colleges on this campus.

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** Does that mean that you run out of themes, or the themes become so narrow that it's very hard to attract enough students who want to be in a college with that theme? What happens if colleges' themes start overlapping; how does one student make choices between the colleges? And how do you staff those colleges with faculty who have their disciplinary bases but are also expected to work with particular themes? There was a mismatch between what the boards were trying to do and what the colleges were trying to do and fill their faculty. Of course, we ended up not with that many colleges. Merrill, again, had a kind of interdisciplinary theme that was focused on particular problems and constituencies. Kresge was initially designed to be the environmental studies college and when it didn't happen there, that mission shifted to College Eight and it made an important, and I think positive difference in College Eight. Oakes was trying to be both a liberal arts college that paid particular attention to training students in science but also having an emphasis on looking at the domestic Third World, if you will. And those certainly were [useful] projects. But you begin to run out of themes. When you think about asking what the international emphasis of, what is it, College Nine has—that makes it different from Merrill's international emphasis, and so forth? What about the social change emphasis of College Ten or the society emphasis— It's not that having

overlapping themes is necessarily bad, but it does raise the question of what the role of the themes was in a practical sense, in the college. I think there was some role but it was not thought through very much. There might have been other ways of creating, establishing college identity that didn't involve as much themes.

**Reti:** Do you know how the idea of themes originated?

**Cowan:** I think Clark Kerr thought that it could be a very useful way of differentiating the colleges, of individuating the colleges. I think Dean also thought that would be the case. It was also part of the notion that every college would be an experiment and you tried different themes to pull them together. But the emphasis initially was just getting the campus up and running, and the initial themes, if rather conventional, were ones that nobody could really argue with. But they didn't think very much about that. And it began to affect the way students chose a college. If, for example, you want non-scientists, students who are not interested in science as majors, to interact with students interested in science, wouldn't you want to move them around through the colleges, so at least at the lower-division level they are interacting, gaining that experience, even if they began to work with their colleagues [in their majors] as they moved on. Those are the kinds of pedagogical questions that would come out of that. But the assumption was that students would kind of sort themselves out anyway and they wouldn't take the themes that seriously. Some students do; some students don't. Anyway, it remains, to me, a kind of interesting problem.

I think, as I've said, faculty research support was something that could have been provided more in the colleges themselves, large enough clusters of faculty so that they would both have the experience of breadth of colleagues in a variety of fields, but enough colleagues working, not necessarily in their own boards, but in adjacent fields, to support their research interests. And I think if the colleges had, from the outset, thought that part of their responsibility was to facilitate their faculty members' research, some of the problems that happened when faculty then came up for tenure would have been mitigated. Not that everybody would have been saved. There were a lot of committees, a lot of other things to distract people, but I think [it would have been desirable] if there had been that sense that research wasn't just something one does because one is impelled to do it. That's what Page Smith used to argue. He said, "Well, you know, a lot of stuff that comes out as research isn't worth the paper it's put on, or it's easily forgotten."

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** I think he was right in many respects, at least in some of the fields that he knew. Nevertheless, to stay intellectually alive, everybody, whether they publish or not, has to be engaged in systematic thinking, trying to put things down to paper, to press the boundaries of one's own knowledge, partly as a model to students as to what it means to be engaged in a learning enterprise. I think the colleges might have found more systematic ways of, in that sense, of encouraging faculty scholarship. It could have been on interdisciplinary and

often very useful multidisciplinary themes, as well as disciplinary themes, but I think that could have happened.

Now, there were some significant exceptions to the—failure is too strong of a word—but to the not pushing as hard to make the colleges research support environments as well as teaching support environments, and one was College Eight. College Eight had a theme. It was [initially] a nonresidential college. Environmental studies was emerging as a field. And so most of the core environmental studies faculty came to College Eight from a variety of fields too. There were marine studies fields; people like Jim Pepper and others, Paul Niebanck with his urban interests. But because it was a nonresidential college dealing with older students who were already in their majors, with reentry students, particularly women, with veterans, with people who were not living on campus, it began to think about how it might create faculty-student interactions that involved more than one discipline. So very early in its history it began to focus on trying to create clusters. In some of its early planning documents, as early as 1974-75, it began to talk about the various intellectual clusters of faculty in the college. There was the environmental group, with a kind of biological component, but also a planning and analysis component; there was a political and social thought group that was—

**Reti:** And this was within the college? Because environmental studies itself had clusters.

**Cowan:** That's right. This was separate. But these were all in the college. And I think there was—I'm not sure, the term wasn't a praxis group, but something like a social action group. And I think there was a mind group, a kind of philosophy and psychology group that was emerging. So College Eight was beginning to model another possibility, but it was a possibility that [most of] the other colleges hadn't taken up [fully].

Nevertheless, there was a sense by 1972-73 that such kind of faculty clusterings around research, scholarly interests as well as around teaching interests, were a desirable thing. So the Committee on Budget and Academic Planning (it was called BAPS at the time) proposed that it might be useful to see if we could have a certain amount of reclusterings of faculty. This became called faculty reaggregation.

**Reti:** We did discuss this last time.

**Cowan:** And so in 1973, the fall of 1973—and I think I was on the Committee on Planning and Budget at that time—but it was something more general in the air, that committee asked the central administration to survey the faculty to find out how many would be in favor of clustering board members in various colleges, and how many were in favor of multi-board clusters in individual colleges. It wouldn't be just a single board in a college, but several boards in a single college.

And it was very interesting. They got about half of the faculty members' response to the questionnaire—this was in Dean's last year as chancellor—and almost two-thirds said that they were in favor of clustering board members,

bringing all the board members together in a single place. But over 90 percent were in favor of multi-board clusters, that is not having a whole board necessarily together in a college, but having a significant cadre from a board together in a college with significant cadres of other board members—creating, if you will, the best of both worlds. Now, I know that Dean—he says this in [a short memoir]—was very unhappy with this initiative. He thought it was destroying the particular kinds of groupings of lots of individual faculty from lots of different fields that he thought would characterize the system. But again, what that was missing, I think, was the sense that faculty were trying to find a way of bringing their teaching and research lives together more.

So without much administrative support, there was a modest amount of movement of faculty that took place the year after Dean retired. And it brought together small clusters of faculty. But it wasn't a major reorganization and it wasn't done with much support from the central administration<sup>13</sup>, I think, again, because of the way in which that the colleges had been conceived.

Now, we've talked about the ways in which the natural sciences already had their clusters. And it was not just their disciplinary clusters, but I think an important part of the natural science story was that those clusters were close to other science clusters in other boards, and various kinds of conversation and even interdisciplinary research were beginning to emerge out of that. You see it

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Christensen actually supported a version of reaggregation, but his brief tenure and the controversy over the specific restructuring plan he proposed delayed a major re-clustering of faculty until 1979—Michael Cowan.

even more today. So that in many ways the emerging Science Hill was itself a kind of college, perhaps more in the traditional academic sense, not a residential college, but in terms of the faculty interactions. I think as the faculty, particularly in the sciences, began to feel that their teaching in the college was not benefiting them as much as they might want, or of interest to them, [and] the excitement of working, not just with their own college and their own boards but across boards in the sciences were beginning to pull them more and more in the direction of that. So it's a complex story and there's a lot of individual variation in that. Because quite a few scientists still were loyal to their colleges, cared about the college, but their sense of what it meant to be a member of the college was beginning to shift for a number of scientists. And as it shifted there, that began to affect the way in which social scientists and the people in the humanities and arts began to think of their scientists.

Now the major support, interestingly enough, given to—and Oakes is a good example of that—to the research in the colleges to the humanities and social sciences was seen as their sabbaticals, because they could go away and do their work as individuals someplace else. Herman Blake worked very hard to find extra funds so that he could provide opportunities for his junior faculty, in particular, to get more release time and so forth, to do that. And that was very important, because he recognized the importance of supporting faculty research. What was not done, not even there, was to try to find ways in which you could create support for clusters of faculty, not while they were on sabbatical but while

they were actually in the trenches teaching and in residence, to create that support, the kind of things, again, that the natural sciences were doing.

I think, related to that was the problem of intercollege cooperation. I think that if there had been more encouragement to colleges to cooperate in the early years, some of these clusters might have emerged. They might not even have involved moving faculty as much as trying to create the campus equivalents of organized research units, or informal research groups, bringing people from a variety of colleges, perhaps adjacent colleges, but elsewhere, but looking for collective ways of supporting faculty's work. But the colleges were each, at the outset, encouraged to have their own individuality, encouraged to go their own way. There was some cooperation, like the Stevenson/Cowell Science program focused on teaching and was for a number of years very successful. But there wasn't very much systematically. If anything, I think provosts were encouraged to go it alone. Their colleges were to establish their own identity. The older colleges tended to say, well, the new colleges can do what they want. The newer colleges tended to say, well, we don't want interference by the older colleges. There was a certain amount of sniping across college lines, a certain amount of turf building.

**Reti:** What was the relationship like during the time you were at Merrill, between Merrill and Crown, for instance?

**Cowan:** We had two quite different themes. The kinds of student bodies were rather different. We did look for ways of creating some commonality. For

example, there were a couple of Americanists there, and during reaggregation two faculty from the west side moved—there wasn't office space at Merrill so they moved into Crown—so they were there and we had interactions. But outside of that there wasn't very much. And in some respects, the so-called "Asian Food Affair" of the eighties was a product of colleges that from the outset had developed not only separate cultures, but the sense that cooperation was not in their mutual interest.<sup>14</sup> They were tied by a dining hall, or by a kitchen, and not by much else. Much of that has changed more recently. But I think that that was symptomatic.

Another was Oakes College. The college cooperation potential was made even more difficult on the west side because the three colleges on the west side were spread out far from each other, so you didn't have that kind of clustering. Oakes—and Herman himself complained to a certain extent about this—was seen as a kind of ghetto, a *favela*, a place where minority students went and then were being isolated. In one sense, it made for a close-knit student community. But it was a community that was not fully understood elsewhere on campus. It was somewhat underappreciated. There wasn't much sense that the other parts

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<sup>14</sup> In 1988 Merrill College, which shared a food service with Crown College, proposed that its College Night on December 7 feature Filipino food as a part of its ongoing celebration of ethnic diversity. Crown College administrators objected because of their concern that serving "Asian" food on that date, the anniversary of Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, would be insensitive. The episode generated a heated conflict between Crown and Merrill administrators and faculty and escalated into a campus-wide affair that included various student groups' charges of racism against Crown, counter-charges against Merrill by Crown faculty, and the attempted mediation by Chancellor Robert Stevens. One version of the affair, among several, can be found in *Robert B. Stevens, UCSC Chancellor, 1987-1991*, his oral history in UCSC Library's Special Collections Department, pp. 59-62—Michael Cowan.

of the campus might play a role in helping the college. And that was, I think, then reinforced by Herman's ambivalence as to whether he wanted any help, or wanted to be able to run the college in the way he wanted to run it. He was quite a visionary and very able and very charismatic. But I think that, again, was a symptom of some of the problems.

Kresge had some of the same problems—also physically distant. Its initial theme was seen as rather strange—

**Reti:** Environmental studies seemed strange?

**Cowan:** It didn't have environmental studies. It moved into human potential, and as that began to get lost—very quickly that began to fade—women's studies began to emerge in the college fairly early because of the nature of the faculty who had been hired. That was when women, junior women [professors] began to be hired, so you had a larger number of such faculty. Feminism was beginning to be an important part of the national, [and] certainly the campus ethos. So Kresge became a natural place [for that focus]. But it was rather isolated from the conversations with feminists elsewhere on the campus. So it wasn't having the impact that it was later to have after reorganization.

But those are simply some of the examples. I think that there could have been ways in which the center, the campus's central administration, could have encouraged more intercollegiate cooperation both in teaching and in research.

And then, coming back to what I said earlier, I think the college curriculum wasn't sufficiently integrated with the overall campus curriculum, or the other way around. Every college going on its own may have meant that the faculty were doing a lot of interesting things in the colleges, but increasingly, particularly in certain areas like the natural sciences, they were just teaching versions of science courses [in the colleges] without much attention to whether that was the best way of organizing the curriculum that might be available to the colleges. That's a long story in itself that I don't want to go into.

Maybe a couple of other problems I see in the colleges. Again, I think that, again, the colleges had a set number of faculty. The notion was that you would build more faculty in as [the number of] colleges grew, which meant that there was a set number of offices in the colleges and you couldn't easily move people around without moving somebody out. I think that made it more difficult to recluster faculty, and when certain colleges like Cowell and Stevenson in particular resisted moving a lot of their faculty, it meant that for certain colleges that clustering was much more difficult.

It was also true that because the colleges had a set number of faculty regardless of the enrollments that their courses generated, they didn't lose faculty simply because they became a college with lots of low enrollment courses. Which meant that the colleges, for example, could have offered, if they wished, a lot of seminars. And if the faculty were offering seminars in the colleges to undergraduates it meant that they weren't as available for offering seminars in their boards. Because the boards were held, to a certain extent, to enrollment

targets which affected the number of faculty positions and other resources they were going to have. So the lack of an integrated approach to this on campus meant that there wasn't thinking through where it made most pedagogical and educational sense for the students to have their small course opportunities, and also how one would equitably divide the opportunities that faculty had to engage in small course teaching. Some of that happened informally but it wasn't worked out in a kind of careful and systematic way. And I think that created some resentments in some of the boards, who wanted to have more small teaching opportunities but felt that the colleges were getting that without a penalty. And it was just one more thing that created some resentment [between the boards and the colleges].

I think, also, the failure to consciously integrate more graduate students into the life of the work of the colleges from the outset in the 1970s was a big mistake. There are certainly lots of exceptions to that. A few graduate students were hired as resident preceptors, for example, in fact, in increasing numbers as the apartments that were housing faculty became vacant because faculty didn't want to live on campus and didn't want to deal with all the students, and the graduate students needed space and they also interacted very well with undergraduates. There were a few graduate students who were being employed as teaching assistants in the colleges. Some graduate seminars, particularly in the social sciences and the humanities, were held in the colleges because that's where the seminar-sized rooms were. And, of course, graduate students interacted with social science and humanities faculty and arts faculty in the faculty members'

offices at the colleges. But none of the colleges had built-in space for graduate students, office space, or other [spaces].

There had been some initial thoughts about this. If I understand right, and I may be wrong, Cowell had planned both a senior and a junior commons room out near the steno pool. The junior common room was to be for graduate students but it never really worked out that way. Merrill in its early years wanted to provide some graduate support groups and did a certain amount of that, but again didn't have much space to make it happen. College Eight, from the outset, really thought about graduate students as being an important part of the colleges. But again, without offices in the college space and without thinking about the way in which instead of seeing graduate students here in one place and undergraduates in the others, graduate students in the humanities and social sciences were thought of as having their workspace in the library.

**Reti:** Right. There were those little carrels up there on the fourth floor.

**Cowan:** That were hardly ever used. (laughs) Trying to bring them together, as was the case in the natural sciences, in a place where there are faculty— And I think that the colleges then missed real opportunities, because without a lot of upper-division students living on campus, but graduate students being around the campus a lot because of their work, they would have acted as—it would have brought a certain tone to the college. They would have been teaching the students anyway as TA's and so forth. So there was a real opportunity that was

not taken full advantage of, to bring the graduate students into this. And again, it would have reduced the board-college split.

Then I think, maybe just the final point had to do with the issue of college identification. Clark Kerr and Dean McHenry from the outset felt that for undergraduates the colleges would be and should be their primary point of identification. And as a matter of fact, Kerr at one point said he felt that the student would want to spend and should be encouraged to spend virtually all of his or her life in his or her particular college, taking at least half of their courses in the college, interacting with the students in the college, a part of that building a close community. Dean, I think, supported that in many respects. And so the notion was that that would be a point of identification so strong that even as the student moved into majors and so forth, that would be the case. And as alumni they would identify strongly.

Now, in the early years, I think that was very much the case—the founding years of the colleges brought together the students. When you read the testimony of the initial Cowell and Stevenson classes you get particularly that. And I think it's been true for many of the other colleges. One of the problems was that it wasn't true for all. And those students that for various reasons were not taken as seriously were not focused on as much. Transfer students, for one thing. Transfer students didn't have a core course. They were already focused on their major and trying to get in, but they were having to go for their major to classes wherever they were on campus, and not just the scientists, but students in other fields, and interacting with faculty in their classes wherever they had to be, and wherever

the faculty offices would be. And many of the transfer students were living off campus, and so they didn't have the experience of residence. For such students—at one point it was said—the colleges were just a mailbox. That wasn't true of all transfer students. Some transfer students got very much involved in the colleges.

I think, also, students who had lived on campus for a year or two but then moved off campus for a variety of reasons developed patterns of interaction and movement around campus and off campus that were not college-centered. Again, undergraduates in particular majors would be often drawn to places outside their own college because the colleges didn't have many people of that major. Ethnic minority students—it was true that Oakes and Merrill were important magnets for those students and the vast majority of minority students on campus, with perhaps Asian American students being a slight exception, were in those two colleges. They identified with their colleges but they also had reason for wanting to identify with cross-campus cadres of such students. And so the notion of the growth of ethnic organizations, for example, in the seventies was a very important part of that. Also, students interested in other campus wide activities: sports, for example. You can think of a lot of other examples.

**Reti:** Feminist organizations.

**Cowan:** Feminist organizations. Very important. And the coming of fraternities and sororities to the campus, not in the seventies but later, is a story that hasn't been told. It was seen as a betrayal of the college system. But you have to ask why the students decided that they wanted that as a point of interaction and

identification. Were there things that the colleges weren't or couldn't do that were creating some gaps in what the students wanted?

It's not that we all don't have multiple affiliations and multiple identifications. And I think if the campus had thought a little more about how it could have fostered multiple identifications and then looked for ways of creating synergies between those forms of identification, some things might have happened. For example, what would have happened if individual colleges had decided that they wanted, early, to sponsor activities, student activities and others, on behalf of the campus as a whole? Now, that to a certain extent happened, when you think about feminist studies and what Kresge did there, and to a certain extent what Oakes did with black students. But what if from the outset all the colleges had said, we will all try to find ways in which we can make ourselves attractive, not only to students who are formally our members, but to students from other colleges who have reasons for wanting to be clustering certain kinds of opportunities?

It would have been interesting to debate in the early years of the campus, for example, about whether or not you should have a student center. And initially there was no money for that because monies that would have otherwise gone into the student center were going to the facilities of each of the individual colleges. So there wasn't money for that. But there was also, on the one hand, student resistance to putting a lot of money in the center. But even more so, there was central administrative resistance to trying to create some common facilities. Some of those began to happen, but it took quite a while. You think about how

long it took to build a student center, both the one out in the meadow, but [also] on the east side of the campus near the bookstore. It took a long time, and I find myself wanting to ask whether some of the attrition that the campus experienced in the early years might have been mitigated, and therefore the enrollment crisis mitigated, if some sites for students' multiple interests had been cultivated more thoughtfully and actively.

**Reti:** What was the source of the resistance on the central administration's part?

**Cowan:** It was the feeling that we have invested our money in the colleges, the students' identification should be with the college, and these pull students away from the college. That was seen as a loss to the colleges rather than potentially a gain to the colleges. My thought was—I remember arguing this in the seventies—that the larger percentage of a student's time that you can keep on campus, the higher the probability that there'll be all sorts of interactions in all sorts of ways—serendipity, casual things. If you only create a few hooks to keep the students on campus during a particular period, they are going to spend more of their time off campus, and their identification with aspects of the campus and their contribution to the social and cultural ambiance of the campus is going to be somewhat reduced. It's a matter of degrees. It's not an all or nothing. But I think that wasn't thought through enough. There was a feeling that at some point in the campus's history it would get large enough so that some of these organizations would emerge. But there wasn't, I think, attention early in the years to trying to satisfy students' needs to have multiple identifications.

**Reti:** So here's another analysis that's come my way frequently in my oral history interviews about the campus, which is the conspiracy theory. It sounds like: oh, the campus didn't want to have centralized facilities because it was during the Vietnam War and students would have used them for protest and the colleges were a way of keeping students from organizing.

**Cowan:** Yes. It's very interesting. Frank Zwart and I and some other faculty and administrators have talked a lot about this. The sequence doesn't quite work that way. The college system was developed before the Free Speech movement at Berkeley. And it had the impact, I think, after the fact, of making it harder for there to be a focal point of student protest, a Sproul Plaza, for example. But that didn't stop students from protesting. Think about the students who gathered at Crown College during the Regents meeting. Or in the late sixties, sitting in at Central Services. Or marching downtown from the campus. They didn't need that kind of center. The political activists found ways of cutting across a lot of those boundaries.

**Reti:** Okay.

**Cowan:** No, I think it was done more for the idealistic sense of wanting to have small, human-scale communities, and these other things happened later. I think the resistance to a central facility was not done by the central administration because they didn't want to give students a place to organize. It had more to do with their sense that that would pull people away from what they wanted to see as a primary point of interaction and identification, which was the colleges. And

there will be continuing arguments about that. Interestingly enough, some individual colleges developed real reputations as centers of student activism. Stevenson, for example, which published *The Libre* in the late sixties, and Merrill was pretty active that way, and Oakes in its own ways. Those activists found ways of making links across, but those links were not encouraged, I think less out of concern about student protest, but because they didn't fit within the model of the way in which the students should want to identify with their location.

Anyway, I think those were some of the issues that affected the colleges' histories. Some of those might have been changed. Even if some of them had been changed, it probably wouldn't have affected elements that led to the reorganization. But I think that they might not have taken place in a stark form. Maybe next time I can talk a little bit about those.

But if you don't mind, I'd like to talk a little bit about what I was doing in the seventies and then lead up to the so-called enrollment crisis, which we can talk about next time.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** I'm not sure I've answered all of your questions about the college system?

**Reti:** Well, I'd like at some point to come back to the question of money and the college system's cost.

**Cowan:** Right. Well, I can say something about that now. A good example of the money question is that if you're investing money you do have in the colleges, you don't have it to invest in central facilities. And so there is a way in which parts of the campus's development were affected by that.

I know that another example of that was debates over the library, particularly the second section of the library [McHenry Unit II], where there were at least some people up in Sacramento that argued that, well, with every college having a library, you didn't need as much space in McHenry, because they would have the books. Well, that's not what the college libraries were about. They were more study hall facilities, little reading alcoves. But those kinds of arguments were being made in the early years.

One way in which Dean McHenry controlled the overall administrative costs of the campus, and that's what he really meant when he said it would cost no more, was to have boards that had very few staff and to have chairs that didn't get much in the way of compensation, that is, to put administrative monies, including academic monies—academic preceptors and provosts and the like—into the colleges rather than into the boards. Now, the divisional structure would then supposedly take care of a lot of the academic issues that individual boards needed, but not to create a lot of space for boards. That was another place [to save money] that instead of creating a lot of offices for boards, for board assistants and secretaries and so forth, then you wouldn't need it because they wouldn't be offering as much in the way of curriculum. That was the way he saved a lot of money. But, of course, the boards began to feel the pinch on that,

and not only as they developed graduate studies but as their undergraduate curricula and the students in the majors grew, they needed more resources. So there was a constant tension there.

The other way that Dean wanted to make the colleges no more expensive than was the case on other campuses was to get more private support for building resources. And he put a great deal of attention, as you probably know, in those early years to trying to get private funding for facilities that the state wouldn't or was reluctant to fund—college libraries, provosts' houses, special rooms in the colleges—a variety of facilities like that, using a mixture of—there were student fees coming in for housing that could provide certain kinds of lounges and facilities—but for certain facilities he needed that private support. And he worked very hard to get that support and was successful for the first four colleges, and then later for what became Porter College. But that was after the fact. Initially, they didn't have any money. It was only the Porter Sesnon gift later on, several years after the college had been built—

**Reti:** A long time later.

**Cowan:** He got it also for Kresge and Oakes, and Herman was a very important part of getting the money for Oakes. He really took on the fundraising challenge. But nothing since then. College Eight. Colleges Nine and Ten. That private money for residential life dried up. And the campus's fundraising efforts began to be focused increasingly on other kinds of activities: supporting research

facilities, supporting student scholarships, a lot of other activities. So that was the other way he was going to keep the college costs under control.

I think the other issue comes back to what I was saying about college scale. I think the campus didn't quite realize economies of scale by keeping the size of its colleges to the size they did. If you can have a provost for 1200 students, you divide the cost, instead of 600 students. Now, there are educational tradeoffs and so forth, but I don't think there was a working through of the potential tradeoffs of that. It could be argued, in fact, that the colleges, as they grew in size, and less because they had been planned to do that, but because we had to find ways of housing more students and we didn't have the money to build new colleges, the amount of social activities and cultural activities available in the colleges actually increased because there was a larger pot of student social money to provide that activity. And there wasn't as much thinking about the way in which the various sources of funding that were from the colleges might have been put together and been much more of benefit to a somewhat larger cadre of students in every college.

I think the colleges did have some hidden costs. I think Dean was keeping his books very tight. But there were some of these other social and other costs. There were some economies of scale not realized. And as private funding for support of the colleges dried up, it became more apparent. Now one thing that that got the colleges into was the fundraising business [itself]. That's another story, but that was to try to find ways to build some college endowments that could support

college activities, not to build new facilities, necessarily. But that didn't happen during the seventies.

**Reti:** So we can talk about that later. Okay, to return to what you were doing during that period.

### **Cowan's Teaching and Research in the 1970s**

**Cowan:** Okay, talking maybe about my own teaching and research, and a little bit about my committee activities in the seventies— I, of course initially was teaching for two boards and a college, through 1974, and then after that for one college and one board. I've already talked about my community studies involvement, which was again, a wonderful experience in many ways. It allowed me to pursue my interest in urban studies and particularly the literature and issues involved in urban planning. Among the teaching I did in Merrill [was] a team-taught course on the American city, for example, with a historian and a person from community studies, which helped me pursue my urban interests. We did case studies involving Chicago and Los Angeles and even took a week-long field trip at the end of the course to Los Angeles to look and analyze onsite some of the stuff we'd been engaged in reading about.

**Reti:** Fascinating! I wish I could have taken that course.

**Cowan:** In fact, one student in the course ended up writing a senior thesis that ended up being published by the University of California Press, on the freeway system in Los Angeles, a marvelous thing. So we got some good research for

undergraduates, as well as teaching, out of it. I also taught, for a number of years, a course at Merrill that I called *Autobiography and Culture*. It was a course where students read published autobiographies of people coming from a variety of social, ethnic, cultural backgrounds both in and outside the United States. But students then also wrote parts of their own autobiography in the course and then interviewed other students in the course and then did biographical sketches there. So it was trying to bring both the personal and the larger contextual to bear. And in the literature board, I also taught a course for a while in English and then American literary autobiographies, emphasizing more of their literary qualities. And then a variety of other courses on American authors, including one of my favorite courses, a two-quarter course focused on nineteenth century Romantic writers, which had been one of my major areas at Yale. Writers like Emerson, Dickinson, Melville, Whitman.

Then, I and two new colleagues who had recently come to College Five met each other and began to have conversations with each other at a party, interestingly enough, a dinner party that was hosted by Byron Wheeler, my eventual partner. (That was some distance in the future.) I think that must have been around 1972. We decided that the students who focused on the study of American literature didn't have a coherent enough curriculum. There were various courses in American literature taught by five or six faculty who were scattered all over the campus in that day. But we decided that we wanted to put together a three-quarter sequence in the American novel, and we agreed to each take a piece of that course. And that was a course that ran for a number of years.

**Reti:** I remember it, yes.

**Cowan:** It was a lecture course with sections. And there was a counterpart course that was developed by our colleagues that was focused on American poetry. And it was an example of where some common interests can bring people together across collegiate lines, across these large boundaries. But as I said, you needed a magnet. Maybe that's what I've been saying all along today, is the campus probably needed some more magnets to pull together people across the various kinds of physical and bureaucratic spaces on campus. But that was a kind of an example of courses that I was doing.

There were some common elements to virtually all of the courses that I taught. I required a lot of writing. I believed it was important for students to gain and hone their skills in both expository and analytic writing. But I was also interested in their bringing a creative element to that. The autobiography courses were wonderful for that. I worked hard to help students to improve their ability to read closely, attentively, critically, even self-critically, and to read a variety of texts—fiction, poetry, lots of different kinds of nonfiction. I wanted them to be able to read an autobiography effectively, but also a sociologist's analysis, and also an urban planning document. I was interested in helping students figure out what were the appropriate reading skills for a particular kind of text. I wanted them to take whatever was in front of them very seriously *as a text* that could be pulled apart, put back together. I wanted them to be interested in the conventions that structured the production of various kinds of texts and the styles of various kinds of texts. Interacting with social scientists and people in

other fields was very helpful to me in that context, because we would be working with a lot of their texts, but working at it from my interest in looking at them *as texts*, and not merely as windows into the larger world. But that was the other thing—I was interested in trying to stimulate in students an ability to connect those texts to the variety of larger contexts—economic, social, political, historical—in which these texts were located, and to see the texts both as symptoms of, reflections of, refractions of those larger contexts, but also as perspectives on those larger issues—the kind of text-context, if you will, whatever the particular text was, whether it was a work of fiction or a planning document.

Now, in my scholarship I was trying to practice and model those particular concerns in my own research and writing. For example, I wrote some stuff on Norman Mailer, not only his fiction, but his autobiographies, and he had a range of social and political commentary. I was interested in the way in which that could be seen as reflecting larger issues in the time. Mailer was a hard person to deal with, given his big ego, and his sexism, and all the other things. But he was also a very canny observer. So I taught him in community studies courses, and in autobiography courses and in a variety of different kinds of courses, and wrote some pieces about it.

And I was also writing about the city at the time. One very long piece that I did dealt with the perspectives on the urban world held by writers who were meditating on the different ways in which technological possibilities affected their perspectives. For example, what happens if you look at an urban world

from the top of a skyscraper or an airplane? What if you look at an urban world as a map, that is, look at maps of urban worlds, of physical plans? And then what happens, to take the opposite tack, if you look at it as a pedestrian, a walker in the streets who is observing the world from a different point? What are the different pluses and minuses of each of those kinds of experience? So it was using my own particular disciplinary and interdisciplinary interests to maintain an interest in the city, but also to link that to looking at the city itself as a kind of text, and the representations of the cities as texts.

### **Chair of the Advisory Committee on Circulation, Parking, and Transit**

Now, quite a bit of my writing was intended also, during that period, for a more local audience, and focused upon this campus as a kind of case study, as a field study. I think I've talked about that before. I was also interested in the policy implications that might come from a close examination of various aspects of campus space and life and various representations of the campus as contained in brochures for the campus and in planning documents for the campus. In 1970 I asked, and Dean McHenry granted me permission, to be an observer of the meetings of the campus planning committee meetings, which he chaired. So I learned a lot. And then the following year he appointed me to be chair of the Advisory Committee on Circulation, Parking, and Transit. I did that for two years. In 1973, the committee produced a report on circulation, parking, and transit and made some recommendations in the report. I was looking at the membership of the committee and it included people like Albert Eickhoff, who was in the library—

**Reti:** I remember Al, sure.

**Cowan:** —Charles Gilbert, who was the business manager at the time for the campus. Tom Schleich, who was a scientist. And it also included Jim Pepper. Jim and I ended up on several committees and collaborating in several areas. Jim, of course, was a marvelous colleague. But out of that came a set of recommendations, and rather than go through all of them [let me discuss] the themes of the report, and it was a theme that, as I look back at it, characterized a lot of the values that I was bringing to bear to my work at the time. One was the theme of equity. We, for example, argued that people ought to pay for what they get in terms of parking. Central administrators were not paying any more for their close-in, reserved parking privileges than were any other staff and faculty. So we argued that there should be a differentiated parking fee structure where, if you got those extra privileges, somebody would have to pay for it in your unit, but you wouldn't be asking other people to subsidize that privilege. And if you parked in a less desirable, more remote lot you ought to pay less.

Another argument we made was that we wanted to encourage pedestrian and nonprivate vehicle use to get around on campus. So we recommended that a small amount, I think it was a dollar or two dollars, come out of everybody's parking fees to pay for a campus shuttle system.

**Reti:** Is that when we ended up with that big yellow tram that looked like it was in an amusement park?

**Cowan:** The big yellow train. Yes. I think it would have happened anyway. But the issue was how do we pay for it. We felt that if, in effect, you're doing it that way it's reducing the amount of traffic in cars.

**Reti:** So up until that point everybody was either driving or walking. There were no shuttles?

**Cowan:** That's right. And we wanted to—this was '72. There was a little. The elephant train was there but there were very few and it was slow and we were basically trying to get more.<sup>15</sup> We also pressed to build a public transportation system, which the students had already voted into place. We said we wanted those privileges extended to staff and faculty to encourage more staff and faculty to use the transportation system.

**Reti:** Thank you. (laughs)

**Cowan:** (laughs) There were some things we recommended that didn't happen. For example, we felt that people ought to be able to park only in one lot, and

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<sup>15</sup> According to Larry Pageler, Director of Transportation and Parking Services, "[When I became] TAPS Director in 1990. I believe there were two tractor-trailer units, which operated in the campus core from at least the early eighties until about 1988 when they were replaced with the first six "cutaway" shuttle buses and the start of expanded Day and Night Shuttle service under my predecessor, Bill Liebel, UCSC's first Transportation Manager. I think the front tractor included forward-facing bench seats that loaded from the sides; seating was provided around the perimeter of the trailer, where one could step directly from the street onto the bus. I believe it was fueled by propane (with an odd-smelling exhaust). I believe the elephant train shuttles were operating when I was a student ('77 - '82). Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District SCMTD was formed in 1968, with the UCSC service contract negotiated in 1972 with student approval of the first mandatory Student Transit Fee of \$3.50 per student per quarter. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first such student fee-funded transit program in the U.S. Our model has been adopted at numerous other universities, including the University of Washington ('91), CU Boulder ('96) and UC Berkeley (circa '97)." —written communication, Larry Pageler.

once they were in one lot they should move around by these other means on campus, and not drive from one lot to another. That was particularly true for people that had A permits. That didn't happen. But many of these other things were actually adopted and so we felt fairly good about that.

Well, the other aspect of that was that we realized that visitors to the campus found the campus a very mysterious place. We wanted to make it clear where they could park, make it easier for them to do that, and make sure that once they parked they could get easily to wherever they wanted to. So the whole issue of accessibility was an important part of our job. But it was within that issue of an equitable fee structure, equitable opportunities, and then a more transparent structure for circulation and parking. And that was a kind of theme that I think went into much of what I was doing at the time. We certainly wanted to make the campus more user-friendly.

### **Chairing the Ad Hoc Committee Revising the 1971 Long Range Development Plan**

Now, in the fall of 1974, and that was shortly after Mark Christensen had arrived as chancellor, he appointed me chair of an ad hoc committee charged with reviewing the campus's [most recent] long range development plan. The long range development plan had been completed in 1971, but in many ways it was a kind of beg the question plan. It didn't have much detail in it. It was still saying, well, the campus may not be 27,500 but it could be somewhere between 10 and 15,000. But it didn't really change very much from the earlier campus plans of

the 1970s. It was clear that at that point all of the UC system's growth was supposed to be slowing down, this campus's growth along with many others. And so it was time to do a new long range development plan. It also, an interesting committee—it happened also to be a committee that had Jim Pepper as a member, and a graduate student, John Wilkes, was the executive assistant, we called him that. His subsequent history at the campus is very interesting, as is Jim's. Ruth Frary, who headed the Health Services, was on the committee. So it was an interesting, diverse group. It had a couple of students on it.

We issued a preliminary report in the winter of 1975 and circulated it very widely because one of the themes in the report was that we felt that the long range development plan hadn't been, but needed to be, an educational document, a part of the way in which the campus as a whole, as well as the community, could look at the campus, and to see the relationship between the academic planning and the physical planning. We felt that link had not been made as clear. We were looking for a transparent way in which the campus physical plan could be seen as flowing from the academic plan.

**Reti:** But had there been an academic plan?

**Cowan:** There had been an academic plan and it had been revised. There were loose ties between the two. The academic plan in many ways had been set by Dean McHenry and Page Smith and a few others who had been around at the very start, and it hadn't been modified very much since then. But how that worked itself out physically—for example, as we were talking about the college

system and how it related to other central structures and so forth—hadn't been worked out.

The two other things in that preliminary report was that we felt that there should be more transparency in the planning process, more ways for people to understand what was going on—what were the values embedded in the planning process; what the alternatives to various specific planning proposals were; what the analysis had been. So it would be an educational document so that everyone would be more informed about the decisions, the tradeoffs that were going into the planning process. We felt that there should be that kind of transparency.

But we were also interested in the way in which the long range development plan could be used, not only to support particular work on the campus, particular units, particular activities, but to support the sense of the campus as a whole. So one of the things that we recommended was that we look for other ways of tying the campus more tightly together. You can see, given my comments about the college system, how I was interested in that. We felt that there were too many centrifugal impulses on the campus and not enough effort to see how you might tie things together. And among the things that we suggested, rather benignly, was that we look for ways, for example, of enhancing sightlines so that people would get a sense of being led from one place to another. In my planning literature reading, I had been very much influenced by the way that paths were not just paths, but were also social experiences at their best, that streets were, as Jane Jacobs had argued in her wonderful books, lively

places where people not only moved along to get from one place to another but themselves were part of the social experience. So we were saying, how can you create the possibility for enhancing the social spaces of the roads and paths themselves and the places immediately adjacent to them as the social spaces, and how can you give people—Kevin Lynch had written some books dealing with urban imagery and how orientation to cities was affected in part by people believing that they could move from one place to another and, while they might be surprised by a few things they found along the way, not feel too lost.

And there was another book by a wonderful anthropologist named Constance Perrin called *With Man in Mind: The Environmental Basis of Design*. And she talked about circuits, talked about the way in which people in moving in their ordinary tasks through a day, through a week, through a year, pursued circuits from one place and one task to another. And she talked about ways in which at various points along that process they either experienced barriers or things that helped them move across barriers and made it easier. And to a certain extent, I think we were interested in creating what we overstated as making this campus a barrier-free environment, making it accessible and friendly.

So anyway, when we talked about creating sightlines, we weren't thinking about tearing down a lot of trees. We were thinking about simply enhancing that as an experience. There was an ecological reason we also were interested in for that time. We felt that the skip out development that the campus had done, like skip out developments in urban communities, was creating more [automotive] transportation, creating more asphalt, making it more difficult for people to

move around by alternative means of transportation and was actually potentially damaging or hurting the environment, the natural environment, than would more compact development. So we were in 1975 arguing that the campus needed in its physical planning to think about the way in which whatever structures were remaining to build could be more tightly integrated with what was already here.

**Inaugural Lecture: "Space as Value: A Reading of the UCSC Physical Plan"**

**Reti:** So you weren't using the word *infill* but essentially that's what you were talking about.

**Cowan:** It was infill. Clustering. We would cluster facilities and we would try to link things, build bridges, not just literally, but other [social and psychological] bridges, with and between things. Well, that was published in the winter. And in March of that year, I gave my inaugural lecture. All newly minted full professors who had been promoted up the ranks—I had been promoted at the end of 1973—were expected to give a public lecture on a topic of their own interest and particularly on their research. I was doing both a lot of [fairly standard] research, but I was also doing some applied research on this campus, if you will. So I gave a lecture called "Space as Value: A Reading of the UCSC Physical Plan." It was a scattered lecture. It went all over the place. I was using slides and it was awkward to incorporate them. It was not the most polished lecture and it went too long. But I tried to do a couple of things in that lecture. I first tried to offer a

theoretical perspective. I argued that plans are imaginative acts. They're projections of a future that has not yet been made. So to some degree they are works of fiction, at least have some fictional elements.

**Reti:** Fascinating.

**Cowan:** Secondly, that plans typically project a future that is intended to be better than the present, an improvement on the present. So they contain some idealized elements, and even utopian elements. For example, they implicitly imagine the ideal users of the environment that's going to be created, not only the environment itself, so people will be able to take maximum advantage of that planned environment. So one could ask the question: what would be the characteristics of those users? What would make them maximally productive and happy in their environment?

And then third was that plans are designed to persuade readers, especially the clients who must approve the plans, who must fund the plans—whether they are campus administrators, or Office of the President administrators, or Regents, or legislators, or the general public, or so forth. And therefore plans are also rhetorical acts. That is, they use languages, images, numbers, and so forth to persuade the clients and other readers that the visions presented in the plans, projected in the plans, are worth moving to embodiment in bricks and glass and stone and everything. And the plans therefore should be read themselves carefully as texts, read for their implicit as well as for their explicit values and assumptions and goals, looking for unconscious assumptions as well as

conscious assumptions and goals. And then also the actual physical environment that the plans are referring to, not only the buildings but their surroundings, the spaces in and around the structures, can and should also be read carefully as texts. That was, of course, in the title. So that an important part of reading actual physical environments is the extent to which the actual environment, as then finally created as the plans are more or less implemented, corresponds to the plans themselves. What slippages or additions are made between the plans that are approved and what's actually there? To what extent are the users that are hypothesized in the plans actually the users? Are they using it in the way in which the plans have said that they should or would be using? What's the relationship between the actual users and their attitudes and the plans? So all of those were the contexts in which I was framing my work.

And then what I did, using slides and all sorts of things, was to suggest ways in which this campus's physical plan can be seen as coming out of a long tradition of Romantic imagery and thought. I'd done a lot of work in, again, nineteenth century writers, Thoreau and Emerson, but also in looking at landscape painters at the time, on Bierstadt and people like that, where the value of the experience of nature—

**Reti:** I think of Ansel Adams and his association with this campus during the early years.

**Cowan:** Absolutely! And so all of that. I was trying to put UCSC not just in the immediate context of Adams and Thomas Church, but also in the longer

traditions that they themselves were a part of, that all of us, as users and participants in this campus were also, consciously or unconsciously, a part of. And I argued that in addition to the campus's many marvelous visual sensory aspects—and I was certainly a fan of those, my own growing up experiences and my own interests are that I love the campus—there was a dark side as well as a bright side to the pastoral. There were darker elements to being in the woods, if you will, that had not been sufficiently confronted, and that perhaps were appropriate prices to pay for the great advantages that we were having but needed to be taken into account. For example, particularly women students' concerns about moving around campus at night. The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, as Robert Frost said (laughs) but they can be scary, dark, and deep.

**Reti:** At midnight when you are coming home from the library.

**Cowan:** Those kinds of feelings were affecting movement and the way the campus was appreciated and a lot of things like that. And again, it was I think what I said in our first conversation, recognizing that everything you gain has some costs. That was one of the costs. To recognize that meant that there might be ways of mitigating the costs so that you can maximize and preserve the virtues.

In any case, I think to the extent that I had a kind of policy message, it was that the campus should be searching in its subsequent long range development planning to become a more centripetal campus, to bridge things which had not been sufficiently bridged, to tie things together, to create a sense of campus, as

well as a sense of local communities, to make the neighborhoods cohere into a kind of city on the hill that would be a functional city in that sense, a humane city, so that it wouldn't be only the neighborhoods that would be humane, supportive, liberal communities, but the city as a whole, but also symbolically, that would come together as a campus.

Well, again, the lecture went on too long and in the question and answer period one student stood up and said, "You won't cut down a single redwood!"

**Reti:** Oh. (sighs) It got reduced to that.

**Cowan:** Well—yes. It was close to another decade before some of the recommendations that were in our long range development plan critique and some of the thinking that was in my inaugural lecture began to really take ahold. And I don't take credit for that [shift]. I think it was some of [the] things in the air, where lots of people were beginning to feel the need for more connection, for other things. But it was interesting to have this particular moment. And these debates, these themes are still with us. They remain very, very lively.

Maybe just a final coda. When I became provost of Merrill, there was a stand of second growth, a not particularly handsome stand, of second growth redwoods in the center of the college, and there were paths around them. But it was very dark. And there was a little seating around the edge. Cowell had a wonderful courtyard, which had great social space; Stevenson did; College Five had this very large courtyard. College Eight didn't have a full courtyard but it had that plaza on the second floor of the Social Sciences Building and was using its rooms

as centers of activities. I said, we really need something like that. So I worked with the people in physical planning and they came in and cut about half of those second growth redwoods and opened it up to sunlight and space. I didn't consult the students in the college, or others, and there was a real uproar from a certain segment, although I must say the faculty were very supportive of this. But the week after they had been cut down and new grass had been put on, a Polynesian dance company came to Santa Cruz—it was part of our Pacific Rim interest—and they performed on that space. And suddenly, there was a dramatic embodiment of what happens when you have something that helps focus a community, brings them together. It was my way of trying to find the right balance between a respect for the natural environment and a respect for the educational and social mission of the college. And I think much of my work and career here has been a search for ways in which one can have that balance. In one sense, it's consistent with what Thomas Church at the outset said, "We must have a campus where neither man nor the environment dominate each other but work in some sort of a synergy."

Anyway, that's my Merrill story and my campus planning story up to the late 1970s. And that maybe can lead us to talking next time about the enrollment crisis of the late seventies and reorganization, and then maybe move on into some of the other aspects of my life in that period.

**Reti:** Sure. That's great. Thank you, Michael. It's fascinating.

**Reti:** Today is Tuesday, June 5, 2012. This is Irene Reti and I'm here with Michael Cowan for our fourth interview. Today we're going to start by talking briefly about these space issues that were going on in the colleges and boards in the late 1970s.

**Cowan:** I was mentioning last time that one of the things I thought that the colleges hadn't thought about was accommodating graduate students. They had done a little bit, but I was suggesting that not incorporating graduate students created some additional tension, probably between colleges and boards, that might have been muted somewhat if they had been, and also would have brought some older students and a certain kind of weight to the college culture that also might have been helpful, especially since the colleges were increasingly housing lower-division students and not many upper-division students.

But boards faced a real problem, not in the sciences, but in the humanities and social sciences, because they had originally been scheduled to have their own separate office buildings in the early plans. When that didn't take place at the start, boards were faced with finding administrative space for themselves. And the colleges hadn't been planned to house boards, so what happened was that a few small offices for board staffs were carved out wherever they could find them on campus, including in the colleges. A board assistant would be squeezed into some office that otherwise would have been used by a faculty member, and typically the board chair used his own faculty office as the board chair office, too. And in that sense there was a lot of rotation in board chairs during that time. You

kept moving the board administrative offices to be where the board faculty chair was, kind of gypsy offices that moved from—

Now in 1973, I think it was, the Social Sciences Building was built, and so it provided some space for—

**Reti:** And that would be Kerr Hall?

**Cowan:** It became Kerr Hall. It was Kerr Hall later—actually when Sinsheimer was inaugurated, Kerr came down and was part of that ceremony. I think in 1977 or 1978 it was named Kerr Hall. At any event, it became the place where several boards of studies in the social sciences—anthropology, environmental studies, of course, was there with College Eight—I think one more got their offices. But humanities still was using space in the colleges.

**Reti:** So Michael, a clarification. Last time when we were talking about McHenry's original plans for the campus and how it was not going to be more expensive to have a college system, I thought we had talked about the fact that McHenry was saying it wouldn't be any more expensive because he would house the boards in the colleges so it wouldn't require a double infrastructure.

**Cowan:** I may have misspoke. Basically what he was saying was that the boards wouldn't need to have very large staffs, at least initially.

**Reti:** Okay.

**Cowan:** And the cost of personnel because they would only be managing a much smaller part of the curriculum. As their graduate programs emerged, they would be able to justify some more administrative staff. But the notion was that you would focus your academic administrative staff on the college administrative staff, rather than the board. So he really wasn't thinking—with the exception of the natural sciences—about where he was going to locate the boards, except eventually in separate buildings in the center of the campus. Board chairs wouldn't have as much duties so you wouldn't have to be paying big department chair salaries. There was a whole range of ways like that by which he was going to save money.

And the space stuff would eventually be solved, he thought, as various humanities and social sciences boards got graduate programs. He was thinking, though, of the boards as the place where upper division, disciplinary students and graduate students— It was something that was thought of as being solved in the future but not something that he was concerned about initially. Partly, of course, it was just that McHenry was a very shrewd politician in dealing with university relations. He wanted to overcome Regents' worries that the campus would cost more. So he made a kind of pledge, and I'm not sure he thought through all the ways of doing it, but these were some of the arguments that he made to convince the Regents.

**Reti:** Okay, thank you.

**Cowan:** Some skeptical Regents. It was interesting that although the social scientists then got their building, Kerr Hall, established, humanities boards were still having to scramble around. For example, history of consciousness, which was just a graduate program, was located for quite a few years in offices in the new Classroom Building on the east side. They had a series of offices there so they were located there. And when I became chair of the literature board in 1976, we were located on the top floor of Applied Sciences, right next to the graduate division, which had its offices there, too.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** (laughs) That at least gave the lit board a large meeting room. One of the things that the boards didn't have in the colleges was their own space for board meetings and things like that. It was, again, a very constricted space to have. But anyway, we had that for a while. But it was a very strange place, I always thought, to locate the literature board. But because we had a graduate program, like history of consciousness, there was a need for somewhat more space, and we had a very large faculty compared to some of the other faculty on the campus then. Anyway, it was an interesting symptom, if you will, of the problems that some of the boards in the humanities and social sciences faced.

### **UCSC's Enrollment Crisis of the 1970s**

Well, maybe I could deal a little with the—I guess the term *crisis* is an appropriate term, at least some of the problems in the so-called post-McHenry era, that is the mid- and late seventies, especially the enrollment problems.

Maybe I can talk a little about some of the causes, some of the impacts, and also the very often strident debates about what to do about the crisis. Some people have argued and I have argued that the reorganization of 1978-79 wouldn't have occurred if the enrollment problems hadn't occurred. And I think the story is really more complicated than that, although that's part of the story. I think the so-called enrollment crisis was actually two separate problems—many of these have been, I think, noted by others. First, was a serious problem, but not an insurmountable problem, that was caused by the nationwide and state demographic changes in the early seventies, and exacerbated by statewide politics and budgets. And then the second was a crisis that I always think was more essentially of campus organization.

The first one—of course, in the early seventies demographers began to argue that there was going to be a turn down in the number of high school students coming into universities nationally, and certainly that was going to be true in California. And then the recession at the start of the 1970s became an occasion, first for Ronald Reagan, and then for different reasons Jerry Brown, to tighten state budgetary support for the University of California. That's a dynamic that's been going ever since the 1960s, that state support for UC has been declining at about 10 percent from the start of the 1970s onward, as a proportion of the total [UC] budget, not the total amount, but the proportion of the budget. Later on, Proposition 13 at the end of the seventies took away some revenue that was coming from the reappraisal of housing, but that wasn't until later in the seventies. Now, the University of California, faced with this demographic shift,

responded in 1974 by instructing all of the UC campuses, particularly the general UC campuses that were growing at that time, to plan for significantly fewer new students in the later seventies and into the 1980s, and every campus had to develop a new enrollment plan that would show how they were going to accomplish that slowdown.

So when Mark Christensen arrived at UCSC in the summer of 1974, the campus was already faced with that rather formidable task of leading the effort to figure out how we were going to deal with slower growth rates. That coincided with the campus's need to develop a new self-study in preparation for an external accreditation review from the Western Association of Colleges and Schools, what's called WASC. I guess it was supposed to happen about every five years and we hadn't had one since, I think, 1970. So there was an internal committee chaired by Karl Lamb, who had been one of the founding faculty on the campus, that published in 1974-75 a document called *Academic Quality at UCSC*.<sup>16</sup> It was a significant title, I think, the emphasis on academic quality, rather than saying "self-study for the review." I think that what had been intended to be primarily a celebratory self study, that is celebrating the campus's first ten years, became a more sober appraisal of some of the problems the campus was already facing at that time, and pointed to some of the challenges that the campus was trying to deal with and proposed some solutions to remedy some of those problems.

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<sup>16</sup> *Academic Quality at Santa Cruz: Report of the Chancellor's Self-Study – Accreditation Commission*, (Santa Cruz, Calif. University of California, Santa Cruz, 1975).

In any case, that self-study was taking place during Christiansen's first year or so. His administration was the focal point of the identification of some of these problems, some of which were already emerging before he arrived on campus. Now, in developing the revised enrollment plan as a part of this self-study, the campus settled on a target of 7,500 students by the mid-1980s, that is, about 6,800 undergraduates and about 700 graduate students. At that point we had just slightly more than 5,000 students, including about 300-some graduate students.

Now, that was quite a comedown from the 27,500 students originally planned, and it was even a comedown from the 1970 plans, which had a rather vague projection by 1990 of between 10-15,000 students. So even [just] four years later, we were down, then, to 7,500. That would have meant, though, an increase of about 2,500 students from where we were in 1974. That would have been about 200 new students a year. It was a modest growth but it was sufficient to keep a number of new faculty positions coming to the campus, keep some more buildings flowing to the campus—for example, College Eight didn't have its buildings yet, although it had already been established—to get some new science and arts facilities, to get some administrative buildings for humanities and undergraduate students, and to get some infrastructure improvements, because there were still ambitions to move eventually into the northern part of the campus.

But I think it's useful to ask why did the campus settle on the 7,500 figure for the mid-eighties. That figure was not mandated by the Office of the President. The Office of the President basically asked each campus to project its own realistic

enrollment targets for the mid-eighties. For example, why not 8,000 students or 8,500, or even 9,000 students? That would have still been consistent with the 1970 plan. And every eighteen to twenty students would have brought a new faculty position, some more TA and other support. Every hundred would have— So that the additional students would have brought additional resources to the campus, made a better case for the buildings and other things.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Well, I think part of the answer is to note that in 1973-74, that is Dean McHenry's last year as chancellor, the other two campuses, UC campuses, that were founded about the same time as UCSC—San Diego opened formally in 1962, but initially with a major graduate component and then began to add undergraduates a little later than that—and then Irvine, which opened the same year as Santa Cruz, in 1965—both had significantly higher undergraduate as well as graduate enrollments in 1973-74 than did our campus. For example, San Diego had 6,000 undergraduates and about 1,100 graduate students in that year. And Irvine had already had 6,300 undergraduates and about 1,000 graduate students. In other words, they had been growing more rapidly than Santa Cruz had and they had more resources, even at that time.

But I think more important, San Diego in its 1974 plans for growth up to the 1980s anticipated growing to about 12,000 students. And Irvine anticipated growing to about 8,500 students by then. That is, both of them continuing to grow to larger sizes than Santa Cruz was planning for. Interesting enough, even

a place like Santa Barbara, which is in some ways in a comparable location, although it had the southern California population, but it didn't have a much larger local population—it was at 12,000 in 1973-74—anticipated growing to close to 15,000 by that period. Davis was also planning to grow. Only Riverside had a projected growth less than Santa Cruz. Riverside was already suffering some significant enrollment problems.

One argument that our campus made at the time for its 7,500 target, rather than a larger target, was that it would be impossible to have additional growth without additional facilities, particularly new residential colleges. It would need new residential colleges to absorb significant undergraduate growth.

**Reti:** Because of our housing issues.

**Cowan:** And because of the housing issues. But it did not want to consider increasing the size of its existing colleges. And it was not willing to consider options such as it did in the first year of the campus, which was, for example, to have some trailers, some temporary housing on campus. Or to take the political risk, which would have been something of a risk, of finding more off campus housing, that is, have a higher proportion of students living off campus for a period of time, until the students came and then they got the building resources to justify more colleges.

Certainly the local community opposition was one dynamic, perhaps, having to look at that 7,500 figure. But I think the major damper on the growth, again, was not the president's office mandates, but the campus's own inability to attract

larger numbers of students by that time, especially enough new students to compensate for the higher attrition rate that Santa Cruz had than other UC campuses were having at that period of time. I think that's part of the story that's also not emphasized enough. There were perhaps lots of reasons for that. But there were more students who initially came to Santa Cruz who were leaving Santa Cruz and going to other campuses, not just dropping out, but going elsewhere, during that period of time than the campus leadership had been willing fully to acknowledge. The [rate of] increase in the first-year student applications had already begun to slow down. I think we talked about this earlier—

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** —by 1971. And by 1973 the new student applications had actually begun to decline, and then the campus had started to extend its application deadline. Then beginning with the entering class of 1975, we took our first group of redirects, mainly students who hadn't gotten into Berkeley. That was a blow, I think, to the campus ego, since we had prided ourselves in the early years on being the most selective campus in the system, and suddenly we were one of the least selective. Anyway, I think if the campus had been looking closely it could have seen some of those warning signs as early as 1972. But I think it was perhaps a little complacent, enamored with its own early success in attracting students, a kind of field of dreams (laughs) syndrome—you build it and they'll come. That *was* happening in the early years but it was beginning to decline. So it

wasn't examining why that falloff and wasn't trying to figure out the causes of the relatively high attrition rates.

Now, I think there was a tendency for at least some campus leaders and faculty to blame the problems on external forces over which the campus had no control. A couple of the arguments were—in addition to the changing demographics—(again that didn't explain why the other campuses had higher projections, but nevertheless)—the location, the fact that we were in a small town and rural area and therefore didn't have an immediate base to draw on, like Irvine did, for example; local opposition, the feeling that that was creating some problems. The fact that there were some murders in the early seventies. All those were seen as part of the problem that the campus faced that it didn't really have much control over.

And I think there was a certain amount of internal blame-gaming that was taking place. I think Christensen, when he came, got caught in that kind of blame-game. He had his own limitations, there was no question about that, but I think to a certain extent he may have suffered from the problem that often successors do to founders. I remember John Adams, for example, in his four years after George Washington (laughs)— If we have a very powerful dynamic leader and problems are left then there is a tendency to blame the successor. In any event, Mark was a convenient scapegoat. He brought some of it on himself through a certain lack of diplomatic and other skills. Nevertheless, there were some problems, which were bigger than any one person could deal with.

And those problems didn't go away after he departed. Angus Taylor came in for a year and a half as acting chancellor and then chancellor.<sup>17</sup> He was very well received here. He was a benign presence. He was well connected. He understood UC politics. He understood shared governance. All of those things were important. And he addressed a number of problems while he was here. But there wasn't much he could do during a short period of time to address the increasingly apparent enrollment problems, and certainly the underlying structural problems.

What was interesting is that even after Christenson was out and Taylor was here, the campus kept missing even its more modest enrollment targets. For example in 1974-75, it had tentatively projected that by 1978-79 it would have total enrollments of 6,500 students, on its way to 7,500. But by the spring of 1977, that is the spring before Robert Sinsheimer arrived as chancellor, the campus had already lowered its projected enrollments for 1978-79 to 6,100, that is 400 less than it had projected then. Then when the 1978-79 year actually arrived, the campus enrollments were just under 5,700. So the campus was already missing even its more modest targets. And that was particularly telling, since, with the exception of Riverside, the other so-called developing campuses, including Irvine and San Diego, were continuing to grow at rates close to their projected targets. So the argument that it was statewide demographics that was the problem was a harder argument to make than it would otherwise have been. It was also quite

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<sup>17</sup> Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Angus E. Taylor: UCSC Chancellorship, 1976-1977* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1998) Available in full text at: <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/taylor>

galling, I think, to a fair number of UCSC faculty to continue to be compared to UC Riverside during this period, particularly by colleagues elsewhere in the UC system, rather than to be compared to the other developing campuses.

**Reti:** Because Riverside already had—

**Cowan:** Had [enrollment] problems. We were lumped with one of the two problem campuses. And it was not only campus egos I think that were involved, that is concern with the wounded campus reputation, the 5,700 was well below the 6,350 enrollment head count that was the basis on which the campus had received already allocated faculty positions for 1978-79. And if it had not been able to fill that enrollment gap, that would have led to a loss of over thirty faculty positions. Riverside had already lost some positions as a result of its enrollment problems, so there was a real example there. It would have meant a weakening of programs, a potentially downward spiral in the campus's attractiveness. It would have meant a loss of other campus resources, perhaps a further loss in prestige. It might have led to some faculty members leaving, like a problem campus. And it could have created additional problems with the Office of the President and the Regents.

I do think that a significant group in the larger Santa Cruz community were not at all unhappy (laughs) to see the—I wouldn't say the campus problems, but the campus enrollment loss. The business community had been unhappy with Santa Cruz because all of the students were voting for progressive people in the elections.

**Reti:** Right, by this time you have redistricting so that students can actually vote in Santa Cruz city elections.

**Cowan:** Yes. That's right. And at the same time, the slow growth, or no growth, whatever you want to call the parts of the community, were happy that slow campus growth would take the pressure off of that side of things.

Anyway, it was a fascinating time, but there were some concrete consequences as well as symbolic and reputational consequences for that, not just slowdown, but actually a decline in enrollments in the late seventies.

**Reti:** So was systemwide coming and saying, "We're going to take back thirty positions?"

**Cowan:** They were sort of threatening that. David Saxon had become president of the University just a year before Sinsheimer became chancellor, so Sinsheimer got an agreement from Saxon that Saxon wouldn't take away any positions provided that by, I think it was 1984-85, the campus enrollments were back up to what they needed to be to justify the faculty positions. But it meant that the campus wasn't going to get any new positions during that period of time. Yes, that's the story.

But I think that there were some other problems that were also affected by the enrollment crisis that are worth reminding ourselves of. I've touched on some of them. One, of course, was the Narrative Evaluation System. That had been, as you know, pressed initially by Page Smith as one of the first things he thought

ought to happen, academically speaking, at the campus. And it was adopted by the Academic Senate, which essentially consisted of the faculty in Cowell and in Stevenson right at the start of the campus in 1965 or 1966. The faculty, of course, which had a lot of junior faculty, were loyal to Smith and so would have gone along with it. But they were also adventurous and this was going to be a part of the experiment.

I must say that I myself was and am still a fan of the Narrative Evaluation System. I think that its goals, which were to encourage students to learn for its own sake rather than for the grade; it was intended to reduce competition among students and to encourage cooperation; it was designed to foster better faculty-student, close relations because the grades wouldn't be there as one of those sticks as well as carrots. Now, it is true that many liberal arts colleges with teachers with fine reputations had graded systems, so it's not clear that the Narrative Evaluation System was necessary to that. Nevertheless, I thought it contributed to that. I enjoyed teaching where I didn't have to worry about giving grades. And I do remember that as the number of students choosing the letter grade option in the late eighties and nineties came, more and more students would come into my office wanting to argue, not about the comments I'd written on their papers, but about the grade I had given them. So I think there were some concrete impacts [of] moving, both first to a letter grade option and then now, of course, to a required letter grade in all courses.

Anyway, the narrative evaluation system was a very important part of the campus. It certainly attracted students to the campus and again had a certain

number of faculty supporters. It did depend on student enthusiasm for the, less the narrative evaluation part and more for the no-grade aspects. If you look at some surveys that were done, the narrative evaluations were seen as something that the students liked, but even more not having to get a grade in the course was an important attraction. It also depended on teacher willingness to devote time and thought to actually writing the evals, and it depended on a rich enough student-faculty ratio to keep the workload realistic for faculty. But the declining student-faculty ratio that was happening even before the enrollment crisis, and the desire for faculty to carve out more research time, was beginning to put a strain on the Narrative Evaluation System.

And then, of course, there were arguments, particularly in the natural sciences, that students needed grades at least in their major courses, in their upper-division major courses in order to enhance their chance of getting into graduate schools and professional schools, particularly medical schools, maybe law schools. So that the letter grade option for upper division courses was built into the natural science courses very early. And the enrollment crisis then fueled the arguments that the lack of letter grades, not the Narrative Evaluation System itself, but the lack of letter grades, was one cause of fewer applications coming to Santa Cruz, and also of students leaving, that is, so they could go to campuses that had letter grades that they could get in their upper-division courses—

I think that was partly a sincere rationale that was supported by a certain amount of evidence. Dane Archer, for example, had a class in sociology do a study that looked at first-year Davis students and first-year Berkeley students. They

interviewed a small sample from several classrooms to find out what those students thought about the notion of a Narrative Evaluation System and a no-grade system. And he found several things. One is that many of them didn't even know much about Santa Cruz. The second thing was that, although in principle they liked the notion of narrative evaluations in their courses, they tended to also feel that grades were important. That was a controversial study but there were some indications that it was really a factor. But I think it was also perhaps a rationalization by some faculty that just wanted to push for letter grades across the board. In around 1980, the senate voted, initially, to approve letter grade options in all upper division courses. There was a referendum on that that overturned what was a very small turnout for a senate vote on that. And then a few years later the option was extended. Anyway, it was quite a controversial issue. But that was another issue, the whole question about the Narrative Evaluation System, particularly the no-grading part of that, and whether that had a negative influence on enrollment.

But there were other problems, of course, as I've mentioned, particularly resource issues. College Eight's facilities were put on hold in the mid-1970s. They were planned to get approval of a new building for College Eight, I think around 1976. That was taken off the capital development improvement. That was at a time, though, where some new facilities were being approved at other new campuses. It was because of the enrollment problems. There was a series of other facilities that had been planned, a humanities building and other things, that essentially were going to be postponed. There was the hope for some sort of a

larger facility, maybe even a student center or offices for student organizations. Lots of things were put on hold.

I think all of this crisis exacerbated some of the administrative leadership problems. I've mentioned the issue around Christensen, but it wasn't only that. I remember that it meant that the campus wasn't addressing what was being complained of as the vice chancellors for the divisions not having enough authority. I remember Brewster Smith at one point, who was vice chancellor, then dean of the social sciences, saying that they had high-sounding titles but very little authority. And it's because Dean McHenry was holding that authority closer to him, and the turnover in administrative leadership after he left meant that issue wasn't being resolved. There were board chairs who were complaining that they didn't have enough authority over working with their faculty to plan curriculum, and the board chairs were often seen as very weak, people who were more secretaries of their boards rather than people with real authority. So there was a whole range of issues of that nature. Provosts at the same time were complaining that they needed more authority to do some of the things that they wanted.

So there was a whole swirl about who had what kind of authority. And it got caught in senate debates too, about whether the senate was robust enough as a unit to be able to contribute to meeting some of these challenges. So there was a lot of that kind of internal swirl going on. I think some of that also distracted the campus from focusing on what it needed to do to deal with some of the enrollment problems. Town-gown relations were also a distraction. I mentioned

space problems in the boards. The whole issue of whether the campus would grow beyond eight colleges. If College Eight couldn't even get— The plans already for College Nine and Ten were put in abeyance.

It was also the case that the campus's ambitions to develop some more programs during the 1970s were pretty much put on hold because that would have required new resources and the existing programs were already feeling strapped for resources and even worried that they were going to lose some resources. So the campus's inability to grow even some of its existing programs, not to mention to add new programs, was also part of a morale crisis, especially since many boards had big curricular gaps—this was noted in the 1974-75 self-study—that they needed to fill, many had to put potential graduate programs on hold in the social sciences and humanities. So all of those were problems that were also contributing to the campus's morale problems, in a sense, an institutional identity crisis.

Now, there were a few things that were happening, though, during the seventies, in terms of program developments or at least pushes. And for the most part they were initiatives that didn't involve a lot of new resources. I might mention two things that I got involved in. One was ethnic studies and one was American studies.

### **Ethnic Studies in the 1970s**

Now, there was, of course, a push starting in the late 1960s to develop one or more ethnic studies programs on campus. That had been one of the key demands

in the student protests during that period. That was one of the issues that was brought up when the students blockaded the Regents, protested the Regents in their meeting at Crown in the fall of 1978. There was a push at that time for a Malcolm X College, a college that would focus on black studies in particular. That seemed to be the focus, mainly. But there were also some issues around Chicano studies that were emerging at that time.

And when I arrived at Santa Cruz in 1969, I very much found myself a part of several initiatives that were emerging out of that push. The first was the push to transform Oakes from a college that had an urban studies theme to a college that would have an ethnic studies theme, particularly black studies, but not necessarily exclusively that. The students wanted to have it called Malcolm X. And Herman Blake had been appointed by Dean McHenry to chair an ethnic studies committee that had as its focus—it was dealing with ethnic studies in general—but quickly became a focus on the planning of what became College Seven, or what became Oakes College. Now, when I arrived in 1969 I was asked by Dean McHenry to be a member of that committee. I think Bill Doyle was on the committee. There were several students. Ralph Guzman was brought in to co-chair the committee. There were a few other faculty. Herman at that time was still a lecturer in Cowell [and sociology]. He had not finished his Ph.D. and he was not yet on the ladder, [but he] was asked to chair the committee. But he had established a reputation already, a real presence as a powerful spokesperson, and I think was well liked, certainly by students, respected by Dean McHenry. He was also seen as someone who could help diffuse student protest.

I don't think I want to say very much about Oakes right now except that that was the college which was very much focused on what ethnic studies might become at Santa Cruz. But [the committee] quickly began to focus simply on the planning of College Seven, that is the physical problems with planning College Seven. That was something I was very interested in so it was very interesting to observe that. I learned a lot from my two years on that committee. It was to be a case study in campus physical planning and its relationship to academic and social planning. It was also a case study in the impact of ethnic and racialized concerns on the campus academic and physical planning because a lot of the pressure for that had been coming from the students, not initially from the faculty. It had also stimulated me as a faculty member to think perhaps a little more about how, given my own limits of expertise, I might nevertheless contribute to making the campus a more hospitable, supportive home, a more attractive home for students and faculty of color, and make the campus a more vibrant multicultural environment for interactive conversation and collaboration and so forth.

Anyway, the ethnic studies committee, instead of focusing on campuswide ethnic studies issues, at that point began to focus on Oakes and what it was going to do. It also acted as a kind of drawing of those energies for black students in particular, but also other students of color—and so it wasn't until the late 1970s, when the campus enrollment problems as well as its more principled commitments to attracting an ethnically diverse student body—it wasn't until the late 1970s that another campuswide attempt emerged to address some of these curricular and staffing problems for ethnic studies.

There was concern as early as the late sixties, but it was increasingly strong by the late 1970s, that Santa Cruz was still a very white campus, especially compared to other UC campuses. And both students and faculty I think shared that view, certainly my colleagues in Merrill did. It was also the case that there were a growing number of high school students of color in the California system at that time, especially Chicano and Asian American students. Our campus was not attracting what was thought to be its appropriate share of such students. And so both for practical enrollment purposes and also on principle, an increasing group of faculty and students believed that there should be more attention to that.

A lot of the recruiting of minority students had been left to the EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] office at that time, which was in the mid-seventies undergoing its own crisis, a very controversial Chicano director. Angus Taylor in his oral history talked about how one of the hardest things he had to do was to fire that director, who was seen as very divisive on campus. But that director was also not encouraging campuswide efforts at recruitment. So much of the recruiting of minority students was focused on his office even though there were a considerable number of students who didn't meet the target for that group. Asian American students, for example, were not being paid much attention to.

In any event, the student pressure began to emerge again, and in 1978, I think it was—this is toward the end of Sinsheimer's first year, a student organization called TWANAS, Third World and Native American Studies, which had emerged earlier, began to press the administration for the establishment of at

least a major in ethnic studies, or perhaps a series of ethnic-specific majors, and potentially a department or a board in ethnic studies. So Eugene Cota-Robles, who was academic vice chancellor at that time, in response to that and with the advice of the Committee on Educational Policy, which happened to be chaired by John Isbister, I believe, decided to appoint an ad hoc task force consisting of faculty and some students, including some TWANAS representatives as well as a couple of other students, to figure out whether there should be a major and/or a board of ethnic studies.

Now, because of my concern for this problem and particularly because I was then provost of Merrill College, Cota-Robles asked me to chair that task force. And the questions, again, had to do with whether there should be a major and perhaps a board. TWANAS had already done a curricular analysis also of what was being taught in terms of ethnic studies on campus. They had done that the previous year. And one of the first things I decided to do was to update that analysis, both by going back over the data they had used, looking at the course catalog, and then updating it for the next year, 1978-1979.

What I discovered was that the campus was offering, actually for a campus of its size, a considerable number of what I called theory courses, theories in the nature of social groupings, ethnic groupings and so forth, and a lot of international courses, that is area studies courses. TWANAS had identified a little over forty courses in ethnic studies that were being taught on campus, but they weren't counting any international area courses, like Latin American studies courses, courses in African studies or Asian studies. They were focusing just on the

domestic things. So I looked at that and discovered that there were quite a few of these courses I would call theory courses, dealing with the dynamics of social and economic relations, the kinds of things that social scientists teach, underdevelopment courses and that sort of stuff—and also looked at the considerable number of courses in Latin American and Asian studies and other courses. And those were a lot. Most of those were being taught by ladder faculty. What was the case, as the TWANAS group had pointed out, is that there were not only a fairly limited number of ethnic studies courses taught but that they were basically group-specific courses. They were basically being taught by non-ladder faculty, particularly in the colleges, which were offering about half of those courses. Oakes was offering some; Merrill was offering some; Kresge was offering some. Those were the three major colleges that were doing that. But they weren't in that sense a stable offering and there were some real gaps in that. Virtually nothing in Asian American studies was being taught. And there were no comparative U.S. ethnic studies courses, with the exception of a few in Merrill and Oakes.

The committee looked at a variety of issues in addition to that, including the fact that the campus still had a very small number of ethnic minority faculty, and, of course, many of them were in areas where their fields involved teaching ethnic studies. There was not enough diversity in the faculty and we felt that that was important for role models, but also because many of those faculty would bring specialties in that area. So among our recommendations which we presented in, I guess the spring of 1978, were to affirm the importance of international and

domestic Third World courses. We were using the term "Third World" because our task force was called the Ad Hoc Committee on Third World Studies.

**Reti:** That was the language of the time.

**Cowan:** It was the language of the time. But the notion was that we wanted more attention to both international and domestic experiences of diverse peoples, but also to take advantage of the diverse perspectives that were coming from people elsewhere in the world, and also elsewhere in the United States. And we wanted to make those courses available to all Santa Cruz students and not merely ethnic minority students. So we urged relevant boards to offer more such courses. For example, in the social sciences, that's where most of the courses were if they weren't in the colleges, but only in history in the humanities division were there any such courses.

**Reti:** Pedro Castillo.

**Cowan:** Yes, he was brought in 1976. And literature didn't offer a single such course in domestic ethnic literature, although it did offer courses in Latin American literature and a little Asian literature. But we found a real lack. We also urged that the courses be better coordinated across units. We discovered that there wasn't any attention to spreading them out evenly over all three quarters, for example, or to scheduling them in a way that they didn't conflict with each other. We wanted to make it easier for students to [take]. We urged the boards to hire more faculty with relevant expertise. And we urged more help for students wanting to form individual majors in ethnic studies, better advising for

them. We urged the campus to better publicize the offerings that already were offered.

We also concluded, however, that there weren't enough ladder faculty on campus yet to warrant forming a separate ethnic studies major. We didn't believe that it made sense to try to form a major if there wasn't a stable base of faculty offering the major. Our emphasis was much more on integrating ethnic studies into a whole range of programs on campus. Anyway, that was a fairly major report that I spent a lot of time thinking about. I looked back at one point over the listing of courses and trying to do that kind of analysis, and, of course, it was something that I was interested in more generally.

### **The Founding of American Studies at UCSC**

Maybe that can lead me to saying something about the launching of American studies during the seventies.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** American studies was also growing, starting in the early seventies, out of individual studies courses and students who were beginning to develop individual majors in the general area that you might call American studies. And that was happening from the start of my coming here in 1969-1970. But the student interest in that area was growing and a couple of faculty who were teaching American subjects on campus began to realize that they were having similar students in some of their courses taking individual studies. John Dizikes

was one of those. Paul Skenazy had arrived, I think, in the summer of 1971 or '72. And Forrest Robinson, and then Jack Schaar, had arrived, I think, in 1971, and was in Merrill. So although we were scattered across several different colleges we began to realize that there were some students that we had in common, and we began to think that it was more responsible for them if we tried to do a better job of coordinating our efforts in advising them, assuring that they got good advice in terms of what courses that they might take, and also helping them with their individual majors. Individual majors at that time required either a comprehensive exam, as did other majors, or a senior thesis.

So we began to put together a kind of structure that was leading to an increasing number of individual majors that were calling themselves majors in American studies. And in 1974 I learned that an institute funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities was being formed at Yale, of all places, that would in its first year (it was going to be a three-year institute) focus on developing curricula in, and improving curricula nationally in American studies, broadly speaking. So I, with the support of the then-vice chancellor of humanities, Ed Dirks, applied, and was accepted to the program, along with twenty faculty from around the nation.

So in the summer of 1975 I hauled my two children, who were I think eight and ten then, across the United States on a great road trip in a VW bus that was constantly breaking down (laughs) to New Haven, Connecticut, to be a part of the institute. I'm sure my Yale connections had something to do with my selection, but also because I was wanting to use that occasion to develop a

curricular program for what I hoped would become an American studies major here on this campus, one initially that would take advantage of the courses that were already here, but perhaps add a couple of anchor courses.

It was an interesting experience. Given my interest in urban areas—I was going back to a city, as much as to a campus in the mid-1970s—I decided that I wanted to live in the downtown area. There was an old Italian neighborhood, a former Italian neighborhood of row houses. And so I found an apartment there. It turned out that it was a neighborhood that had become a mainly black neighborhood with some Puerto Ricans in it. There was a grade school that was right there too and I figured that if I'm off at the institute it was important that my kids have close access to a grade school. It turned out that they were only two of the three white kids in the grade school. For them, that was a very interesting learning experience. I'm not sure that it was a great experience to impose on them, although they learned a lot and both of them have talked about it as a time for surviving and also learning. But for me, living in the center of the city, having a walking relationship to—because it was about a ten-minute walk to the campus—was very important, to reimpose myself. It was a changing urban scene and to get, again, a sense of what that meant in dynamics.

**Reti:** Now, how long was the institute?

**Cowan:** It was a year-long institute. We were there for an entire year. Now, it was fascinating because—again, Mr. Christensen's battle—the official focus of the institute was curriculum development. But only a few of the faculty were

very much interested in spending a lot of time developing new curriculum. We were supposed to present by the end of our year a new course that we had developed, an interdisciplinary course of some sort, in some aspect of what you might call, loosely, American studies. Plus, the faculty went off and did their own research. But that wasn't necessarily bad because I was able to talk to colleagues in a whole range of fields. It was a mixture of relatively junior faculty and senior faculty who had already established their reputations as scholars, who were there. So I interacted with other faculty in the institute who were folklorists, who were working in anthropology, in art history, in history, in literature, of course, institutional analysis and feminist analysis. Interestingly enough, out of the twenty people there, there were only three women. One of them was a woman named Catherine Sklar, who had written a major work on U.S./American women's history. A wonderful person. And a charismatic and quite brilliant woman named Catherine Stimpson—

**Reti:** Oh, sure!

**Cowan:** —who moved on into—she became president of the Modern Language Association at one point, and became dean of the graduate school at NYU. A very powerful presence. So I had people like that around, as well as some of my male colleagues. And some of us were very interested in curricular development. So the group was supposed to break down into various kinds of thematic clusters. Some of us were interested in all of the clusters.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So we went through all that. I read a lot. And I worked on my course, the course that became *American Lives*, which became the foundation course for a while here for American studies, which was designed to bring together autobiographical material, biographies from Americans from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. So that was a very important thing to me.

Also, we had visiting scholars who had come in periodically to give talks and many of them were interesting, but one person in particular was a sociologist named Peter Berger, who came back several times because there were a group of us who were interested in him. He had developed a reputation, in part because he, along with a man named Luckmann, had written a book called *The Social Construction of Reality*, which dealt with the way in which understandings of reality were socially constructed by particular groups and particular contexts. It was a kind of sociological and anthropological analysis of the way in which entities such as nations and ethnic groups and others were constructed. It became a very fashionable thing later.

**Reti:** Okay. Prefiguring the postmodernism of the eighties.

**Cowan:** Absolutely. But it also was very powerful to me because it affected the way in which I thought about the construction of a nation state, the United States, and what were the factors that led into the construction and even naturalization, if you will, of that in the minds of people, so it was seen as a natural and inevitable thing.

Anyway, a fascinating time for lots of reasons. It was great driving across the United States and then back with my kids, showing them sights along the way, and thinking about the United States and its development during that period of time.

In any case, after I got back in the summer of 1976, I began to pull together faculty—

**Reti:** So you came back during the bicentennial summer.

**Cowan:** Yes, that's right. That was part of the reason, by the way, that they had an emphasis on American studies in that first year of the institute. The next year, by the way, was focusing on European issues, and Harry Berger became a member of that institute. Again the Yale connections were undoubtedly a part of that. The third year was going to be focused on society and technology, or something like that. And then after that the NEH funding stopped and so it didn't continue.

But one thing that was an aftermath of that was that the NEH had reserved a certain amount of money so that individual participants in the institute could propose projects that would help them institutionalize what they had learned back at their home institution. So I applied for a grant that allowed me, in the summer of 1977, to pull together a group of faculty at Santa Cruz to actually sit down and plan the American studies major. Pedro Castillo had come at that time. Barbara—her name was Barbara Easton at that time, [now] Barbara Epstein. And Jack Schaar, Paul Skenazy, Forrest Robinson—we had a linguist, a guy

named Will Vroman who was a part of that. It was a small group. I think Marge Frantz was brought in. She was a graduate student in history at that time. I was trying to diversify the faculty who were involved.

We all committed ourselves, as a part of getting a small stipend for working in the summer, to actually participate in not only forming, but teaching an American studies curriculum. So that the goal of American studies—which was influenced by my previous experience at Santa Cruz, particularly in Merrill, my concerns with ethnic studies, my concern with the global studies interests of Merrill—was to have a major which would negotiate what we called a series of creative tensions: that is an emphasis on the local, on using local case studies, local and regional, and the national and the global, the international. So we would negotiate issues of a variety of groups in the United States, including groups that had been subordinated in the United States and by recountings of the history and culture of the United States, minority groups, but also women. So we were interested in gender issues; we were interested in class issues because it included concern with the poor as well as the more affluent people. We were interested in issues of technology and media, the different forms in which the United States and these problems were represented in all forms of literature [and other media]. A concern with individual people but also people in a variety of different groups. Concern with the multiplicities of identity and of identification.

All of these kinds of issues were ones I'd been concerned with for a long time, and my colleagues were too. So the goal was to have an American studies program that would respond to the challenges of the sixties and seventies, while

not losing its interest in maintaining a long historical perspective in order to understand the present and at the same time asking, how do you use your understanding of history and the present conditions in order to project a future? One of the first core courses we had was a senior seminar that was called *The United States: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*.

**Reti:** Huh. (laughs) We could have that today.

**Cowan:** The goal was to take a series of very contemporary issues and then to ask how those might be addressed in the future. So the issue around citizenship, broadly construed, not just in a narrow sense, was a very important theme in the program. Anyway, a lot of energy. Student interest had been steadily growing and when the major was finally approved in 1978 we already had a considerable number of students. In 1979, when the first group of students graduated, there were I think about twenty students who graduated that year in American studies. And the next year there were something like forty. Maybe I can talk later about what happened to American studies later on.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** But at that particular point, it was one of the few new majors that got established in that period of enrollment crisis and it was really because we were taking advantage, basically, of courses that we were already teaching, particularly of courses that we had been teaching in the colleges that we could transform. So it wasn't adding new faculty. The one new faculty position I got, as I may have mentioned last time, was a position for an appointment in African

American literature, which became Nate Mackey. When he came in, he became a part of that group too.

**Reti:** So the Academic Senate was supportive.

**Cowan:** They were supportive. It wasn't that the senate was reluctant to have new programs, because they cared about interdisciplinary programs and because we already had a track record, which showed that we had student interest and that we were generating enrollments. We'd already had several college majors—Latin American studies, Western civilization, aesthetic studies—that had been carved out of various colleges. But we were, from the outset, going to be a campuswide major, as was Latin American studies. We weren't going to limit ourselves simply to students who were in Merrill. It was administered in Merrill and because I was provost of Merrill, which was another factor I'm sure in my being able to get that going.

**Reti:** And that seems significant, because at that very same time weren't they trying to dismantle programs like aesthetic studies?

**Cowan:** That's right.

**Reti:** And religious studies.

**Cowan:** And modern society and social thought held on a little more. Western civilization. Those were college-based programs. They weren't having very many students in them and they were dependent too much on temporary faculty, not on ladder faculty. So all of those factors were, I think, part of that. Reorganization

I think disrupted that a little but I think there were other factors that were even more important.

Now, one of the things that we built in from the outset in American studies was an insistence that all students do a senior thesis. And even while there were individual majors, we had in those early years really some remarkable theses. I think the topics of those were kind of an example of what we were trying to do. Two students got together and wrote an early history of Santa Cruz before the incorporation of the city, a guy named Mike Eaton and Steve Grable.<sup>18</sup> They used *Sentinel* old files and other files. They did a lot of local research! Another student that I was working with wrote a history of the North Coast above Santa Cruz, the history of this property from Spanish land grant all the way up to the present.<sup>19</sup> He used to intern at Año Nuevo Island. So he was taking advantage of the local.

**Reti:** Do you have his name?

**Cowan:** The name is John Selby. A very interesting guy. He was one of the first gay students I also knew, and as it turned out, one of the first students I knew who died of AIDS in the early eighties.

Another was a guy named Richard Gaudino, who organized A Day on the Bay, the celebration of the Italian American fishing community. He did that for a couple of years. He never formally finished his degree, interestingly enough. He

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<sup>18</sup> *Land of Hope: the Quest for Community in Santa Cruz, 1850-1876*, date unknown. Available in UCSC Library's Special Collections department.

<sup>19</sup> *The California Steeles*, 1979. Available in UCSC Library's Special Collections department.

went on and he's now doing some other interesting things. But that was another locally based interest.<sup>20</sup>

Another student I worked with, a guy named John Mauceri, now is web systems administrator at Cabrillo [Community College]. He wrote a history of early serious American gay fiction, in this period right after World War II, when you still had to have tragic endings. (laughs) He wrote about what he called the gay pastoral, where you'd go out into the countryside. It was that sort of thing. You had to get a little space away from the— Of course, it was very interesting, given Santa Cruz history and all of that.

And then there was a study of Ralph Ellison's fiction, basically of *The Invisible Man*, done by a young black student, I think his name was Mike James, up in the San Francisco Bay Area. And a Chinese American student did a study of Chinese American activist organizations in San Francisco during that period. And then one of my students who had taken a course in autobiography and culture early with me interviewed a lot of elderly residents of the Casa del Rey hotel downtown, the one that was close to the Boardwalk that was torn down, and is now the parking lot. But she used to go down there and play guitar and entertain them. So she decided to take advantage of that and so interviewed many of them. She went on—her name was Patricia Nelson, and she went on to graduate work in American studies and then became an assistant professor at Harvard, occupying the slot that had been occupied by Frederick Jackson Turner earlier.

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<sup>20</sup> *A Day on the Bay*, videorecording, (A Ciao Production), 1980. Available in UCSC Library's Special Collections department.

**Reti:** Oh, is this Patricia Nelson Limerick?

**Cowan:** She became Patricia Nelson Limerick, who moved on and became one of the really major figures. So we can't take credit for—I mean, these are people who were bright on their own, but we gave them some space to do some things like that. But a senior thesis requires substantial work, and what impressed me was how much really substantial work came out of undergraduates. And I think one of the sadnesses I've felt, as our campus has developed since then, is how the senior thesis requirement started getting replaced by comprehensive exam requirements. There are a lot of reasons for it, faculty workload and other things. But some really remarkable stuff was being done by those students in the seventies. I look back very fondly on those days.

### **Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer**

Well, maybe I should get to [Chancellor] Sinsheimer's arrival. During his first year at Santa Cruz—he came in 1977—he faced a faculty that I think at the very least was highly concerned about the future of the campus, how to solve these enrollment problems and the turnover in administration. I think they were less concerned about the campus's survival. There were some rumors that the campus might be closed down and sold to Mormons, but I don't think many of us took much stock in that. I think there was a much greater concern that the campus would just limp along for the foreseeable future, as a kind of weak sister in the system, again linked with [UC] Riverside, which was having a lot of problems there, and not able to compete successfully for students from other

campuses and not able to realize a lot of the dreams of the original founding of the campus.

So there was a lot of strong faculty pressure on Sinsheimer to do something. There was pressure coming from the campus, from the faculty, but also pressure coming from the Office of the President. We needed to reverse the enrollment losses. We needed to get the campus budget, and therefore the campus, growing again. We needed to mount a strong effort to repair and to strengthen our slightly frayed reputation, particularly elsewhere in the UC system and at Office of the President.

The story of Bob Sinsheimer's first several years, which has been told a lot by lots of people, including his own oral history and then others—I don't want to go back over that again.<sup>21</sup> But he was himself under a great deal of pressure. I know he was a controversial chancellor in many ways. He was somewhat awkward socially, I think, in many respects uncomfortable with idle chit-chat. He tended to think very carefully and then come forward with proposals. But he was a very systematic and deep thinker. He was an extraordinarily good writer. He was very articulate in those contexts. And a lot of what he moved toward proposing was because he was under pressure from the faculty to do something. It wasn't merely that [President] David Saxon had said, you've got to reorganize and so forth. The faculty themselves, and there are records of this in senate meeting

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<sup>21</sup> See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *The University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1996) Available in full text online at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/sinsheimer>

minutes and elsewhere, at least a considerable body of faculty, was telling him to do something. It's just that faculty were divided as to what they wanted him to do.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** But I think of several of the things it might be worthwhile to point out that he did. One is, of course, very early [he realized] he needed to build enrollments, reverse that decline. And so he hired a new director of admissions, Richard Moll, who himself was very controversial. Faculty wanted to see enrollments up and they felt that there needed to be more outreach, but there was real division as to whether they simply wanted to celebrate all the great things that Santa Cruz was doing, or to emphasize other things. And Moll, among other things, not on his own, but because there was strong faculty pressure, began to stress the rigor of the campus, stress the natural sciences in particular, because that was an area where he felt that we were not attracting enough students. He revised literature that would go out to people, with the advice of a retention group. That's another thing. Some faculty people felt that Moll was being too slick. So there was a real attention to the way he was doing it and that created some problems. But he was under a great deal of faculty pressure to do something and he had the reputation of turning other campuses' problems around.

Another thing Sinsheimer did was to commission a series of studies, both bringing in external people—there was one done by a group from Philadelphia

that they called an enrollment analysis, for example. And there were several studies done internally by the Office for Institutional Analysis here, Planning and Analysis, whatever it was called then, to look at students' attitudes towards the campus, at why students had decided not to come to Santa Cruz after they had been accepted, looking at some of the retention problems and why people were not staying. There had been some of those studies before he arrived, but very few, and he really pushed to engage in a whole series of such studies. And some faculty—I mentioned Dane Archer's study—were also trying to contribute their own to that. Another thing that he did was to commission a study in 1978 that was presented in a very small, easily readable pamphlet, that focused on the positive, even dramatic impact that the campus had on the Santa Cruz economy, a very interesting document.

He was working on all fronts to try to convince the community that it should support growth, that we were a good thing to have here and they shouldn't snipe at us. He was trying to meet his commitment to Saxon to get the campus back up to the enrollment that it had been budgeted for. He also began to take steps, which he pursued then in the early eighties, to develop a research and development park on campus that he thought would not only enhance the campus's reputation as a serious place, but also would connect us with Silicon Valley and perhaps lead to some additional external support, financial as well as others for the campus.

And then in addition to these studies, both internal and external, he began to pursue a series of other changes. The major one was, of course, reorganization.

[*pause*] I can say a few things about reorganization. It's too complicated to go very far into. He decided to do several things. He announced [this plan], after a lot of consultation with the faculty, who were urging him to do things, again, I think it's important to stress that.

**Reti:** Right. It's not like he came in with some idea that he was going to demolish the college system.

**Cowan:** He didn't have an idea of what he wanted to do then. He just knew there were problems. He thought that there was a reputational problem, that the campus had developed a reputation for not being serious enough, that the location, the beautiful, natural, gorgeous location was also part of it being seen as a flaky place, a place where people spaced out.

**Reti:** Uncle Charlie's Summer Camp.

**Cowan:** Ah, all of that. And however unjust that was, that was a part of the problems that were identified in some of these enrollment, application, and retention studies that he did. The NES, the Narrative Evaluation System, which was seen as a no-grades structure, was another one.<sup>22</sup> The fact that the campus

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<sup>22</sup> I've over-generalized on this matter throughout this oral history. The move toward mandatory grades took place over several years, as did the erosion of the requirement that faculty submit "narrative" evaluations for all students in their courses. At present, all students, to earn a Bachelor's degree from UCSC, must receive letter grades in at least three-fourths of their courses. They may still choose a P/F option in up to a quarter of their courses, but departments may designate all or some of their courses as letter-grade-only courses.—Michael Cowan.

hadn't reached out to make itself more visible, not only in the local community, but to the state and potential applicants, was another aspect of that.

### **Reorganization**

Anyway, in the late fall of 1978, he announced a two-part reorganization. One was that he was going to take away faculty FTE-holding power from the colleges and locate it entirely in boards or in divisions. That was a very important, and of course very controversial piece. Most faculty, by the way, on campus supported that, as you can see in senate minutes. But particularly the older colleges, particularly Stevenson and Cowell, were very much resistant to that. As a part of that, too, he wanted to move the faculty around, to in effect continue that re-clustering of faculty that had begun in a more modest form in the mid-seventies, and to create significant support clusters of faculty within particular disciplines in particular colleges. But he was also interested in creating cross-disciplinary clusters, so that he was very supportive of not just having a single board in a college, but having parts of several boards together in the college. He didn't work out the details of that. He was leaving that to the deans of the divisions to work on. But that was very important.

Interestingly enough, he exempted two colleges from that a bit. One was College Eight, which had become the home of environmental studies, and so the provost of College Eight was going to be also chair of environmental studies, and so their appointments would be in effect, the two would be together. The other was Oakes. And I can talk about that maybe next time, but Oakes was somewhat left

alone, they were still allowed to maintain some joint appointments. But otherwise, getting rid of the joint appointments between colleges and boards.

But the other thing was that he was going to reduce the number of courses offered by the college to basically also divisionalize the curriculum. And that was also very controversial. There were some other things, though, that he wanted to do that I think were not fully appreciated at the time, or enough in the swirl of the controversy about the colleges. He wanted to strengthen the liberal arts and general education on campus. And he did want to strengthen the interdisciplinary research as well as teaching on campus.

**Reti:** That story doesn't get told.

**Cowan:** And he brought—even when you read some of his inaugural addresses, as a part of his inauguration he convened a symposium on liberal education in the twenty-first century, brought some major speakers from around the nation. Clark Kerr came down for that. That was in 1978. There were a number of things like that that he wanted to do. And he felt, among the other things, that the existence of separate college curricula and board curricula had created greater incoherence in the campus curriculum as a whole, but also a particularly significant incoherence in lower division and general education curriculum, because nobody was really looking at what that looked like as a whole. And so part of what he wanted to do was by consolidating control of the curriculum into the divisions, to create greater coherence.

One thing that he did then was to appoint an ad hoc committee on campus curriculum, on the reorganization of the campus curriculum. It was called the Reorganization Committee to Address Curricular Questions. And I was asked to chair that committee. That was a huge committee, by the way. It was a measure of the importance of the committee. It included representatives of major Academic Senate committees. It included all of the divisional deans. It included a number of students. Interestingly enough, I was the provost on the committee, so I was the representative of the provosts, if you will, on that committee. I think he probably chose me because I had already done this work on the third world committee and he thought I could probably pull together a report, and also because he wanted somebody who was affiliated or identified with the colleges. Anyway, that's my guess. He never told me why he did it. Also, by that time John Marcum was academic vice chancellor and John and I knew each other [well]. So I think there were a lot of things.

Well, that committee faced a very complex task. And we did a number of things. One of the things—I'm not sure that I could go through everything. But we also strongly supported creating a more coherent lower-division general education—

**Reti:** Because we didn't have general education requirements yet at that point?

**Cowan:** Well, we had some breadth requirements. But every division, and that was the reason that all four deans were on there, was asked to develop their own plans for a more adequate lower division curriculum. And that led to the so-called foundation courses, the notion that you would have—

Oh, the colleges were divisionalized, by the way. That was the other thing that happened. Social sciences got two colleges; humanities and arts got three colleges. Natural sciences got one. Oakes and College Eight were exempted from that. But the notion was that each division would develop a foundation course that would also become the core course of that college, and that ladder faculty would become recommitted to teaching in that course. That was not controversial in most cases, although I think in a few colleges, in particularly I know Stevenson and maybe Cowell, it was controversial because they already had a core course and they thought that this would disrupt what they already thought was a good thing going. They liked the notion of having more ladder faculty teaching, that and more attention given to student writing. The recommendation was to add some more composition courses and to make that an expectation for all students, and also to have a math center that would do more tutoring with math students. So that was all a part of the reorganization, that is to add curricular elements to those areas that didn't depend just on the colleges, although we wanted to deliver as much of that as we could in the colleges, but they would be controlled, not by the colleges, but by the divisions that were responsible for that. The goal was to create greater stability.

Another recommendation of the reorganization committee was that more attention be given to advising, and particularly to advising transfer students, because they'd gotten lost in the college system, which had focused more on first-year students. Another major recommendation was that we should develop some other attractive courses, what humanities called foundation two courses,

which would be taught not in seminars, but in larger courses that would address large, cross-disciplinary themes of interest to students. And those eventually became what were called the "T" courses, the topical courses.

**Reti:** The courses that are numbered in the 80s.

**Cowan:** Yes, the 80s courses. And every division was supposed to offer an attractive array of those courses, which could satisfy some campus breadth requirements. So the notion would be that we're not just preparing students with prerequisites for their own major, but more broadly. And in fact, the prerequisite courses were not supposed to be the courses which counted for the 80s courses. So that was another thing that was coming out of it, to get the divisional deans more involved and to get the ladder faculty more involved in a coherent planning of that curriculum.

The other thing that Sinsheimer said he wanted to do, and he got a fair amount of support from most faculty, although with significant pockets of resistance, was to list all the courses under either boards or interdisciplinary committees. One of the things that I did as the chair of that committee was to literally go through the entire college curriculum and to see who was teaching the course and to ask what board might be able to house that course if it continued to be offered.

**Reti:** Good God. This was all pre-computerized *Schedule of Classes* or catalogs.

**Cowan:** (laughs) This was all on paper and it was an amazing thing. But it fed into my interest in doing this sort of stuff. In any case, we were able to show that a very large number of courses taught in the colleges were actually board courses that could easily be moved into the appropriate boards, and also a considerable number of the interdisciplinary courses could be absorbed into the campuswide majors, like women's studies, like American studies, and others. And so we supported that notion and essentially developed some recommendations for concrete mechanisms for which divisions should take what courses. One of the mandates was also that every divisional dean put a lot of emphasis on supporting interdisciplinary as well as disciplinary activities. And that included collaborating across divisional lines to make sure that programs and courses that required interdivisional cooperation would continue to be offered if they made academic sense.

So all of those things, as well as other things, were done in the reorganization committee. It was controversial in parts, but there was enough faculty support to move it through, and so starting in 1979, with the exception of College Eight and particularly Oakes, the curriculum shifted that way, with the exception of basically the core courses, which were maintained in the college but with the notion that they be strengthened.

And I remember my first year [after reorganization] one of the things that happened to me was that I was moved around from college to college too. The Social Sciences Division was assigned the responsibility for Merrill. It was clear that Bob Adams, who was dean at that time, wanted a social scientist to be

provost of the college. And Helene Moglen had been assigned Kresge, and it was considered probably the most challenging college to move faculty to. It had developed a reputation, partly because of its reputation and partly because it was seen as a little more remote. And so she made a big push. She decided that she was going to bring a whole series of very senior faculty and several major programs over there. And so she brought a whole group of Americanists, loosely grouped around American studies group there. She brought the literature board there. And she brought the history of consciousness program there. Women's studies was already there. Women's studies had been assigned to the Humanities Division as a program.

**Reti:** So American studies was at Kresge at that point?

**Cowan:** We moved to Kresge at the start of 1979. So I decided that in order to support my dean and because I thought that I needed to set some sort of an example since I had been (laughs) chair of the committee, that I should move.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** I must say that we had thought that we would be able to get together larger cluster of Americanists by doing that, and because there were some other people that could move into Merrill, that would strengthen some of its own interests in Latin American studies, and some of its other areas too. So I agreed not only to do it, but to lead a group of Americanists over there along with others, to what was going to be a kind of modern studies college. That was what Kresge was presenting itself as. She also brought a group of faculty in social and

political thought—Jack Schaar, Peter Euben, Bob Meister—that group over there too. So she was trying to inter-divisionalize the college too, but within this framework.

**Reti:** And she was dean of humanities.

**Cowan:** She was dean of humanities. We can talk about that a little more [later]. So anyway, reorganization left a lot of bad feelings that lingered for some time, although I think most of the faculty on campus, not just the natural scientists, ended up supporting it, to a certain extent out of desperation (laughs) but also because they thought it really made sense. And I think Bob Sinsheimer really was not trying to destroy general education and liberal education. He really believed, and I think a lot of faculty came to agree with him, that this would be a way of further strengthening that. But all of this was happening at once. And I think part of the problem was that these various complex streams got confused, and some of the streams kind of got lost in the later folklore of what happened during this period.

### **Chair of the Academic Senate**

**Reti:** Today is Monday, June 11th, 2012, and this is Irene Reti. I'm here with Michael Cowan for our fifth interview. And Michael, we're going to start today by talking about your time as chair of the Academic Senate, and following up on reorganization, our discussion from last time.

**Cowan:** Fine. As I mentioned last time, as a part of reorganization I had left the provostship of Merrill and moved with a bunch of faculty to Kresge, and for my sins was tapped to be chair of the Academic Senate. I do remember that in the senate meeting [in which the following year's slate of officers was confirmed], one faculty member, whose name I will not mention, got up and said that he thought that it was very important that senate officers be highly distinguished scholars. I was confirmed anyway. But it represented one of many fissures among the faculty at that time concerned about that.

In any event, I spent a year doing that before I took off for a sabbatical to Boston, and it was a very busy year. That was the year in which, under John Marcum and his then-faculty assistant John Isbister, the campus developed a five-year academic plan, which it published in 1980. It was going to go through 1985. That was a document called, I think, "Santa Cruz Plans for the 1980s," and it was an important attempt to address the issue—once reorganization had taken place—where the campus should be going. It was dealing with that 7,500 expected limit on the number of students we were going to have, for years and years it was thought, and so it tried to deal with the various kinds of things that the campus would do to make sure its resources were being used efficiently, that it was still paying strong attention to undergraduate education, that it reaffirmed the college system and so forth. As chair of the senate I was a member of that committee, along with Brewster Smith, who was then chairing the Committee on Planning and Budget. And I think the chair of the Committee on Undergraduate Courses, it was called at the time, I think George Von der Muhl chaired it at the

time. Anyway, there were some administrators, even a few students on that. But we produced a document, which was sober but upbeat, and maybe I can talk about a little more of that later. But I thought it might be useful to say something about the Academic Senate as a whole during its first fifteen or so years of the campus.

**Reti:** Sure.

**Cowan:** The Academic Senate on our campus, what we call the Santa Cruz Division, is, of course, a division of the University-wide Academic Senate. It is an agent of, authorized by, and ultimately responsible to the systemwide senate. And in those days the individual campus senates were trying to figure out how they carve out authority and at the same time build up the power of the systemwide Academic Senate. I remember going to Academic Council meetings. It was essentially the executive committee of the systemwide Academic Senate. Karl Pister was chair of the Academic Council. That time is when I first got to know Karl. I remember his talking about the fact that it was still a very low-keyed operation at that level. They were meeting in a committee room in the Academic Senate on the Berkeley campus, and it hadn't assumed the elaborate functions that it was going to later. Nevertheless, there were a lot of senate committees, and our campus, as a very small campus, had to mount the entire committee structure that was mandated by the systemwide senate, which meant that in the early years, with a small group of UC faculty, most faculty had to be on the senate committee in order to make it work.

**Reti:** About how many faculty were in the Senate when you got here?

**Cowan:** Well, when I got here there were probably two hundred faculty members, and probably a hundred faculty had to be involved in a senate committee, so a good half in any one year. And that included assistant professors; there were even some assistant professors chairing some senate committees. But a lot of us, almost all of us who were tenured had to take our hand. A major cry, increasingly in the seventies and certainly as the enrollment crisis and all of these other structural crises came to a head in the late seventies, was that there was too much committee work on campus—we had our board committees, we had our college committees and we had our senate committees—and it was blamed in part for the lack of research productivity for some faculty. I think it was a little more complicated than that, in part because I think a lot of faculty, including very junior faculty, were excited in the barn-raising phase, they wanted to be involved in campus service. There was a lot of activism and certainly an emphasis on what we were calling participatory democracy—the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] phrase at the time.

**Reti:** Oh, yes. I remember that language.

**Cowan:** And so I think there was a lot of that energy, and it may not have been the total amount of time that people were spending in committees, but that fact that if you're having a committee meeting for two hours on this day and another one on another day, it interrupts your work rhythms. Otherwise I think it was

more that interrupting of work rhythms that was the most difficult part of all of these committees.

But I think there were some positive aspects to the committees, and perhaps the most positive aspect is that it brought faculty together from across collegiate and board lines. You were interacting with social scientists and arts folks and humanists, natural scientists. And it, I think, gave faculty both a greater appreciation for the pressures and work that other faculty from other parts of the campus were doing; it brought them across all these physical as well as institutional barriers; and it also, I think, fostered a concern for campuswide problems, and recognizing that they were campuswide and not just limited to specific units. So I think that was very important.

Particularly important, I think, were the individual senate committees. Attendance at the quarterly—they used to be scheduled for twice quarterly—meetings of a whole division started declining during the seventies, except when some major issue was on the table, like reorganization or grades or things like that, and then you'd have a lot of people show up.

But it was interesting that one of the proposals for saving faculty time that was ventured, I think during the reorganizing period, was to move our campus to what was called a representative assembly, that is, to some way have a smaller body of the faculty actually serve as the legislative body for the senate as a whole. Other campuses had done that by, say, nominating a faculty member from their department to be on this representative assembly, or a representative

of the chairs of each senate committee to be on that, a much smaller group. And interestingly enough, the [UCSC] faculty voted that down when it was proposed, and we never have gone to a representative assembly. I think that we may be, outside of Merced, the only campus not to have a representative assembly. It says something about the particular ethos of the campus that faculty didn't want to miss out on an opportunity to participate in major policy decisions affecting them.

But I think, although the campuswide divisional meetings were important, the real work of the senate was always being done in the individual committees, and I think there were some committees that were important from the outset. For example, the Committee on Curriculum, which then became merged with the Committee on Educational Policy, which had to approve undergraduate majors, and technically all the courses that a particular program was teaching. It had plenary authority over that. You couldn't start a new undergraduate major unless that committee approved. Didn't mean it would happen, you'd still have to have it funded, but the administration by itself couldn't start a new major.

**Reti:** Nor could you even approve a course without—

**Cowan:** That's right. Certainly, another major committee was the Committee on Academic Personnel, which reviewed all new hires, all merit increases and promotions and became an increasingly powerful committee. The Committee on Committees was always important, because it appointed the members of all the other committees.

**Reti:** It sounds so Orwellian (laughs).

**Cowan:** I know (laughs)—and therefore could affect, by who it appointed to those committees, the agendas of those committees. So, if the Committee on Committees thought that there was a particular issue that needed working on, they could press to make it happen. I, at one point, perhaps a little tongue in cheek, thought instead of a Committee on Committees we ought to have a Committee of Committees, where one day a week for three hours all the committees would meet in one room, a large room, and like a speed dating arrangement you would move from committee to committee and you'd try to make all your decisions and coordinate committee work and so forth. Of course, it never happened. (laughs) Other committees then became increasingly important. The Graduate Council, of course, which, like the Committee on Educational Policy, had to approve all new graduate majors. And graduate courses became increasingly important. And then, of course, what was first called the Committee on Budget and Academic Planning—BAPL, they used to call it—which then, in the late seventies, became retitled the Committee on Planning and Budget, CPB, which became a very important senate committee. It was advisory. It didn't have plenary authority, but it started carrying considerable weight with the administration.

I think, related to these committees, was the growth of a group of what I might call senate specialists—especially chairs. There'd been a lot of turnover in committee membership in the early years. I was on, I think, four different senate committees during my first five years here. I was fairly typical. We were bounced

around from committee to committee. Therefore there wasn't necessarily continuity in leadership or expertise. But increasingly there were certain faculty that began to get particularly invested in and specialized in certain kind of committee work. I got, for example, very interested in the work of the Committee on Planning and Budget. I chaired it, in fact, in 1981 through 1983, and I'd been on it for maybe four years prior to that during the seventies, and I think maybe a total of ten years on that committee during my time here at Santa Cruz. But I was typical of some other faculty that were beginning to do that. And it meant that those committees began to have a kind of clout because they had people who really knew the issues who were involved in those particular committees. There were other committees, like the Committee on Educational Policy, where you had that kind of strong leadership.

I think the chairs of the committees, of course, play a particularly important role. It's their homework; it's their organizing agenda; it's their one-on-one conversations and negotiations with the administrators on behalf of the committee that can play a real difference, and we were beginning to get that. Now, my experience here on campus has been that quite a few chairs have really been excellent. They've been dedicated; they've been talented. Occasionally you would get a chair who is sort of a rogue chair, who goes off on his or her own personal agenda. And that can be disruptive. But on the whole I think it has been very important.

One of my goals in my role as chair of Planning and Budget for those two years—in fact, John Marcum was academic vice chancellor at the time—was

related to some things I'd already been interested in in terms of physical planning and the like. I thought that the UC administration needed to bring much higher quality scholarship to its own institutional analysis. That is, to treat the institution itself as an object for serious, nuanced, multifaceted research. There had been a rather casual approach to that, I think in the early years. There had been more what I call administration by seat-of-the-pants feelings—people who, like the chancellor and others who had been around a lot and knew a lot, and who thought that they really knew what should happen. And I think the enrollment crisis and a lot of other things led to a feeling that there really should be much more sustained analysis, so that the campus's Office of Planning and Analysis assumed rather a greater role, and began to take on projects that were suggested by the faculty, not merely ones by the administration. It's been a very important office. It's had some extraordinarily able staff over the years, and certainly we had good working relationships with that. But we really insisted on that.

For example, one of the issues was how, with limited resources, the campus with steady state [economic conditions], you could make most efficient and most effective use of those resources. And Planning and Budget argued that you needed more nuanced understanding of what *workload* meant. It wasn't merely a matter of counting how many courses the faculty member taught, or how many—how much enrollments they had. But we argued that there was—and this was another theme that I was interested in, the issue of equity—how does one divide the teaching workload in an equitable way, so that faculty are spending

about the same time and effort on their total educational, their total teaching responsibilities, and therefore have an equitable amount of time available for their research? It was that kind of argument, which meant that you had to look at more nuanced figures and criteria than simply the number of courses or the number of students taught.

Another thing we argued for was transparency in administrative processes and decisions. I was arguing for transparency in terms of campus planning, a more transparent campus physically. But the notion of encouraging administrators to be clearer about the processes by which they made decisions, to make those processes and consultative processes clearer, to have them be clearer about the basis on which they made their decisions, the cost-benefit analysis that they did, the alternatives that they suggested and so forth, to basically say to the administrators that they had a responsibility themselves to be educators, to make decisions that themselves were educative, to help people understand the processes, the rationales, the values and so forth—and to tie that to research. And it was also the time when the campus began to undertake systematic reviews of individual boards and programs.

**Reti:** External reviews?

**Cowan:** External reviews, bringing in external teams. This had been a part of the commitment that was being pressed by the university-wide administration as it encouraged every campus to take a better look, a closer look at its resources, and how they could be most effectively used. And part of the notion was that if there

were some very weak programs, then they might be candidates for elimination, and strong programs needed to be supported in adequate ways, given the tightness of the resources. And initially, it was the divisions that were reviewed, and then in the early eighties individual programs, on a five, six-year cycle, began to be reviewed. And that's made an important difference in the campus academic program quality.

**Reti:** So do you recall if there were programs that were eliminated because of the reviews?

**Cowan:** The one program that was eliminated was not reviewed. Well, it was reviewed, as I remember, but as a special case. It was sort of off cycle. That was the religious studies program. It was a program that had, I think, four faculty members, one of whom had left in the late seventies, leaving three faculty members. It was a program where—.

**Reti:** Was that Paul Lee, who left?

**Cowan:** Paul Lee—he was in philosophy, he wasn't in religious studies, but he was affiliated with it. I think it was Donald Nichol, I can't remember when Donald actually left, but he was a historian of religion, and he was very much involved. But there were three other faculty in the program, and each of them specialized in a religion. But there wasn't a comparative religions course. The closest that came to that was Noel King's courses in African religions. But for the most part they were courses [on specific religions], and the focus was less on the analysis of religion. The major religious studies program in the system was at

Santa Barbara, and they had a very distinguished research faculty. Here, there was a feeling that it was more a celebration of the particular religions, which was not necessarily inappropriate, but the analysis wasn't there. And so Gary Lease, who was a part of that group, finally, as chair of the program, proposed that it be eliminated. And so, with a great deal of controversy—I think Helene Moglen was dean of the division at the time—it was phased out as some of the faculty didn't get tenure and others were put into other boards. I think that is the only one that I can remember at that particular point, but all the programs were put under the gun, if you will.

At the same time, there was an interest in, seeing within the limited resources, how new programs might be developed. It was at that time, interesting enough, that computer engineering was approved, that applied economics was put on the table for another program. So there were some things that were happening at the time.

Maybe the other thing to say about that committee as a kind of case study is that it was a good example of how shared governance, that is the collaborative governance between the faculty and the administration, can work at its best. The shared governance system can be a kind of mutual veto system, which can lead to stasis. That is, the administration may want to have a certain kind of academic program, but unless the faculty is willing to approve the program it can't happen. Faculty may want some sort of an academic program, but unless the administration is willing to fund it, it won't happen either. It's also true that collaborative governance, shared governance, is always an object that can

involve some faculty sniping. Faculty love to sit on the sidelines and blame the administration for all the bad things that happen, the faculty not having to take some responsibility itself. For it to work, it requires both an administration willing to listen to and value the participation of faculty, but also faculty who are willing to rise above their often parochial interests to do something on behalf of the greater good. And when it involves mutual problem solving—each side keeping the other honest, but recognizing they're all in this together and have common cause. I think at its best, certainly on this campus, that's been the case. Not always, but mainly.

**Reti:** I don't know if this is the appropriate place to ask this, but certainly over the years I've heard many of the narrators I've interviewed say that Santa Cruz had a reputation for being ungovernable, especially with systemwide.

**Cowan:** That's right. It did have that reputation. The grounds for that are [*long pause*] complicated. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** It was in the seventies that that arose, when Dean McHenry left and we had a year and a half of Mark Christensen and then Angus Taylor came down. And then it was restimulated when [Chancellor] Robert Stevens had a certain—he was here for four years, but had a somewhat complex relationship to the campus. But I think it was that mid-seventies, the Christensen episode, that did it. It was reinforced by that sense that the campus didn't know where it was going, and the controversies attendant to reorganization—all of those were there.

But I think there was a certain amount of glee [outside the campus]. I mean, it was a reputation that had a certain self-serving— Here's a campus which is trying to do some different things and look, it's not succeeding. One of the problems must be that it doesn't have good leadership and that the faculty is ungovernable. There is no question the faculty was activist and caring, but my experience has been that the faculty worked together [with the administration]. Now, there were individual cases where deans were forced out by unhappy faculty and so forth, and perhaps sometimes with less justice than others. But often the problems came where you had administrators who didn't show that they respected faculty views and were not cultivating relationships and honoring cooperation. And, you know, occasionally you'd have some faculty troublemakers. But I think that this campus was probably not much worse in terms of governance than many others, when you think of turnover of chancellors and vice chancellors elsewhere in the system at various points. Anyway, so that wasn't my general experience, but I can certainly understand that, particularly the problems of the 1970s fueled that, and once a reputation is established it takes a little while to go away. There's always this sniping.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** It happens at Berkeley; it happens at UCLA; almost any place.

**Reti:** Human problems.

**Cowan:** That's right. I think another positive aspect of the senate was that the senate chairs ended up ex officio having to serve on their systemwide senate

committee counterparts, and that was important, in part, because it de-provincialized some faculty here. I think it gave them a better sense what was going on universitywide at other campuses. When you had a combination of very young faculty here and a very inward looking campus initially focused simply on getting things going, there was probably not enough faculty attention to the senate as an outreach vehicle, and, in fact, in a larger sense, to the campus need to be visible outside the campus. A relatively small proportion of young faculty, and even some tenured faculty at the campus when I arrived, were actively involved in their own national professional associations, for example. That wasn't true in the sciences, but I think in the humanities and social sciences and art it was particularly true, but with some significant exceptions, of course. But in any case, participation in senatewide committee was de-provincializing to at least some faculty, and it was also a way of making Santa Cruz visible. If you have somebody on a committee systemwide, if they say something like, "The campus is ungovernable"—

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** —and have a faculty member say, "Well no, it's not really ungovernable, we have this problem or that," and they could explain it. Without that interaction, you are subject to other people's interpretations and view. It was the case that relatively few Santa Cruz faculty before the late 1980s and early 1990s served as universitywide committee chairs. I think it was part of the junior nature of the faculty here. I mean, typically a chair would be drawn from more senior ranks, and usually you become a systemwide chair after you've served on

that committee as a member for a couple of years, and with all our turnover we didn't have that continuity. But by the late eighties and early nineties we had that work.

Anyway, my year on the systemwide Academic Council, in 1979-80, was an interesting year, because, again, we'd just gone through reorganization and there were a lot of questions about that. I think that I tried my best—I don't know whether successfully—to assure them we were in fact going in the right direction, and that we were addressing our issues and they weren't as serious issues as some people might [believe]. All of the individual campus senate chairs who were on the Academic Council were asked as part of the exercise of the council that year to write a report of their division's work. And I remember writing a report on our campus where I went over the history, talked about [what] the campus had been trying to achieve, talked about the problems, and then talked about the addressing of the problems, and then gave a very upbeat sense of where we were going under our new chancellor and so forth. And it was probably the first occasion on which I pulled together some of my thoughts that ended up then morphing into other position papers that I wrote during the eighties and later. But it was a very interesting experience. And again, Karl Pister as chair of the Academic Council was a useful role model in that.

I think that in addition to the Academic Senate as a kind of campuswide binder linking people from all over the campus, there were a couple of other campuswide binders during that period. Just to give one example, in the year just before reorganization, the academic vice chancellor, Eugene Cota-Robles,

and Bob Sinsheimer supported asking for a grant from universitywide for undergraduate education improvement, a curricular improvement grant it may have been called, or something like that. The grant was approved and it led to the establishment of some periodic lunches, free lunches for any faculty who wanted to participate—I think it took place once a month to focus on various topics of undergraduate education. It was the so-called 'teacher on the hill' project.

**Reti:** Oh, yes.

**Cowan:** It led also to a newsletter, I think published once a quarter. Frank Andrews, who was professor of chemistry, was editor of that, with some staffing assistance. He was a very devoted teacher, cared a great deal about that. The lunches were free, which was a big incentive— (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** —but it did bring faculty from all the divisions. I used to go regularly, during 1978 and 1979, and all the way into 1980, and it brought them from all the divisions, all the colleges, and there was typically a talk or a separate topic every lunch. We met over in the College Five dining halls as I recall. And oh, topics like dealing with nontraditional students, the issue of gender in the classroom, lots of stuff on pedagogy, dealing with the role of IT, the role of the arts in general education, dealing with student research, with fieldwork experience—fascinating, stimulating topics. I remember when I was provost writing a position paper on general education that got published in their quarterly

newsletter<sup>23</sup>, because a lot of these discussions would end up published in the newsletter as faculty would be invited to contribute op ed pieces and white papers and so forth. The one I did was characteristic because it generated some responses and counter-position papers and alternative-position papers from a variety of other faculty, and then they would bring quotes from the discussions. It was a very important forum that continued to put undergraduate education and its quality on the agenda. It was important symbolically as well as substantively. But it was also a way of having something in these very difficult times that was uniting people in debate, friendly conversation. The grant ran out. It was a three-year grant, and I think when it ran out that project didn't continue, but it was at a very important point, I think, a real boost for the campus.

Another linkage at the time were these divisional discussions, and the discussions stimulated by CEP that led to the foundation courses—an attempt to save the core courses, which had really, for the most part, with a couple of exceptions, fallen on hard times—and also led to the development of what became the 'T' courses, where every division was supposed to offer some lower-division courses oriented towards nonmajors and building in requirements for those. So there was an attempt to renew that kind of commitment there, and it did bring people together around serious discussion.

Maybe I could turn to the Humanities Division now, for a while.

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<sup>23</sup> *Teacher on the Hill*, Issue 10, February 1979.

**Dean of the Humanities and Arts Division, Helene Moglen**

**Reti:** Sure.

**Cowan:** I think maybe first say something about Helene Moglen during her five years as divisional dean.<sup>24</sup> She could speak much better about that than I can. She was dean, of course, of humanities and arts—arts still a part of the same division that humanities was in at that time. Helene was a very, very bright woman; she was very organized, very energetic, very assertive. She loved a good fight and she was prepared to battle for things that she believed. She was articulate; she was eloquent; she had very good political instincts; she was a good strategist, and she could, of course, be immensely charming when she chose to be. But she was tough. And one of her major challenges as dean was to make some very hard decisions. The humanities had been losing enrollments, humanities and arts, compared to some of the other divisions, particularly the natural sciences, also to some extent the social sciences. And so, as a part of the budget cuts, she had to give back, I think, half a dozen faculty—FTEs—positions. In order to do that she had to decide whether some of the openings that she had would be given back, but she also had to make some very tough personnel decisions. And so, she became known as somebody who was making, or recommending, a number of negative tenure decisions during her time. It was very important to her that the campus, or that the division, be seen as promoting research productivity, and important for her to show that she wasn't going to recommend

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<sup>24</sup> An oral history with Helene Moglen is in process and will be published by the Regional History Project in 2014—Editor.

promotion of anyone who was not showing scholarly activity that she thought was UC-appropriate. Of course, that was Bob Sinsheimer's line, too, but Helene herself believed that. I think that she also saw that it was important that she show the Humanities Division wasn't soft.

It also had, for her, the strategic advantage of opening up some positions that she could reinvest in areas of the division. She did several important things while she was dean. One was to push towards separating the arts from the humanities. She felt that the arts had their own dynamics and own needs, and so they should be administered separately. And so initially a director of the arts was appointed. When I became dean, the arts were formally separated from humanities; I become only dean of humanities. The arts had a director and then eventually a dean.

**Reti:** So was it common to have arts and humanities together administratively at other campuses? What was the reason for that?

**Cowan:** At some point, maybe I could say some things about the divisional organization. I think divisional organization here was a pretty conventional organization. It wasn't a very imaginative organization. Some campuses, for example, have a general college of arts and letters that includes the social sciences or arts. Some have a general campus of arts and sciences, with a general dean. This campus divided itself into three divisions, humanities and arts coming together. I think perhaps initially because it was such a small faculty it didn't make sense to overdivide. But periodically the campus has revisited the

question of whether we have too many divisions, whether they're the right divisions or not, where you put units. For example, in many universities history is located in the social sciences.

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** And where do you put interdisciplinary programs, where do you put women's studies, Latin American studies, ethnic studies? Those are administrative decisions that don't necessarily have all the intellectual logic that would be desirable. In the case of the arts, first, especially after reorganization it was located—basically—on the west side of the campus. It had labs; it had special issues. And Helene felt that they needed somebody who could really focus on those issues.

There were some interesting enrollment politics, also. For example, art history would typically be a program that would be located in the humanities in most universities—cultural history, intellectual history. But it remained in the arts, even though some of the faculty in art history wanted to move to the humanities, because they were generating huge enrollments, and they helped subsidize the small arts programs. Arts didn't want to lose it, and Helene was willing not to fight that particular battle. That was one thing that she [didn't] press.

But I think more important, in addition to her personnel decisions, was that she really did work to strengthen several programs. She supported dissolving religious studies, as I mentioned. But she decided that she needed to bring in some strong senior leadership in several programs, so that, for example, in

history of consciousness, the year after she was here, she brought in Hayden White, who in turn brought in Jim Clifford, and then the year after that Donna Haraway. Now, Jim and Donna, I think, were initially assistant professors. Maybe Donna came in as associate professor, but Jim was definitely an assistant professor when he came. But Hayden was senior. And then, in linguistics she brought in Jorge Hankamer, who was associate professor, as the chair of that program. And then Geoff Pullum immediately after him to [revise] that program which was almost eliminated, and I can talk about that in a minute—.

**Reti:** Linguistics?

**Cowan:** Linguistics. And then in philosophy, which had had two senior retirements and was really floating a bit, she brought in Richard Wasserstrom from Los Angeles. He had had a joint appointment there in the law school and in philosophy. And then brought in David Hoy immediately after him. So that in those three programs she knew that senior leadership was really very critical. And it was, and it really made a difference.

She also supported interdisciplinary work, for which I was personally grateful, but I think it was also good for the division. When Richard Wasserstrom proposed getting a legal studies major up and going, she was very supportive of that. She certainly supported women's studies very actively, given not only her research and teaching, but her strong belief in that as a viable program. And she was certainly a friend to American studies. In women's studies' case—and maybe I can talk about that a little more later—she made the difficult decision

from moving it from essentially a student-run program to a faculty-run program. She felt that it would not survive unless there was faculty leadership. She continued to involve students very importantly, but she realized that it wouldn't survive if it didn't have faculty participation. She was the one who initiated the annual retreat of women faculty on campus, which brought faculty, even those not necessarily involved in women's studies, together. And that became a very important annual event.

**Reti:** I remember that being at the Women's Center in the late eighties.

**Cowan:** That's right. And she pressed, in the mid-eighties, when I think she was chairing women's studies, to have a feminist studies research group organized, which again was a way of bringing faculty, whether or not they wanted to be involved in women's studies as a major, together. And so she was very important in that. She also worked to boost enrollments in humanities, to stress the value of humanities. She knew that if she was going to be able to build some resources for humanities she had to get our enrollments back up. And one example was that she got all the histcon faculty to agree to teach a very large lower-division course.

**Reti:** Was that one of the 80's topical courses?

**Cowan:** It was a topical course. They didn't have their own major, and they weren't necessarily going to be involved in the core courses, but she got it so Hayden and Donna and Jim and Gary and all those people did that. But she pushed all the departments to make sure that they were offering really attractive

lower-division courses, and she also strengthened the campus writing program, recognized how important writing was and stressed the role that humanities could play in that. She of course strengthened Kresge by a decision to not only have humanities be assigned Kresge as one of its colleges but to move a series of departments there—literature, history of consciousness, American studies, women's studies already there, a political thought group—but also to ensure that some very senior faculty move there. That meant Hayden White and Norman O. Brown, Richard Wasserstrom, Jack Schaar, for a period— She was determined to give Kresge some intellectual heft, reduce its isolation from the campus, and reduce its sense as a college that gone out of orbit.

**Reti:** (laughs) Well, it's interesting because she was not founding faculty. She came a bit later.

**Cowan:** No, that's right, she did.

**Reti:** But she grasped who the key players were and what the weaknesses were.

**Cowan:** That's right. There were a few faculty who were still there—Gary Lease was a member of the Kresge faculty. But a number of the faculty had left as a part of reorganization, some really important people, like Carolyn Martin-Shaw, and May Diaz had been provost but I think then moved to be a part of the Latin American studies group, as I recall. And so [Moglen] had to repopulate the college. She persuaded me to be senior academic preceptor (laughs)—

**Reti:** Oh, my gosh.

**Cowan:** —here at Kresge. And, of course, she became provost of Kresge, too, and remained provost, I think, for several years while she was dean, as a way of trying to eliminate the split between provost and division. She was accused by some of doing that only because she wanted the house, which was not at all a fair thing to do, because being provost is very demanding. You're dealing with all the student issues.

**Reti:** (laughs). Yes, there are easier ways to get a nice house.

**Cowan:** Yes, that's right. But she did it, I think, out of real principle, felt that it was a way of saying, first, that she and the divisions still cared about the strength of the college but that the colleges needed to have an academic backbone. And she wanted to show her commitment to doing that. It's one thing I decided not to do when I became divisional dean, because I think that had already been solidified as a result of Helene's initiatives and because I had more than enough on my hands, I figured, as dean.

### **Chairing the Humanities Division for Six Years**

Maybe I could talk a little about that. I was dean for six years. I think I probably am still the longest-serving dean in terms of continuous presence in the deanship.

**Reti:** In the humanities?

**Cowan:** Yes, six years. We had to undergo a fifth year review, and I survived that and stayed for another year and then decided, for reasons I can perhaps talk

about, that it was too much. I think maybe Gary Lease had a longer total time—he was dean at two different points, was dean for, I think, four years, left and then came back for a couple. Helene could've stayed on, I'm sure, and decided that she wanted to make five years her time. I'm not sure [my six years as dean] were good or bad for the division but it gave me enough time to try to pursue some initiatives.

One of the first things we did—it wasn't my doing—was that the divisional offices were moved from Kresge to below the Cowell dining room. My divisional assistant dean, Bob Jorgenson, arranged that. It moved into space which was not academic. I think they were where the Cowell pottery studio was and where some recreation space was. There was resistance on the part of the bursar of Cowell to that but what it did was to allow the division to move into space that didn't compete with the academic space in the college. And it was one of the colleges that the humanities was administering, so it made sense. It also reflected the need that Kresge boards were increasingly feeling to get more space, because they were then beginning to expand again. They needed space for the graduate students, not just faculty. And there were several boards there that needed that space, and also the division was beginning to grow a bit in staff and also needed some space.

It might be useful to talk a little about the campus context during the eighties, just to mark a couple of points, because it did have an impact on the humanities division and on my time and work as dean. There was, of course, renewed campus as well as University of California growth in the early eighties. The

demographic projectors who said that fewer students would be coming to the university hadn't proved to be quite accurate.

**Reti:** So, in the early eighties the University started to grow?

**Cowan:** In the early eighties, yes. It was universitywide. There were a lot of reasons for that that the demographers and universitywide officials hadn't fully seen. One, for a variety of reasons, the University of California started getting a higher proportion of high school students applying to the university than had been previously. Secondly, there were groups like Asian-American students who began to apply to UC in much higher proportions and coming to UC in higher proportions—and those were two dynamics that simply hadn't been anticipated.

**Reti:** Interesting.

**Cowan:** So all the campuses were beginning to grow, but what was interesting is, of course this campus was—partly because it was doing more effective, more active recruiting of students—getting its enrollments back. It had that decline and had been told by David Saxon that it would lose positions if it didn't get its enrollments back up to about 6,300 or so by the start of 1984-1985. Well, it reached that point by 1982 as a result of the recruitments, and in fact by 1983, when I became dean, it was up to around 6,700 students. It was partly the Berkeley redirect program, where we agreed to take students who didn't get in to Berkeley if they would come here for the first two years, and then they could transfer to Berkeley and be guaranteed a spot. And about half of those students ended up staying in Santa Cruz. So Santa Cruz got some benefit from that. It was

interesting—I was just looking recently at some statistics—a fairly large number of those students were Asian American students. And that had a side effect that was going to be important to the campus, that it got the attention of Asian American students and families to Santa Cruz that had not happened prior to that.

In 1985, universitywide went to multiple applications. Prior to that you had to apply to only one UC campus. If you didn't get in that, you'd be redirected to another UC campus. But starting in 1985, the pressure was on, I think particularly for some of the emerging campuses, the developing campuses. We went to a system where students could apply to as many UC campuses as they wanted to. And so every campus was competing with every other UC campus. But by that time we were actually well out of the woods. There was still some concern, but we had already, even discounting the Berkeley redirects, more than met our Saxon commitment, and were already around 1985-1986, on our way up to close to 7,500 students. So what we thought was something we were going to top out with not until the 1990s, we were already there in the mid-1980s. Now, that was a big boost to campus morale, and it did quiet not all, but some of the concerns and strife that had happened during reorganization and bringing in Richard Moll as a director of admissions. He left about that time, but the campus's outreach structure was much more firmly in place by then. And so, campus enrollments were growing steadily through the 1980s. In fact, as I said, they were around 7,500 by 1985 or so, and we were continuing to grow by about 300 students a year.

**Reti:** In 1986 I worked for the registrar's office. And there was a sudden jump in enrollment, which we were not prepared for. There was quite a crunch for classroom space.

**Cowan:** And that was the multiple applications.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** What the uncertainty of that is is that you then had to figure out how many students of the multiple applications you were going to admit, knowing that some of them—many of them—were applying to other UC campuses, and that you didn't know how many of them would end up going there. And for a couple of years, it took a while to begin to begin figure out what the take rate was going to be.

**Reti:** It was pretty crazy. (laughs)

**Cowan:** Santa Cruz survived that, but I think it was because we had things in place. The admissions office was always great, some wonderful people over there. It was still an uncertain time, and we knew that we couldn't be complacent, but there was that sense that we were on the move again.

Now that meant, of course, more faculty positions started coming to Santa Cruz in, I think, 1983-1984, which happened to be the first year I was dean, and some of those began to filter down to humanities. And again part of it was more aggressive outreach efforts to students, I think, that was bringing that. But it also involved affirming the campus's commitment to undergraduate education, and

to a liberal arts education, but with giving sciences a particular emphasis. I remember in several documents of the time, instead of simply saying, "This is a committed high-quality, liberal arts university," it would say, "We are a committed liberal arts and science university." Sciences were a part of liberal arts, if you will, but giving that extra emphasis was designed to show—I think part of the message was that science was a code word for "We're really serious as a campus. We have high academic standards." The message, "We are really a UC campus." We're not eccentric. We're distinctive but we're not eccentric." (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So it was the campus trying to position itself back from that point where it was seen to have gone over the edge. Not a loopy campus, not a weird campus, although we still have that slogan that we play around with—but then there was a concern about that. Anyway, the emphasis on the sciences was very important, and high academic standards. Science was a code for that.

There was also an emphasis during that time to develop some applied programs, applied economics, computer engineering, some other programs of that nature, as a way of trying to attract a certain constituency of students. That was the period where letter grades became an option for all upper-division courses. It became available for all students regardless of their majors. It had previously only been in the natural sciences. I remember that a relatively low proportion of the students in humanities and social sciences were taking the letter grade option, even then. I had only a handful in my classes, although gradually that

was to increase by the late eighties and into the nineties. And at some point there was a kind of tipping in campus culture where, both from a mixture of faculty anxiety, perhaps, and student anxiety, that became not merely an option for students, but a universal requirement: all students getting letter grades in all their courses.

**Reti:** So it wasn't a letter grade option anymore.

**Cowan:** That was the late nineties, I think, when that finally happened. It was a long time coming. There was still the culture. I think there was, of course, an additional research emphasis. Bob Sinsheimer, for example, had from the outset started seeing if he could plan and get approved and developed a research and development park for the campus. It was going to be up above where Crown and Merrill were located. He wanted to build a road up that way. He thought it would bring the infrastructure around there, and it would be a way of bringing industry research, the private sector, and the campus together, ties with Silicon Valley.

He worked very hard. There were studies. There were environmental reports, economic reports—all the things that he had to do. But it was a little before its time. It had gotten caught in the fact that we didn't have quite the resources yet. We didn't have quite the ties with Silicon Valley yet. There weren't enough start-ups here in Santa Cruz area yet. And the environmentalists' concerns were also beginning to push back. So it didn't happen. There were, though, developments in applied and other research on campus, research institutes and so forth. If you

look at the campus during that period of time you see a series of additional organized research groups emerging in all sorts of fields, not just feminist studies, but elsewhere.

Affirmative action was a very live wire topic in the 1980s throughout the UC system, but certainly on this campus. One sign of it was the redefinition of the so-called "target of opportunity" position, or an expansion of it that happened during the 1980s. Target of opportunity had been used to designate appointments that didn't have to go through the normal open-search process. It had to be a special opportunity, some extraordinarily distinguished scholar who you could get only if you made them an offer right away. And all the campuses, if they had the money, were using that to attract Nobel Prize winners and other very powerful scholars without an open search. On this campus—and it wasn't true throughout the system, I think, but probably on a couple of other campuses—this campus decided to use the term "target of opportunity" to identify outstanding scholars of color, but also junior as well senior colleagues who could help diversify the faculty. And that was before Proposition 209 in the nineties. And we decided to use on campus the term "TOE," "Target of Excellence," to designate what had traditionally been the "Target of Opportunity."

In any case, the emphasis on trying to diversify our faculty was very much alive at the time that we were also trying to diversify the student body on campus. This was still a very white campus, and that was a concern, both for practical reasons—namely, that that was an increasingly large proportion of the students

graduating from high school in the state—and also on principle, that it was important to do everything we could, in spite of the fact that we were away from urban areas and had some of those handicaps.

Another thing that happened during the eighties was that as a part of the increasing attention on outreach, the campus' external relations initiatives were ramped up. The Alumni Association really didn't get going until the early 1980s. It wasn't much of an association. There weren't many alumni. The individual colleges had some ties with alumni but nobody was really keeping systematic alumni records. We didn't have much in the way—a kind of token presence in the University Relations, or Development Office. The Development Office began to ramp up; emphasis on external fundraising began to emerge. It was a somewhat haphazard area of growth for a while. I know Bob Sinsheimer cared a great deal about it.

But I remember being one of the early recipients of what was called the Alumni Distinguished Teacher award, somewhere in the early 1980s. The Alumni Association met at the Coconut Grove and nobody knew exactly how to manage the award, the protocols of what was said, and whether the recipient was supposed to say anything. I mean, it was clearly still a bit of an amateur operation. But it was good willed. And it was clearly in the campus interest to do things like that. But the association was particularly focused, as it has retained as one of its major focuses, on undergraduate education, on liberal arts, and particularly on the college system. It was the thing that was exciting to a lot of alumni. And the alumni board consisted of representatives from each of the

colleges as well as a few at-large members, so that a lot was riding on that identification. One of the challenges was constantly to assure the alumni, who were devoted to the colleges and their experience at the campus, that the campus hadn't jettisoned that. Anyway, it was a very interesting area. But, there was so much focus [on the colleges] that there wasn't much focus on the other ways in which you could hook alumni, for example, their majors.

**Reti:** The same problem we had in other ways.

**Cowan:** Student organizations. And all of those other things. So it was symptomatic of that. But things were happening on that level.

There was, of course, campus renewed physical growth, which is again a morale boost, when you think about all the building that took place during that period. But there was also rapidly rising environmentalist scrutiny of the building projects, and so one had to go through many more hoops in developing new projects, and not just because there were CEQA [*California Environmental Quality Act*] requirements, formal environmental impact reports required, but because the political climate was such that you had to constantly defend against slow or no-growth. And, of course, our relations with the city and county, during the eighties, as they were before and have been since, were always a live issue. Bob Sinsheimer tried his best to show the city and county that the university was a positive force, a positive economic, a positive social and cultural force. He tried lots of things and so did others. But it was always, as you know, a tug of war between those two areas, trying to figure out where you could find points of

mutual interest so that growth of the university was not seen as simply a negative force in the community.

There was periodic revisiting of the whole issue of undergraduate education during the 1980s during the time of my deanship. I've mentioned a couple of things of that nature. There was one aspect of that though, which was not, I think, marked at the time, but which I think had a pretty important impact, and that was the importance of faculty desires to reduce their workload. It centered around the definition of the five-course equivalency. The convention was that faculty taught five courses a year, but the way it was phrased was "the equivalency of five courses," so that faculty, for example, in the natural sciences would sometimes get two courses credit for not only teaching the major part of their course but supervising the laboratory part of their courses.

Well, in the mid-eighties the social sciences, arts, and humanities faculty decided they wanted a piece of that action. Partly they argued that if they were going to do more research they needed more time. So they began to argue that their independent studies, their supervision of field studies, supervisions of senior theses and dissertations should count as a course. And so the practical effect of that was to reduce the expected workload for faculty in those areas to what it was typically in the natural sciences, namely to four courses. Well, that had a couple of important impacts. It was disguised, by the way, by the fact that we were hiring more faculty. So it wasn't that the total number of courses being taught in those areas was decreasing. But we were using increasing numbers of lecturers to teach some of those courses and they had a heavier course load. It

did mean that the average course size in the humanities and social sciences started increasing, probably by 20, 25 percent on the average, simply because you were reducing the number of courses. And lecture courses got larger.

**Reti:** Enrollments were going up.

**Cowan:** The discussion sections got larger. Fewer seminars. I remember leading debates about whether juniors and seniors in their majors could be given at least a seminar course. But all of those things were happening there. As you say, the enrollments were going up. That probably disguised this, though. But the enrollments going up, new faculty coming in, but fewer courses per faculty. So there was an overall, in terms of the undergraduate experience, something of an adverse reaction. But it was done as faculty, consulting their self-interest, begin to try to carve out some more time for their research. And that was one way that they could do it within the conventions of the five-course load.

There was, of course, always an ongoing debate about the role of the colleges. That debate never stopped.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And probably it never will. There were a variety of task forces and committees, several during the eighties, and there were ones in the nineties, with the usual sort of issues: what's the role of the colleges; what can the colleges contribute to undergraduate education? At the same time, the colleges were getting larger. For example, when Colleges Nine and Ten were planned, the

planning for them revved up again in the late eighties, they were planned to each be about 1,500 students, about 750 students living on the campus. College Eight finally got its facilities in the late eighties, so planning, concrete planning for that was revving up again. But also it was planned to be a larger college in terms of the number of students on campus and elsewhere. I think virtually all the other colleges got infill projects. Apartments were being built in several of the colleges because upper-division students wanted apartments and not regular dormitory rooms, and new faculty office complexes were being built during that time. This was something you could do because infill projects could be funded under minor capital improvements and they didn't have to go through the same hoops. So it was politically and tactically strategic there, but it was also recognition that we were growing as an undergraduate campus more rapidly than we could get new colleges going quickly.

So colleges were changing. I think that did have some advantages that some people thought were disadvantages, but one thing that it did mean was that every college had a larger budget as a result of the student fees paid the colleges to run more social and cultural activities. To have enough people in the college to make sure that their coffee shops were making enough money to survive. And there were more faculty, then, in each college, which meant that at least the faculty presence, even if not in the curriculum of the college, was there. So that in one sense some of the things that we were talking about in terms of the seventies were beginning to happen. At the same time, there was a push for some additional campuswide facilities—a new bookstore; the student center, debates

about where that would be located—but the sense that the colleges, even with their own growth, still were not going to be providing for some student interests.

And this was the era, or this decade in which fraternities and sororities began to arise, the discussion about them on campus, and there were several task forces, even, to consider that [question]. And then the issue was were the fraternities and sororities antithetical to the Santa Cruz system? Are they going to hurt the colleges? The fact is the fraternities and sororities emerged for a variety of reasons, one of which is that students off campus wanted to have convenient, congenial cadres with them. Also because the colleges weren't focused on upper-division students, and so the issue of how you establish a social presence there. The campus wanted to look more like some other campuses, and therefore fraternities and sororities were part of that. And also because the colleges, for all their great strengths, were not serving certain needs, social and cultural needs. So a lot of things were happening on that.

Well, maybe I can say a little about some of the humanities programs. When I became dean in the summer of 1983, some new faculty positions had started filtering down to the division, so I was very lucky.

**Reti:** Yes. Good timing.

**Cowan:** I, again, luck—I came at a good time, I didn't have to worry about cutting programs, I could build programs, I had a few FTE to play with, and a few positions from retirements and resignations and negative tenure decisions, many of which had happened under Helene's watch, that I could use. The

advantages of growth, of course, is that you can give everyone something and keep them happy, or at least happy enough so that they don't spend a lot of time yelling at you.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And at the same you can use that growth to make investments in certain programs that would have a harder time getting investments if they were in more direct competition with established programs. I think I made in my six years as dean about three dozen new ladder faculty appointments.

**Reti:** Wow.

**Cowan:** Including about eight tenured faculty members. I was going back over the list recently and that was really lucky. And many of them were in the major departments, something like fifteen to sixteen appointments in literature, including four or five senior appointments. Nine new appointments in history. They were mainly almost all at the junior level, because history already had a lot of senior people and there were some other reasons I could talk about. In linguistics, I made five appointments, added to the three that Helene had made. Philosophy, Helene had made several; I added one more there. History of consciousness—during the time I was there we added Teresa de Lauretis, and then right at the end of my deanship a replacement for Hayden [White]<sup>25</sup>; and then there were two transfers—Barbara Epstein transferred, and then the last

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<sup>25</sup> An oral history with Hayden White and Jim Clifford about History of Consciousness is in process and will be published in 2013 by the Regional History Project.

year of my deanship Victor Burgin transferred from art history to histcon. So they were, you know, building up. Women's studies, which I can talk about in a minute, was able at the end of my time as dean to make three ladder appointments. It couldn't control them before then. And then I made one appointment in American studies, right at the end of my time. I was able among those three dozen appointments to make six TOP [*Target of Opportunity*] appointments, and that was important for diversifying a lot of the departments, or boards, at the time. But we also made a couple of hires of scholars of color outside the TOP. I felt that departments shouldn't be able to get off the hook simply by using those, that they ought to have a commitment to looking for opportunities to hire relevant, high quality people in their regular appointments.

One of my regrets, or sadnesses, is that a rather large number of the scholars of color eventually left Santa Cruz, sometimes during my time as dean, sometimes later. And the causes are ones that wouldn't surprise you. Many would rather have lived in a large city than a small town. This is not exactly an ethnically diverse community. And, in fact, a number of them lived in the San Francisco or Oakland and Berkeley area and commuted down, and that was a strain on them that I think finally took its toll. A number had partners who felt isolated here and who then put some pressure on their spouses to leave. And, of course, if they were really strong scholars, as most of them were, they would be avidly sought by other institutions—we would be outcompeted by them.

So we had a fair turnover. We would keep trying to replace them, but I think actually the history of the campus since the 1980s is similar to that. When you

look at who among the scholars of color have stayed it's often because they've had joint [spousal] appointments or other factors that have caused them to find this a particularly important home. It remains a challenge for us. It was true, by the way, of some Anglo colleagues, too, who would get recruited away because we didn't have the size in part; we didn't have the graduate programs; we didn't have other things that they needed.

The other thing that I tried to do was to carve out some ongoing lecturer funds to help programs that couldn't yet have their own ladder FTEs, or that needed them, like writing, and languages, but women's studies and American studies had a lot of soft money put into them in that period.

### **Linguistics**

Maybe I can say a few things about some of the humanities programs specifically. First, linguistics. It had almost been dissolved as a program in the late seventies, it was down to, I think, three faculty. Two were not likely to get tenure; one was a tenured faculty member. But there was a strong push by several faculty, particularly in literature, to keep that program alive. Helene strongly supported its rebirth. She appointed Jorge Hankamer who then, in turn, appointed Geoff Pullum, and then one other faculty member early on. So when I came in it was really rebuilding.

Jorge Hankamer had a very shrewd way of doing it. He decided that he first was going to focus on a tight set of issues, theoretical issues primarily, and was not going to try to cover all the bases—sociolinguistics, cultural linguistics,

philology, a whole set of issues like that—and he was going to make research a very important focus at the outset. So he brought in faculty who would reinforce each other as clusters within the board. He made some really excellent appointments, people like Bill Ladusaw, later Sandy Chung, who was a TOP appointment, Armin Mester—really, really great appointments.

It also had a very highly self-conscious pedagogy. He did focus on undergraduates because that's what they had initially, but there was a certain method of instruction that all the faculty agreed on. They talked a great deal about teaching among each other. And that was an important part of this, not just talking about their research. They were all focused also on being visible in the outside world while being active professionally. So within a short period of time he was really making a case. He was also a very persuasive arguer. So I devoted five positions to him. So he had eight by the time I left the deanship and was on the verge of moving toward a graduate program. He was very skillful at that. They were also excellent campus citizens. They served on a whole range of major senate and other committees, and they also knew they did well by doing good—that is, it gave them a campus presence, too. And to a certain extent, the division was subsidizing their enrollments because this emphasis on small group courses meant that their average enrollment size per faculty was less. On the other hand, they were doing so much for the campus that [it] was one of those cases where although some other parts of the division were subsidizing them, if you will, they were doing very important things for the division.

## Literature

Literature was, when I became dean, by far the largest of the boards in the division. It was probably the largest, certainly one of the largest boards on campus at that time in terms of number of faculty. It, history, and history of consciousness had the only three graduate programs in the division at that time.<sup>26</sup> It had been established to be an interdisciplinary program, or really, more accurately, an interdepartmental program. That is, instead of having separate programs in French and German and Russian and English, or Romance language programs and all, it was going to have one program that would study literature as a general phenomenon and deal with the problems of method and theory that involved that. It had hired quite a few faculty in the early years who had teaching and research interests in several national literatures. It was designed to transcend national boundaries, but certainly when I became dean and even before that it has mainly settled into nation-[and language]-specific clusters or caucuses, each of which were fighting for their own caucus. And each said, "If you only give me two more appointments for French, or German, then we'll be visible and distinguished." Their argument was that they couldn't possibly contribute to a graduate program if they didn't have those kinds of clusters. The arguments were the kind you would expect: "We have high quality and we deserve better, or we need to create critical mass." There were also debates about the role of creative writing, which had some strong advocates on the board but

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<sup>26</sup> The history board had launched a PhD/MA program in 1970 but had effectively suspended its PhD program in 1980, admitting only MA students, some of whom might then be allowed to pursue a PhD. The full PhD program was reopened in 1989—Michael Cowan.

was also considered as a sort of outlier. There was an issue at one point of whether [creative writing] would be in the arts division or the literature division.

Well, I certainly recognized that, as one of the largest boards, there had to be real support for the board. But there were some problems. It had an unusually large number of senior faculty compared to some of the other boards Helene had tried to build up elsewhere. I had put a few more senior faculty into it. But I'm afraid that although virtually all the senior faculty were very productive researchers, some of them I really believe shirked their duties to carry their fair share of the undergraduate teaching workload. They, for example, found all sorts of excuses—some of them, not all of them, I'm talking about the very senior full professors—not to teach undergraduate lecture courses, using other administrative appointments, all sorts of things. Which left the burdens to certain areas, such as the English-American literature groups, and the junior faculty. So that put a real burden on some parts of the board, and that was always a source of tension.

There were some other board tensions, and because it was a very large board those tensions often got very big. One was ideological differences, differences in approach between some more conservative people who felt that you ought to focus on the text and were interested in certain kinds of texts, and those faculty who were interested in social-political issues in the expression of the text. And that got divided in all sorts of different ways. I remember sometimes there were lines between [some faculty and] the American faculty and the Latin American

faculty, for example, around these issues.<sup>27</sup> [And] some New Left French scholars came in. So debates about the kinds of theory that were appropriate.

And then those divisions, the caucus divisions and the philosophical-ideological divisions, were exacerbated all by personality conflicts. And throughout the eighties and then all into the nineties periodically you would have meltdowns in the board, fights. They were usually over personnel issues: who was going to get hired; who was going to get promoted; who was going to get a merit increase. Those were real issues.

There was another issue, and I got caught in it because I was trying to build enrollments. I felt that the faculty in the literatures outside of English should try to have a larger number of attractive courses where the literatures that they were specialists in could be taught in English, that is, in translation rather than in the original, because there were not enough students who had the expertise in the particular language to take those courses about it. There were a lot of debates about that, and I was accused of trying to cheapen the curriculum and so forth. The enrollment booster in me felt that that was important for the health of the division. But the evangelist in me felt that students who didn't have the language skills still had a right, and it was going to be good for them, to read literatures [not originally written in English]. Even if it was in translation, it was better than not reading those literatures at all. So that was an ongoing debate.

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<sup>27</sup> That is, the American studies and Latin American studies faculty were often allied on these matters—Michael Cowan, note added to the transcript after the interview.

It was, because of all these divisions, very hard to find board chairs. I was board chair for a year and a half. Board chairs were seen by the senior faculty as more like secretaries (laughs) to the board.

**Reti:** This is particularly in literature it was hard or all the boards?

**Cowan:** It was particularly in literature, there were other—I think it depended on which board. But I think in literature—it was very hard to lead a board of that size, particularly. It had very senior faculty who were well ensconced and didn't have to move. And given all these debates and how I [worked] all the time to mediate that, and then, dealing with growth and all—it was a real challenge and I don't know that I, as board chair in the time before reorganization, did a very effective job. But I think it was very difficult. It wasn't until, I think, the eighties where you got a board chair to serve more than one or two years, and we started getting three-year terms [that we became] more normal. But I think it wasn't really until the late nineties where you began to get a sense of a board that was tired of fighting, at least at that level, battles. So, a very important program, it produced some really excellent graduate students, some wonderful scholarship, but it remained a problem board.

### **The Language Program**

Languages, by the way, it's very interesting—many campuses, as you know, if they have separate foreign literature groups, will have the languages for that particular literature taught by that particular department. So, a French department will be responsible not only for the French literature courses but the

French language courses. Their graduate students will serve often as the TAs along with lecturers in that course, and the ladder faculty will typically teach an advanced language course or two, at least a bit of that as a part of a transition. Well here, the languages had split off from the literature board in the early seventies out of some personnel fights. As a result, you had to develop a cadre of lecturers rather than graduate students who were teaching it, but they were lecturers rather than ladder faculty. And so there was a real question of how you were going to manage that. The language committee had to be managed by ladder faculty because all units have to have senate members managing their curriculum. But so, the literature faculty was still, if you will, the key manager of the board. And many of the faculty in literature really cared about high quality of language teaching but very few of those faculty were willing to teach even advanced courses in the programs. So there was an ongoing tension.

During the late seventies, and then certainly while Helene was dean, there was an attempt to begin to put a lecturer who had security of employment at the head of each of the languages. That had basically happened before I became dean. One thing I tried to do was to give the lecturers with security of employment more authority over the managing of their [program]—it was still called a committee of studies then. And there was some resentment from some people in literature of that, but I think it was good for the morale of the SOE [security of employment] lecturers and we tried to add lecturerships to the languages using soft money to build up that particular interest.

The quality of teaching at languages was and has been and still is very high on campus, despite all the problems of status and morale, and despite the fact that gradually the size of those languages courses began to creep up, and especially in areas like Spanish and so forth. And there were issues about whether you could keep every language alive. Russian, for example, was constantly subject to debate.

The language lecturers were also very interested in establishing a new major, a language and culture major. Their feeling was that students who would go through the language courses didn't want just to go study literature courses; they wanted to study courses that involved the history, culture, and society where that language was spoken. So we attempted, during my deanship, to start a major in language and culture, in fact, did kind of start it up. And, in fact, even brought a senior faculty member in French literature in to head the program. He, though, gravitated towards the literature board and then left after a couple of years. So, it didn't work, and that program really didn't take off until Jorge Hankamer, looking for opportunities to be of service and also to benefit the linguistics board, agreed that the linguistics faculty would take over the friendly management, along with the lecturers with security of employment, of the language program, and take over the major, which was called then language studies, and which would require students not only to take a lot of language courses up to the level that they needed to, but take a lot of linguistics courses. Which then made it rigorous, but also it was good for the linguistics departments

because they had a new audience for their courses. So, another example of really shrewd planning and responsibility, I think also, by linguistics and George.

### **The Writing Program**

The writing program had some of the same problems. In a typical campus, the teaching of composition is under the English department, and their graduate students as TAs will teach the basic composition courses. Here, because we had a literature board which mixed lots of different languages, there wasn't much interest in literature taking on that responsibility. And the colleges in their core course had thought that they would be responsible for that, and they were doing it individually.

I think beginning with reorganization and with then Helene's emphasis, which I had tried to continue, there was an emphasis on establishing greater integrity in the writing program itself, and the sense that it needed some leadership in that program. So a couple of security of employment lecturers were appointed there. The first one, Don Rothman, was appointed in the late seventies. He was appointed not because he was to head the writing program, but because he was heading the Central California Writing Project, and because he had established a reputation as extraordinarily skillful in Oakes College working with students of color.<sup>28</sup> Herman [Blake] pushed that very hard, so he was made a security of employment lecturer.

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<sup>28</sup> Don Rothman died suddenly on November 29, 2012, several months after this interview took place. His presence is greatly missed. See

It wasn't until I became dean that I was able to move toward getting an additional security of employment lectureship, and I think that was around 1986, and we appointed Carol Freeman, who had been a lecturer here since the mid-seventies, but to appoint her to run the program.<sup>29</sup> And that was a very fortunate appointment. Carol was splendid, not just to handle the writing program but as a campuswide servant, as Don was. Those were the only two security of employment lecturers in the program. All the others were just lecturers. But the writing—

**Reti:** What about Roz Spafford?

**Cowan:** Roz ended up there by replacing Carol in negotiating who the chair of the program would be. So Roz then in the 1990s became that, as Carol still was security of employment but left that, but not on my watch.

**Reti:** Okay.

**Cowan:** Several things happened, though. The writing program took over the responsibility for ensuring that all the core courses had writing sections. Under Carol's leadership, and this began to happen more in the nineties than the eighties, there was emphasis on working with departments to increase their own attention to writing, not just basic, but advanced writing. So that was a very

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[http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/localnews/ci\\_22101885/retired-ucsc-faculty-member-dies-don-rothman-remembered](http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/localnews/ci_22101885/retired-ucsc-faculty-member-dies-don-rothman-remembered)

<sup>29</sup> An oral history with Carol Freeman is in process and will be published by the Regional History Project in 2013—Editor.

important theme. And having a single program that was devoted to that and developed a cadre of experienced lecturers is important. Now, many of those lecturers were actually coming from the literature graduate student cadre, people who began to teach some sections, initially with some resistance from the lecturers. But Carol ran a separate course for the literature graduate students. If they were going to teach composition sections, they had to go through this course. And so that was a gradual blending of the graduate students, some of whom then stayed as full-time lecturers. I think that was very, very important, the issue of writing through the curriculum, which was a very important theme that Carol and others pushed.

Writing lecturers also had some ambitions, though, to work with upper-division students, as did the language lecturers. One reason for the language and culture program was so they could teach upper-division courses in languages and not merely lower-division courses. Same case with the writing lecturers. And so there were several pushes to try to get an upper-division major. There was a rhetoric and critical thought [program]—I can't remember the name of the major—that Carol and Roz and some others pushed very hard that never did get finally off the ground. But I thought it was a really good notion. It could have paralleled, perhaps, the science writing program, which had already been up and going, although it could have been an undergraduate version of that. I thought maybe it could be called technical writing, that might even have a graduate component, like the science writing program. It was one of the disappointments. We could never get that going.

The other thing that the writing people were trying to get was some kind of a journalism program that might have been under this technical writing program. As you know, the lecturers in the writing program, particularly Roz but also some others, were serving as major sponsors of *City on a Hill Press*, *Twanas*, *Fish Rap*, a lot of others—and were giving students credit for working there. They could never get the journalism minor going. It was constantly being attacked as soft and not really academic. I know it was very frustrating to Roz and others who were pushing that. I was very sympathetic with trying to get a framework within which that could happen, but I didn't stay around long enough to try to continue helping them fight that, and then subsequent deans simply weren't interested in it. And that was, I think, too bad.

### **History**

The history board—it was a board that, in many ways was hurt by the Noah's Ark effect of the colleges. The history faculty, like the literature faculty, were initially concentrated in Cowell and Stevenson. And then, with the exception of Merrill, which ended up with a small cluster of historians, they were pretty much scattered over the other colleges, and that was a real problem. The college loyalty and focus was very powerful for those early history faculty.

**Reti:** Well, you have Page Smith.

**Cowan:** You think of Page Smith. And then John Dizikes. They were among the skeptics over reorganization, certainly first reaggregation, and then that. They didn't want to lose that important tie into the college. There were some other

issues within history. There had been an early emphasis, and it had a lot to do with Page Smith's own interests, of a focus on intellectual and cultural history. And that was the cluster primarily of the people who were in Cowell and Stevenson, but especially Cowell—and you think of John Dizikes<sup>30</sup> as a part of that and Richard Mather and some others. There was also a strong focus initially on American and European history. The emphasis on social history really didn't emerge strongly until Merrill came along. Then you had Terry Burke and then David Sweet, and Dilip Basu.

**Reti:** Pedro Castillo.

**Cowan:** And Pedro coming in the late, mid-seventies. And also a very strong third world strength, in other parts of the world than Europe and the United States. And I won't say it was a tension between the earlier faculty and that, but it did mean that there were probably not the kinds of conversations about how those might come together—people like Terry were very much pushing toward a world history approach that might include all of this. And there was not as much enthusiasm on the part of, particularly people in Cowell and Stevenson. It was, I think, for the most the part a congenial group, but there was a kind of do-your-own-thing approach to faculty teaching what they really cared about. There were certain faculty like Larry Vesey who was trying to create a more coherent approach. He was a professor in Stevenson College, a very productive person. There was a strong emphasis in the history board early on and it maintained

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<sup>30</sup> See Cameron Vanderscoff, interviewer and editor, *John Dizikes: Reflections on a Life of Learning and Teaching at UC Santa Cruz, 1965-2000*, (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2012).

itself for a long time on undergraduate teaching, a very devoted group, and there were some extraordinarily fine teachers. I think of John Dizikes as the exemplar of that, extraordinarily successful, extraordinarily devoted. And that was true of a number of other faculty in the program. Although the quality of the faculty was uneven, I mean there were some faculty who coasted in that board. So it didn't have, outside of Page and then Larry, with the very junior faculty—there wasn't really much leadership for a while in the department.

There was some interest in starting a graduate program in the seventies. It made an attempt—got a Ph.D. program launched in 1970 and then effectively suspended it in 1980 because there wasn't enough faculty interest and resources focusing primarily during the next decade on the MA program. There was a shift in the eighties toward a comparative history graduate program, Terry Burke and others leading that, but again there wasn't finally enough faculty or enough student interest. It wasn't until the nineties that program really got a head of steam. And one can understand why history didn't push its Ph.D. harder in the 1970s and early 1980s. It was a product of a lot of things. One of the best things that happened about reorganization was that it did bring some faculty together. For example, it brought the Europeanists together in Stevenson College. Buck Sharp, Peter Kenez already there, but Jonathan Beecher and the other faculty starting getting that. And so you started getting a critical cluster of faculty. The American history story is a somewhat different story that I can talk about in a minute, maybe.

In any case, the reorganization did have that advantage of bringing scattered historians together. They had lost a couple of people, like somebody in history of science, a guy named Richard Olsen, who was in Crown and left, I think, partly because, although he had a lot of scientists around him [in Crown] there wasn't that larger support.

### **Philosophy**

Philosophy was an interesting program. Dick Wasserstrom was a terrific appointment, a person of great stature and skill, and he made in David Hoy another really excellent appointment. He was a fine chair. And then a junior appointment in the philosophy of science was added by Helene. And there were already philosophers in, particularly, Cowell and Stevenson. So there was a good basis for an undergraduate program and there were some very good teachers in their program. But there wasn't enough senior strength and overall research visibility at that time to make a graduate program worthwhile. Richard didn't push it very hard at that particular point. What happened was that faculty who wanted to participate in graduate programs started looking elsewhere. I remember David Hoy, in particular, starting to teach in the history of consciousness graduate program.

But many of the faculty in philosophy simply—it was like history—simply weren't interested very much in the graduate program. And that didn't happen until then 1990s, when Jorge Hankamer as dean began to urge them to have it. But it is a graduate program that has limped along. There hasn't been quite

enough faculty, visible faculty to make it work, and the retirement of David Hoy and Richard took a lot of that kind of senior weight out of the program. It has a program but it has had that problem. But there were some very good faculty there that were brought in by Helene and then, I'd like to think, by me. Dick Wasserstrom and Jerry Neu also got involved in mounting the legal studies program, which was a good initiative but again, took their attention a little bit [away from] what additionally you could do in philosophy.

### **History of Consciousness Board**

History of consciousness—everybody knows what a great program that is, although it's had some of its own difficulties more recently. Hayden's appointment was a brilliant appointment, and he in turn was a very shrewd, good judge of quality—for him to hire Jim Clifford, still an assistant professor, and then Donna Haraway immediately after that. He inherited Gary Lease when religious studies was disbanded. So he had a cadre. And I was able to then add Teresa de Lauretis to that list when I was dean, and he took advantage of two transfers from other departments, Barbara Epstein in history and Victor Burgin, and then I think we were starting another search in my last year as dean. So they had a cadre of about seven or so faculty.

It was, of course, the most selective Ph.D. program at UCSC from early on, even when it was almost a general studies graduate program. It was attracting typically older students who already had master's degrees, highly independent, very self-focused. It had several emphases within the program. There was a kind

of feminist studies emphasis that emerged; there was a praxis emphasis that emerged; there was a kind of—I can't remember [what] it was called—mind and language emerged, it was sort of taking advantage of some of the philosophical concerns; and there was a political-social theory group. But theory was the binding link to the program. It quickly developed a highly visible faculty, because it already had some senior faculty, people like Norman O. Brown and others, and Harry Berger, who had been initially involved with the program.

**Reti:** And they continued to teach for the program?

**Cowan:** They were able to at least initially. Page Smith was involved early in the program, too. They had the notion that you would admit a graduate student who you wanted to work with. But the trouble was that if the faculty member then lost interest, the graduate student was left kind of floating. This was in the seventies. So Hayden really brought some structure, what you might call a theoretical structure and a meta-structure. That is, he was interested [in meta-history], or looking at history's own assumptions and so forth. Jim did the same thing for anthropology; Donna [Haraway] for science<sup>31</sup>; Teresa working with feminist theory, as was Donna, and also sort of the theory of film criticism. And Barbara Epstein, when she came, brought a Marxist theoretical approach to understanding history. She had left history in part because she felt that there was not being enough attention given to social history, due to the nature of the

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<sup>31</sup> See Irene Reti, interviewer and editor, *Edges and Ecotones: The Worlds of Donna Haraway at UCSC* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2007). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/haraway>

program, because there were very few women in the program too, and I think those were two dynamics that brought her over.

In any event, there were other faculty from other boards who certainly in the eighties and nineties were more than happy to work with students from history of consciousness and to even teach in the program, especially if they didn't have their own graduate programs. I worked with quite a few histcon students myself, and I was sort of representative of faculty who were interested because we enjoyed working with them. They were cutting across all sorts of boundaries and doing very interesting things. Hayden didn't want to admit a graduate student if he didn't think that they already had a project that would lead to a first-rate dissertation.

**Reti:** Wow.

**Cowan:** It didn't always work out that way, but in fact in an extraordinary number of cases it did. You can look at the number of dissertations that got published, and the histcon students who went on to major appointments elsewhere. Very important.

During the 1980s, histcon faculty were very responsible in teaching undergraduate courses. They didn't have a major, but they were willing to teach large undergraduate courses, so they helped division enrollments, and also to make themselves visible. It also was useful because it gave their graduate students places to have TAs. So, it was in their interest but also was good for the division and good for the campus.

I think coming in the nineties, there was an attrition of that. Fewer and fewer undergraduate courses, particularly large lecture courses being taught by the histcon faculty. I think subsequent deans from myself let that slide a bit. And that began to create some resentment in some of the other humanities departments, which felt that they were essentially having to subsidize history of consciousness. History of consciousness was having more time, they argued, for research and other things. And the other units were having to be service units for that. Histcon constantly argued that they had a lot of graduate students they were working with, which was true, and that took a lot of attention, and that they were bringing prestige to the division. But it was a bit of a tension.

And the other tension in histcon was the fact that histcon at some point decided that, although it had initially been a committee of studies where there were faculty from other departments who were on the governing board and helping making decisions about admitting students, that histcon wanted to control that themselves. I think that one of the problems that histcon developed from around the late nineties on was that they became just a bit too isolated from some of the faculty. There are a lot of exceptions to that, so I don't want to overstate it, but they didn't keep their bridges built as much as they could have, and I think that created some tensions [so] that then when histcon itself got into trouble five, six years ago as faculty started retiring a couple years ago, there wasn't as much sympathy for replacing them.

**Reti:** Interesting.

**Cowan:** But histcon has been extraordinarily important to the division and to the campus, and I would certainly give Hayden [credit for] a great deal of leadership, and his successors.

### **Legal Studies**

Maybe I could say something very briefly about legal studies, a program that was founded by Dick Wasserstrom, Jerry Neu, and then over the Social Sciences Division Bob Meister, who was still a young faculty, and had a cadre of other faculty. It [was] designed not to be a prelaw major. It was specifically designed not to be that, but to have a wider range of interests so it wouldn't be just a technical field—students would be thinking about law within the social, cultural, political context. Nevertheless, a lot of students who decided to major in legal studies were, I think, interested in going on to law school.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** So it had a cadre. The major, from the outset, stressed that it was going to be highly rigorous. And one way of showing that rigor was that it was going to require a double major of all the students who majored in legal studies. They would have to major in another field so they would develop a disciplinary competence, and also interdisciplinary perspectives. One of the problems with that is that students would go through the major and take advantage of these small courses that were offered in the major and some really terrific teaching, and then would drop out of that and end up just getting their degree in their discipline. So that there were some issues of how many students were actually

majoring in legal studies, and the people in the program were constantly arguing that they were being undercounted. I was arguing as dean that they really ought to rethink the double major requirement, that it was probably too onerous, that they'd be better off having a major and then encouraging minors in other boards, but making themselves the center of attention. They could never persuade me that they deserved to have their own FTE because of this. And finally they were moved, I think perhaps in my last year as dean, or perhaps the year after that, to the Social Sciences Division, where politics absorbed them. But actually that helped keep them going because then they had a board that cared about them.

**Reti:** Then Bob Meister was over there.

**Cowan:** Then Bob was over there. Because they were isolating themselves a bit from some of the other colleagues who might have wanted to be in it. One thing I did support was funding for Jeremy Elkins, who was a terrific lecturer, and he taught in the program for quite a few years. And he actually anchored the program in the kind of curricular sense.

I can say just one or two things about women's studies and American studies if you don't mind.

**Reti:** Sure.

### **Women's Studies**

**Cowan:** Until the 1980s, as a committee of studies, not a board of studies, it couldn't get its own ladder positions. And so it had to make do with faculty who

volunteered their services from other departments, and to an infusion of lecturer money. It did get a lot of support from faculty from other departments during that time, although relatively few wanted to teach in the program. But Helene, for example, taught in the program; Donna taught in the program; Teresa taught in the program for a while, and there were a few others. And Helene's leadership, of course, both as dean and afterwards as chair of the women's studies program, was very important. She found ways, using the feminist research center, the annual retreats—all of these things were pulling people together. And, of course, as important as Helene was, the heart of the program was Bettina Aptheker, who had been hired as a lecturer. Charismatic, passionate, cared immensely about students, wide-ranging experience—her huge introductory course subsidized not only women's studies but the whole division, and made possible smaller courses in that program and elsewhere. And so, it had a steadily growing group of students involved in the program with that stable leadership and finally in the late eighties was able to make its first ladder appointment. And that went to Bettina. That happened around '87, '88, and then, in my last year I authorized two other searches for ladder positions, and that resulted in the hiring of Akasha Hull.

**Reti:** I worked on that recruitment when I worked for women's studies.

**Cowan:** Remember that? —who was here only for a few years, but she was a TOP appointment who was brought in to add some more senior leadership for the department, and then Wendy Brown. The notion was that you needed at least a small cadre of faculty for the administration of the program and to run its

core curriculum, a tight core curriculum. Then you could have other faculty volunteer for it. By the way, participation from other departments was helped by the fact that the college holdover meant that faculty had a course that they hadn't had to devote to their boards initially, they were being devoted to the college. And some of those courses were—if boards were still generous enough to allow a faculty member to have a course outside the board—could be devoted to these interdisciplinary programs and to other programs. And Helene—she had taught, I think as dean, a course or two annually, but she didn't have a full assignment. So she could do that, too. So it didn't hurt the boards to have that kind of contribution.

### **American Studies**

The same thing was true of American studies. Its history parallels women's studies, and is some ways a little different. When I was in Boston on my sabbatical—another going back to a city, and Byron and I had gone there in 1981—during that year in the spring, the TWANAS group, the Third World and Native American Studies group of students, organized a strike, a series of protests. It had been fueled in part by the coming to the end of the three-year appointment of a guy named Ed Castillo, who was teaching Native American studies in Kresge College. Helene had not reappointed him. She felt, I think for understandable reasons, that he simply was not a strong enough person for that position. She wasn't hostile to Native American studies, but she felt that there should be somebody else in that role. That, among other things, had led to a big

fight, and there was also concern about the stability of some temporarily funded Asian American courses.

So, out of that strike in the spring of 1981, when I was still in Boston, came an agreement that the chancellor and John Marcum as academic vice chancellor struck with the TWANAS group and a concerned group of faculty, that they would ensure some ongoing support for Native American studies and Asian American studies, initially in terms of some ongoing money for lectureships, but eventually for some ladder positions somewhere down the line when campus resources increased and they could potentially do that. The students who had been active in the strike weren't fully happy with that, but they had gotten something out of it. Their argument, quite understandably, was that this was still the whitest campus and that something like this was really important for attracting students, both substantively and symbolically. Another part of the agreement was to establish an ongoing committee in ethnic studies. The Third World Committee I had chaired in 1978 had recommended the establishment of an ongoing committee to promote and coordinate ethnic studies on campus. It really had not gotten off the ground. And so under that [1981] pressure it did get off the ground and you had a small group of faculty who were appointed to that committee.

The students also wanted more ethnic studies appointments or recruitments and were not merely concerned with Native American and Asian American studies. Well, it so happened that, since American studies, which had been approved as a major and was starting up in a pretty strong way then, we had been committed

as a central part of our mission not only to studying social and cultural diversity in the United States but to trying to embody it in both our student body and in our faculty. And so, we embraced the possibility of taking over responsibility for the offering of the Native American studies courses, and expressed also a happiness to take over the Asian American studies courses, and to eventually, if we could ever get some positions, to hire some faculty of color to teach in our program. Not to mention achieving some gender diversity in our program also.

Now, like women's studies we didn't control ladder faculty positions then, and we had to rely on borrowing faculty from other boards. And at the outset that included Nate Mackey—I'd gotten his appointment and he agreed to participate in American studies as well as in the literature board; Pedro Castillo had agreed to the same thing. And so they taught courses in African American and Chicano Studies for a couple of years for us. Jack Schaar contributed a course for us, John Dizikes, and, of course, myself, and I think Paul Skenazy, and Forrest Robinson. We had some other people doing this. We were also able to get a small amount of lecturer money and so we hired Marge Frantz to teach a couple courses. Later, when I was dean, we were, as a result of growth and even though [we] couldn't control ladder positions yet, we brought Ann Lane on. She was an academic preceptor in Kresge, and we were able to get her a half-time position, we were able to fill that out, and eventually we put her full-time. And, of course, Marge and Ann were just splendid for the program. It also enabled us to create some gender diversity that we weren't able to initially because there simply weren't

faculty on campus that would [be] available to enable us to do that. But we did get some ethnic diversity at the outset.

And I can't remember exactly when it was, it may have been a year or so after I came back to the campus and became committee chair, that Ed Castillo left and so we were able to hire somebody else. We hired an extraordinary woman named Phyllis Rogers as a lecturer. She was here with us for five years and she and I taught the first core course. It was an outgrowth of the old *American Lives* course, what [we] called *America and Americans*. That was actually a title taken from a book by John Steinbeck. The emphasis was on the diversity of [American] experience, and although she was Native American, and very strongly a proponent of Native American studies, she threw herself into teaching the course. We were teaching about [Americans] of all sorts and backgrounds. We were teaching something about the constitution; we were doing all sorts of wonderful things in the course. Anyway, so we established ourselves as the primary location for Native American studies on campus. And we kept pushing on that.

And finally when the campus, around 1986, '87, authorized the search for a ladder position in Native American studies, finally making good on that commitment, there was a campuswide committee chaired by Dick Wasserstrom, and out of that search came the hiring of Gerald Vizenor in literature. But we got, as a part of the agreement, agreement that he would teach a couple of courses for us as well as literature. And Jerry did that very generously and faithfully until he left. And then shortly after that Louis Owens was hired as a TOP appointment

and we looked like we were building a real cadre of—and we got another Native American position. It looked by the early nineties we would have a real cadre. It didn't quite work out that way. But we were really taking that seriously. And that was our first, if you will, half appointment.

Then we got another appointment toward the end of my deanship that allowed us to search for a leadership appointment, very much as Bettina's position was being used. We hired a guy named José Limón, who was a folklorist-anthropologist from University of Texas. He came here only a couple of years. But our goal again was to diversify our faculty and diversify the leadership and make ourselves seem substantively as well as symbolically a home for a diverse constituency. That leads to the Oakes story, which I can start with next time.

### **Boundary-Crossing Enterprises at UCSC**

**Reti:** Today is June 14, 2012. This is Irene Reti and I'm here with Michael Cowan for our sixth interview. We are going to begin today by talking about the importance of connections between departments and across campus, really this ongoing theme that we've been following throughout the campus's history.

**Cowan:** Well, I think we were somehow stuck in the mid-eighties when I was dean and I was talking about some of these aspects then, but I thought maybe I could say a few more things. And then maybe go on and talk about two areas where issues around connections across lines were very important, which were American studies and ethnic studies, and maybe look for the kind of history of those things on campus up to the present. Certainly one of my projects was—I

tried to emphasize this [in the earlier interviews]—was this desire to find ways of making all sorts of connections. And an increasingly important part of that, as far as I was concerned, was to bring people together across all sorts of lines—physical, social, cultural, academic, bureaucratic, temporal.

**Reti:** It's perfect to me that we're doing this interview in the Gloria Anzaldúa room.<sup>32</sup>

**Cowan:** Yes, I know it. Perfect, how wonderful. Who was a great person in talking about borderlands as both dividers and connectors, and a special place, and also an uncomfortable place. And a lot of the kind of connecting sites that I'm interested in have always been uncomfortable places to be, which is part of what makes them challenging and also fascinating.

I can think of four areas where connection-making projects during the eighties were important to me. I've talked about some, but maybe I'll highlight a few again. One was the area of research, how you bring people together across diverse interests, how you organize that. There was a lot of interest in the academic planning and actually the physical planning of the eighties. In establishing the feminist studies research group the FRA was established during

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<sup>32</sup> The Gloria Anzaldúa Study Room is a study room in McHenry Library dedicated to the late visionary Chicana feminist and philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa was the author of *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987) selected as one of the "100 Best Books of the Century" by both the *Utne Reader* and *Hungry Mind Review*. Her other published works included *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981, coedited with Cherrie Moraga), a groundbreaking collection of essays and poems widely recognized by scholars in women's studies as the premiere multicultural feminist text. Anzaldúa was also a major figure in American studies, and after her death the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Award for Independent Scholars was established by the American Studies Association in her honor. Anzaldúa was also a close personal friend and colleague of Irene Reti's.

that time. And one of the major such initiatives in the Humanities Division came out of an initiative that David Gardner, when he was president of the University, had taken. He wanted to show that he cared about strengthening research in the humanities, make sure that it was understood that he didn't want to neglect that. So he wanted to establish a universitywide humanities research institute. It became called the UCHRI eventually. And he asked all the campuses to make bids for it, for it to be the administrative home. Bob Sinsheimer encouraged me, in my capacity as dean, to write a proposal on behalf of this campus, because he wanted, both to support research, but he also wanted to support humanities research. I know he was never thought about that way, but [he] really was concerned about research in all areas of the campus.

So I wrote a proposal. We ended up as one of the three finalists. It finally went to Irvine. I was told that we came in second. And the major arguments finally that Irvine had in its favor was that university had more funds to put into it, and more space to give to it. They ended up actually locating it in the central administrative building that housed the chancellor's office and other things on that campus. We didn't have a lot of space to give to it, where they could provide some visiting faculty offices, conference rooms and so forth. So [the Irvine administration] was willing to put that up, and this campus, because it was small, because it was impacted, and because it hadn't been growing didn't have [those resources]. Another major argument was that we were physically too isolated to be easily gotten to, whereas Irvine had an airport there. And I suspect

that there were some Northern-Southern California campus politics along with that.

Anyway, that was somewhat disappointing, but out of that came funds that allowed every UC general campus to establish its own humanities research institute. And I began to talk with my faculty in humanities, and identified Jim Clifford as the point person to help us plan this. And Jim decided that it made sense, instead of our calling it a humanities institute to call it the Center for Cultural Studies.

**Reti:** Oh, that's how that came to be.

**Cowan:** We were getting that piece of the money. His thought was that *culture* was a very cutting-edge term. It was both a useful focus but a capacious framework. It was a contested concept, also, so it would make for lively debate. One of the things that Jim and I and others who involved in the planning were concerned about was that it not be just thought of as a narrowly bureaucratic Humanities Division project, although that's where it was located, but that it involve people who had relevant humanistic perspectives, if you will, from the social sciences and the arts and even the natural sciences. And Jim can talk much more richly about this than I can because he was involved as director of the Center for Cultural Studies for quite a few years and did an extraordinary, creative job.

But the thought was to bring people together from across the campus, including people in the humanities, and the center was designed to also involve both

faculty and graduate students. So it sponsored some visiting scholars, symposiums, conferences, visiting lecturers—it had some collective research groups on various topics that would be sponsored. Jim also went after some additional funding to support some of its activities. It was a very important and visible center. It cooperated also with the feminist research group. So there were some very productive collaborations there. And eventually, in the 1990s, there were some faculty in the humanities that felt that they were being left out of the notion of culture—that is, it was not broad enough to capture some of their interests. I think that was felt by people in linguistics and philosophy and history, in particular. So Jorge Hankamer, when he was [no longer] dean in the nineties, using some additional—must have been Office of the President's money—formed a humanities institute/research cluster that would fund projects and other things that would capture the interests of some of these other people and eventually the Center for Cultural Studies became a subset of that group. Anyway, it's an interesting history, and if you ever have a chance to talk to Jim Clifford about it—.

**Reti:** Well, we will be interviewing him later this year, so we'll be sure to talk about it.

**Cowan:** Then he'll really give you a wonderful sense of that. But it was an activity, I think, of which I was certainly proud, but for which Jim, in particular, I think, can take a great deal of credit.

Another kind of boundary-crossing enterprise that I was interested in was more interdivisional cooperation. And the center was a good example of something that we were trying to do to bring others together. I must say that it is often very difficult to get deans to cooperate very much on anything. I don't want to overstate that because, depending on the particular dean, or deans involved, you could get a great deal of productive cooperation and there're lots of good examples of that. I'm thinking of what's going on between the arts, for example, and engineering and natural sciences over media projects currently. But deans have this funny role of being both advocates for their own particular divisional interest, which means competition for resources or faculty positions and all, and at the same time campuswide officers. Different deans negotiate that dual responsibility in different ways. It was very hard, I found during my deanship, to get much cooperation, for example, out of the dean who was then the dean of social sciences. We had a perfectly amenable personal relationship, but he was just very focused on getting his own programs together. And so it was very difficult to get some of those cooperations.

Later on, after I was dean myself, deans like Marty Chemers were much more amenable to that kind of cooperation. I think humanities deans as a whole have been more interested in reaching out than others. Maybe it's the nature of our field, that it's perhaps a little more amorphous, or that we always have our fingers in lots of different intellectual pots. In any event, it was a point of frustration for me. I think that there could have been more, and I think

particularly at a campus with limited resources, of a search for cooperation. It was very important.

Another connection-making enterprise that, of course, I've been involved in for a long time was—and still am interested in—was the physical connections. Part of the ex officio [duties in] my role as dean was a member of the Campus Physical Planning Advisory Committee. All the deans were on there, but it gave me a chance to be involved in a lot of projects, and I took a particularly active role.

In 1984, I had been asked to be vice chair of the committee charged with developing a new twenty-year academic plan for the campus, that is, from 1985 to 2005. It was very interesting because I had been involved in a similar enterprise in 1980, had in fact been on a small committee when I was chair of the Academic Senate, which John Marcum appointed to try to develop a new academic plan. At that point, we were trying to develop a plan for about 6,000 students through the eighties up. The notion was to be efficient and to make as much use as we could of our limited resources. And a lot of our hope was to grow our graduate programs up to about 10 to 15 percent of the campus population, to grow modestly at the undergraduate level. It's a sign of all the things that were beginning to happen on the campus in the early eighties that by the time we started planning our academic plan in 1984-1985, we were already up to that point, well past what David Saxon had said we needed to keep our FTEs. We were beginning to get new positions, and began to [make] the case for new facilities. And we were then planning to grow, by 2005, to conservatively at

least twelve thousand students, and more optimistically to fifteen thousand students.

And so that was back on the table in the middle of the 1980s. And 15 percent of our students we wanted at that point to see as graduate [and] professional students. That was a figure that began to be built into subsequent planning efforts of the nineties and even in the first part of this century. In any event, there had to be a new long range development plan following on the academic plan to take advantage of, to express that planned growth, and I was on that committee too. And it was very interesting because when you think of all the new buildings and structures that were planned during that period that finally got built in the late eighties and into the nineties—College Eight, planning for College Nine and Ten, which was postponed then for another ten years for various complex reasons, Frank Zwart I know has talked about that.<sup>33</sup> Several new natural science buildings were planned during that period of time, performing arts and music facilities, the new concert hall and all the music facilities. What we might call infill projects, but they made sense to me of course because it was a way of tightening the campus. It was a way of creating clusters, of creating synergies. And I became, in particular, interested in the notion of magnets. What did it take to make a particular structure or collection of structures sufficiently attractive in terms of what they were doing to start bringing people together from across all sorts of different places? To a certain extent, activities could do that. I was

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<sup>33</sup> See Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Growth and Stewardship: Frank Zwart's Four Decades at UC Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2011). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/ucsc/growth-and-stewardship-frank-zwarts-four-decades-at-uc-santa-cruz>

thinking about our Teacher on the Hill project for example, in the eighties, where faculty from all over the campus were coming together for monthly luncheons to talk about common issues. And the humanities research activities. Many of these were magnets, but to find new ways of physically expressing those magnets, to provide homes, physical homes for them was very important. A much more recent example, of course, is what's happened here to McHenry Library as it's built up a set of activities and really drawn all sorts of people together in the way it didn't in earlier years.

There were two projects during the eighties that we were planning for, one of which was implemented and the other was delayed. One was the faculty club. Bob Sinsheimer very much wanted to have a faculty club. He wanted it to be in the center of campus, and he wanted it to have a kind of visibility and use it to bring faculty, and then staff also together. He wanted to locate it out in the area which was now part of the Performing Arts area, just east of that, and make it visible and make it easily accessible. But it got caught in the lack of funding and in controversy whether anything should be built in the Great Meadow. And so, it was finally postponed. And then not until the building of Colleges Nine and Ten, where M.R.C. Greenwood had a very clever idea of building it within that framework, melding funds which normally were not being melded— That was one of the other problems, that you had different funding sources, and it was very hard to get universitywide approval for bringing different funding sources together for a common structure. So all of those were issues. And then Bob Sinsheimer, when he left as chancellor, left that as an undone project.

But the other project during that time was the Student Center. There had been increasing calls for a facility that would serve campuswide student organizations and interests, a feeling that the individual colleges themselves couldn't do that. There had been both resistance to that idea, particularly from the colleges who felt that it would draw students away from the colleges, but also increasing pressure from students in organizations, government organizations, ethnic organizations and the like, to do that. The big issue was where to locate it. And campus politics, of course, as they always are, got involved in that. I was a part of the planning group for that. And a bunch of us, including myself, argued that it ought to be a place where it would be easily accessible to students from all over the campus. The students, who were very active on that committee, argued that it should have a space that would be central, not only for functional reasons, but for symbolic reasons—another way of asserting that students were central to the campus.

And so we finally chose that site on the edge of the Great Meadow just east of the performing arts and just south of the library. And it was a project that, looking back on it, I realize was in many respects a failed project. Our thought was that if you put something there it would be a magnet; it would both have symbolic value, it would give students one of the prime view sites and that was important, so symbolically it would be important, but also functionally. Unfortunately, it was located there prematurely. The performing arts hadn't built up enough; there wasn't enough other activity around it; the library at that time was not generating enough activity. And so although they put in a small restaurant and

offices, it didn't attract much activity. And finally, it got turned over to more organizations of various sorts, so students still use it that way. But it didn't become a center, a real magnet to bring people together.

There was also a proposal to build a pedestrian link that would have linked the East Field House area to that area as another way of trying to tighten the campus and bring it together, and that never got built. Didn't have the funds and there was controversy because there was concern that it might again get into the Great Meadow. So anyway, it also died, and when that link didn't happen [the Student Center] was somewhat isolated. And so later, when the bookstore project was built, it was decided to build it where there was already a kind of hub of activity, the Bay Tree Bookstore and so forth.

The graduate students, by the way, had fought very hard for their own space. My view is that if the graduate students had come in with the undergraduates and built a center, it would have created some synergies of all sorts. And with the faculty club, I really had a grand vision that this would all come together in one kind of grand space where you would form interactions. It didn't happen, because everybody had their own interests. So, the Student Center was—I wouldn't say a complete failure, but it was a partial failure. It didn't do what we were hoping it would do and so finally, even though [the additional facility was eventually located] on the east side, it was at least oriented to a place that already had a kind of hub of traffic and student interest, and that was, on balance, probably a good decision.

But it still begged the question of what you were going to do as a part of the center of campus. And it wasn't until the library's addition started making that more attractive that you began to get a little synergy.<sup>34</sup> And, of course, now the performing arts have built up nicely, and there perhaps is a little more possibility there. So it was perhaps an idea before its time. It was a worthy goal but practically it just didn't work out the way I was hoping it would.

I think I should give a great deal of credit to Wendell Brase, who was the vice-chancellor for finance, planning and administration. He was a controversial figure because he pushed very hard. He was constantly being accused of wanting to destroy trees and do all sorts of bad things like that, and violate landscapes—and also of running the academic planning process, because he was always pushing to get new buildings before there had necessarily been all of the academic planning that might have gone into it. On the other hand, he was very skillful at working with the Office of the President, and he was able to get several projects pushed up in the queue. He had a very strong vision of wanting to make the campus more coherent. And, on balance, I think he did a terrific job. But he was controversial. He left to go to Irvine, and Irvine might have been even more suited for his large master planning ambitions, at least culturally suited. But he's done a great job there. He was very thoughtful, and I enjoyed working with him, and I do think sometimes you need people who are willing to push a little against various points of resistance in order to get something done. But he made

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<sup>34</sup> A ten-year, \$100 million project funded primarily by state bonds expanded and significantly renovated McHenry Library, and was completed in 2011.

a great deal of difference in the building projects that we now have. I don't think we would've had nearly as much success if we hadn't taken advantage of that window of the eighties before there was a recession then, around 1990, and so forth—but some things were already on the books, including planning for Nine and Ten, which got stopped for, again, various reasons that were perhaps unfortunate.

### **The Oakes College-American Studies Story**

Well, maybe that leads to another connection-making project, which is American studies. Maybe I can start that with what I was beginning to talk about last time, which is what I call the Oakes-American Studies story.

**Reti:** Sure.

**Cowan:** Oakes had been exempted from reorganization in 1979, it and College Eight—College Eight because it had become the kind of environmental studies college, so it was almost acting like a large department with some other affiliated faculty, and it didn't have its own space. There wasn't much tension between the notion of college and board there.

**Reti:** No, they were virtually synonymous, in my memory.<sup>35</sup>

**Cowan:** So it was a place where that was working, I think very well.

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<sup>35</sup> Reti was both a College Eight student and an environmental studies major in the late 1970s and early 1980s at UCSC.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** Oakes had been founded with a very strong conception of what it wanted to achieve in terms of serving students of color, focusing—but not just in ethnic studies, although that was part of it—but in terms of providing a strong foundation that would help them move into the sciences in particular. But it had several handicaps. It was the most isolated of the colleges. Unlike the east side, the west side had—its colleges had been rather spread out, and it was far away. Herman [Blake] had taken some risk in hiring some very young faculty. He didn't have many senior positions to work with to help him. And a number of them had not gotten tenure. He, at the same time, wanted to make sure that people coming in the college had fully bought into his vision. When reorganization took place he was exempted from that, still had some control over some faculty positions and some say. But it meant that by the early eighties, it had many fewer ladder faculty than other colleges. And in fact, in 1981, just as I was returning from my sabbatical in Boston, John Marcum wrote me and expressed his concern about Oakes and its isolation, its declining number of faculty—the crisis. And he wondered if American studies, which was just then starting up, could help out perhaps by moving to Oakes.

It certainly was a good programmatic fit given our own interest in social and cultural diversity. But there were some real problems, as far as I was concerned. First, American studies was still just settling in to Kresge, which was a terrific fit. We were happy at Kresge. We liked being around some boards that could support us. We liked our connection with women's studies very much. And we

were concerned about our isolation from colleagues. If we moved there, first, we didn't have control of faculty positions then, and so it was really hard to know what that would mean.

So, I suggested that John consider pulling together a cadre of programmatically related social science faculty and humanities faculty to move to Oakes. I suggested, for example, the social psychology group, which was a very strong group, had people like Tom Pettigrew and Bob Alford and others in it. It had crossed the lines between psychology and sociology and was nationally known as a powerhouse group of faculty. I thought that that, if we moved there, would be wonderful for American studies to give it our own interest. For example, Tom Pettigrew had written very important works, influential works about race. And nothing happened, though, on that proposal. I think the campus was still too distracted. So when I became dean—

**Reti:** Distracted in what way?

**Cowan:** I think juggling too many other things, and I think Herman was also very wary of being interfered with.

**Reti:** I see.

**Cowan:** He wanted to have it on his terms, and I think that was one reason that other faculty were a little reluctant. Again, I want to give Herman a great deal of credit for his vision to Oakes, but in this particular way there was a kind of

separatist element he wanted for the college. So it was a tug of war, and John and the chancellor didn't want to fight that issue at that time.

But when I became dean in 1983, Herman was planning to leave the provostship, so it seemed to me that there might be another opportunity. I was concerned about the Oakes issue, too, and so I went to John Marcum again and asked that he bring the social science dean at the time and myself together to discuss what we might jointly do. The social science dean was not at all interested in that. First, he didn't want to divide his faculty further into other parts. He had other agendas.

**Reti:** Who was this?

**Cowan:** Frank Childs. He was an economist who had come from Davis. And so it was clear that if anybody was going to do something it would have to be the Humanities Division. So I decided to see if I could persuade a group of Americanists from history and literature who were then in Kresge to move to Oakes. And there was a search for the new provost that yielded a Chinese-American historian, Sucheng Chan, who had come from Berkeley. I thought it might be an opportunity to see if she would be supportive of our moving.

So we were successful in persuading a group of people who were in American literature and U.S. history to move to Oakes. American studies at that time didn't control any faculty positions. The teaching was being done by volunteers from other departments but I thought if we brought together a group that was already beginning to work together and helpful to American studies it might work. And,

in addition there was a group in literature that was forming called the world literature group. It included several Americanists, and it also included some people from other literatures who were restless with the national divides. So a few other faculty decided to join.

So we were able to bring a small group, I think it was initially eight or nine faculty who said that they were willing to move to Oakes. It included people like Pedro Castillo<sup>36</sup> and Jerry Vizenor, Nate Mackey. It was a good group. It was a risk of sorts, also. We had all enjoyed being in Kresge, so it wasn't that. But there were some other factors, too. Literature and women's studies and some of the other programs in Kresge were themselves beginning to expand. Literature, in particular, needed some room for graduate students and they needed more faculty offices. So there was a bit of a space pressure there. So we also relieved that. Nevertheless, going to a place that was somewhat isolated, even though there were some good programmatic reasons for doing so, created some challenges. Interestingly enough then, just a few years later when Gary Lease had become dean, history of consciousness began to feel that it needed some more space. It was beginning to compete for space with the literature graduate program. They were also in Kresge. And they hadn't built yet the new annex there in Kresge.

**Reti:** Yes, I remember them all being kind of squished on this one long hallway with women's studies.

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<sup>36</sup> An oral history with Pedro Castillo is in process and will be published by the Regional History Project in 2014—Editor.

**Cowan:** That's right. And so Hayden and Gary decided that it made sense for history of consciousness to move there, too. Well, American studies wasn't unhappy with that because we were working with a lot of histcon students, our faculty, and also because we thought that the connections between history of consciousness and American studies might be strengthened by that. And this was one thing that Wendell Brase had done, got a remodeling of a part of Oakes to build some more faculty offices there and some space for graduate students. And so history of consciousness a couple years later came down.

And so Oakes became, if you will, de facto then a Humanities Division college where it hadn't been before. So it was brought into, in a belated way, into reorganization. As a part of the move there were some things I did get that served American studies' interests, in addition to this general interest of being with a college that was known for its support of minority students and committed to looking at social and cultural diversity. I got Marcum's agreement to continue funding several Asian American studies courses that Oakes had been funding through money given by the vice chancellor, and with a commitment that after, within a couple of years we would get a ladder position if American studies was able to get controlled positions.

**Reti:** In Asian American studies?

**Cowan:** In Asian-American studies. And that resulted in the appointment, eventually, of Judy Yung in 1990, 1991, shortly after we'd gotten an ability to control a couple of positions. It wasn't the first position we'd gotten, but it was

the second new position that we got. The other was that he agreed to create a ladder faculty position in Native American studies *in* American studies. It wasn't that position that Gerry Vizenor had held. It was going to be another position for us building a small cadre of specialists in Native American studies on campus.

**Reti:** Is that the position that Louis Owens ended up having?

**Cowan:** No, he was appointed in literature in a target of opportunity position for that position. It was a position that, as I'll talk about it in a minute, the first appointment in that was a young guy named James Treat, who then moved to New Mexico—interesting enough, Louis Owens and Gerry Vizenor both moved there [later], too. In any event, to the extent that it was a kind of self-interested way, it was a way for us to get the administration to pledge that it would eventually commit some positions to us.

Now, American studies, from the very start, was dedicated as a program to building bridges, making connections. Its goal was to bring together a variety of disciplinary perspectives and methods to examine problems that cut across conventional disciplinary boundaries. And from the start we wanted to at least meld perspectives from the humanities, broadly construed, to include the arts and the social sciences. We wanted to examine what brought individuals and groups of people together, as well as what kept them apart, to look at what divided and united them within the framework of a nation, within the framework of a larger world. We were looking at political barriers and links, economic barriers and links, social and cultural barriers and links, ideological

barriers and links. We wanted to examine conflict; it was a very important part of the American Studies movement of the seventies nationally. We wanted to not just look at issues around consensus and commonality; we wanted to see those things that were genuinely being contested. But we were also looking for ways in which common causes could be found across those lines.

A kind of major question revolved around the concept of citizenship: to what extent could citizenship be a liberating and unifying term and not an oppressive term, a concept used to oppress peoples and individuals? So we were interested in how we could bring people together in civil conversation across all those boundaries. Part of the study of diverse peoples that we were interested in was to recognize that individuals had diverse identities, diverse points of identifications. Depending on who the individual was and what the circumstances were, the particular point of major identification might be different. So those identifications could be shifting as well as constant. But the fact is that everyone had multiple points of identification. We wanted to explore all those points of identification, their relationship to each other, to look at identifications that were inherited, to look at identifications and identities that were imposed upon people, to look at identities that were chosen, and look at the circumstances that led to those various kinds of factors.

We also recognized that most American studies programs in the United States took on a certain coloration from their particular location, so that programs in the Northeast, for example, in New England would spend a lot of time studying New England issues—Puritans and identifications. People on the East Coast

would be looking at European immigration issues. In the South, issues around the South as a region were very important.

We felt that we had both an opportunity and a responsibility, in addition to looking at large national issues, to take account of our own location in the West and particularly in California, and to see California itself as a kind of case study in the way these dynamics played out. And so we, from the outset, gave particular attention to appointments in Native American studies, in Asian American materials, in Chicano materials. Our first formal appointment was a person who was specializing in the study of Chicano folklore and Chicano-white relations in the south.

**Reti:** And who is this?

**Cowan:** José Limón.

**Reti:** Oh yes, you mentioned him the other day.

**Cowan:** I may have mentioned him, from Texas. And as I say, Judy Yung was our next appointment, with Native American studies coming close behind. So many of our courses had a, if you will, a Western or California flavor, even when we were reaching beyond that. Forrest Robinson developed what turned out to be a very popular course, which he called *California and Californians*. At one point it had over four hundred students in the course. It was seeing the local as a point for seeing all sorts of regional and national and international forces coming together, and negotiations of that. So the case study approach, the problem

approach, was very important for American studies. It was also, though, important for us to recognize that, although race and ethnicity were extremely important factors in the way Americans thought about themselves and the way in which life in the United States was organized and negotiated, it was not the only point of identification. So we cared very much about issues of class, of gender, increasingly of sexuality, issues around other ways in which people were divided and brought together, technological issues, the whole issue of the political landscape in which these all played a part.

We certainly wanted to link an understanding of the way in which the past, the present, and the future related—the old Santayana phrase is that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Our feeling was that we wanted to give students a lively sense about the way in which the past—global as well as national and regional past—affected the present. And feeling that unless they understood the complexities of that connection they wouldn't be able to think imaginatively about what a more just, more humane, better future would be.

In any case, we took race and ethnicity seriously, but we never wanted to be just an ethnic studies program. And that was always a point of negotiation and thinking. But if you look at our early courses—we had courses in many of these areas, in addition to ethnic group specific courses. And we tried to make sure that we had some in each of the major ethnic areas, if you will. Even our ethnic studies courses were comparative courses, and one of the things that we stressed was that we wanted students to be able to look at their own heritages, their own

particular groups, but we wanted them also to look at other groups and to think of themselves in relationship to other groups and to think about the way in which other categories of identification could be also relevant, were also relevant to their lives and concerns.

**Reti:** Were you also dealing with mixed race issues at this point?

**Cowan:** Yes, in fact, we started teaching a course, Judy Yung first, and then others beginning in the mid-nineties or late nineties to teach a course in mixed race and ethnicity because students were coming from mixed backgrounds. And, in fact, one of the points we had was that we all in various ways came from, if you trace this back far enough, ethnically mixed backgrounds.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** These terms *race* and *ethnicity* were not pure terms; they were constructs. They had important value for identification but they were also constructs that were used and abused for all sorts of other reasons. One of the things that was important for us, out of our commitment to an integrative curriculum, was that we, again, didn't want students simply studying their own groups. We wanted them, even if that was a central interest which we wanted to honor, to look more broadly with those interests in larger comparative, connective contexts. And similarly, we didn't want the faculty, regardless of their own ethnic background or orientation, to teach only courses dealing with that. So that, for example, Judy Yung taught not only courses in Asian American studies, but taught a very important course in oral history.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** And she, like all of our core faculty, was expected to teach our introductory course American Studies 1, which for a long time was called *America and Americans*, and then it came to be called *Introduction to American Studies* at some point. But that was a course which was designed to express these issues of conflict and accommodation and collaboration, the multiple points of identification, to see it in a large historical framework. And all the core faculty when they came were regardless of their own specialties expected to teach that. It was a way, of, in fact, making sure that the faculty stayed in conversation. Wrestling over that course and over the curriculum was a way of keeping us together, not always in agreement, but to keep us in civil conversation. We felt that it was important for us as a faculty to model the kind of civil conversation we wanted our [students] to also be a part of.

In fact, American Studies 1 is an interesting course. We taught it, at the high point of the major, three times a year, and we used to get a hundred to as many as two, three hundred students in that course. It was a part of our breadth requirements in the division, which counted both for humanities and social sciences breadth requirements, I think quite legitimately. And each of us taught our own version of that course, but there were some common themes and concerns, the ones I have mentioned, that we would bring together. I taught that course very regularly, like my other colleagues, and it was a very challenging course. Difficult, because you're dealing with a lot of students coming together, including students who are new to the campus, students from lots of different

backgrounds and interests, and trying to bring that together. Diverse materials, autobiographies, fiction, film, social science writings, political speeches, advertisements, you name it—it was all brought together. So it was very exciting, I think, to do that. I learned a lot.

One thing that had always been important to me was to see that the teaching of a course is educative for the faculty members' teaching. It gave me an excuse and an incentive to read things that I hadn't read before, to think about issues that I hadn't been before. So that it was always an attempt to not only bring one's own expertise to bear on a course, but pushing the boundaries of that expertise in areas that you weren't quite comfortable with, and at least to say, what does it look like for a faculty member to try to use a course to model the way in which one goes about studying something one doesn't necessarily know something about? What are the kinds of questions you have to ask there? What are the tools at your command? So that to a certain extent one was trying to model a learning process. And in that and other ways, I think American studies in an important respect was trying to be a paradigmatic liberal arts major. You might argue that we were one of the last general education majors, the way we were trying to bring things together, bring people with a variety of expertise, testing and pressing our individual boundaries and asking students to do the same thing. At least that was our ideal, we didn't always achieve it, but it was the kind of thing we were constantly trying to press.

**Reti:** Michael, how did you deal with the broader global context of American studies and not become parochial?

**Cowan:** It's a good question, and something we constantly wrestled with. One way was through some of the particular subjects we taught, which were natural links. For example, in American Studies 1 we spent a lot of time talking about immigration. So, in order to talk about immigration, you had to talk about the societies from which people came, to talk about why they came from those particular societies, what were the dynamics in those societies themselves that caused them to leave? And then talk about what they brought with them from those societies, and what happened to them and what they brought with them when they had to interact with people from other places who had brought things with them and who may have constituted the dominant power in the society. What changed; what happened to the immigrants as a result. And what, in turn, the immigrants caused to happen to other parts of the society as a result.

So we were interested in both transformations and continuities in the conflicts and the accommodations and collaborations that resulted of that. What happens if, for example, people from lots of different points in Italy who think about themselves in terms of their own local group come to the United States and discover that although they have clans, if you will, part of their own localities, they have to identify with the next level up in generalization. And so they start thinking of themselves as Italians, Italian-Americans, which was a category that was not as salient to them when they were in Italy. In fact, Italy didn't get born as a [functional] nation-state [until the latter part of the nineteenth century]. So, using immigration, the movements of peoples globally. And, of course, we also emphasized that it wasn't just that people were coming to the United States.

People from Italy were going to Latin America; they were going to Australia, they were going all over the world. Chinese also, although they were coming to the United States, it wasn't just that story. We invited our students to recognize that they were going to Chile and to England, and to other parts of the world, and that was an important part of the story, the movement of people.

Another was the movement of ideas. A lot of the ideas that we talked about, like issues around the notion of democracy or equality didn't have their locations initially in the United States. These were concepts, which were also imported, if you will, and in the process were in various ways changed by it. So, we were not trying to be a global studies program. In fact, we were constantly accused of not having a strong enough focus ourselves. It was one of the problems with American studies. It was seen as too amorphous. On the other hand, it was sometimes accused of being too provincial.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** Not being global enough. This was a tension, if you will, that we realized we had to continue to wrestle with. It was a tension not just in our local program, but in the American studies movement broadly construed. Anyway, it's remained an important theme in the program. It was and is something you never fully resolve. In fact, that was one of the things about American studies, you realize that none of the issues we were dealing with [were] sort of neat and pat and could be easily resolved. There were constantly new perspectives being added to that.

Another way we did it was to introduce comparative materials. For example, one of my favorite courses in American studies that I taught for years was a course I had called variously *Symbol and Ritual in American Life* and *Imagining America*. But the goal was to look at what I thought were the central role of symbols and symbolic actions, including those more formal symbolic actions we call ritual, in the way in which Americans interpreted their own and others' experience, interpreted the world, used symbols, rituals, to establish and negotiate identities, groups, and also to negotiate and establish boundaries between groups, to use in seeking and defending resources, in seeking and defending power, including power over others. So, it was a useful rubric for bringing together lots of materials: anthropological, sociological, psychological, literary, media materials.

I used a series of case studies in the course to deal with these issues. A lot of the theoretical literature was literature not focused on the United States, but on anthropologists looking elsewhere, or sociologists. And so I was constantly bringing comparative case studies from other societies to bear, to get [students] to think about the theoretical issues involved. And then we would apply some of that to looking at issues within the United States. And we were also interested in students thinking then, not just about the way in which symbolic action was working in the larger society, but to think about the way it was working in their own lives, the way in which in they themselves were caught in and either consciously or unconsciously negotiating symbols.

**Reti:** Give me an example, because I'm not quite clear on what you mean by symbols.

**Cowan:** Sure. First, the most obvious kind of symbols. For example, as part of my case studies I would deal with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial controversy. What does it symbolize, and what are the controversies around that? The AIDS quilt and its symbolism. The U.S. flag, its history and the debate about its meaning and its use and controversy over what constitutes desecration of the flag. So I'm really interested in national symbols. Washington, D.C., as a symbol. But also more local symbols. What about a protest march, a symbolic action—what does it mean? A march is a symbolic action as well as a practical action. You want to have consequences. But you want to be visible; you want to make a statement. What kinds of statements are being made? For example, there was an annual walk in Los Angeles, a walk of Jews from one part of the city to an older part of the city, and an anthropologist named Barbara Meyerhoff wrote a wonderful piece that talked about what it meant for them to march, to gather and then march back to the old neighborhood, which was the original Jewish neighborhood in Los Angeles. So, interested in all of that.

But then I actually asked them to look closely. I said, "Think about this campus; think about the banana slug." It was one of my favorite illustrations. The banana slug—why was it adopted as a mascot over the sea lion? Well, it was seen as ecologically friendly. It was a green symbol, if you will; it was seen as harmless. And, of course, then when two students drew what is now the major image of the slug it was seen as friendly and reading a book and Plato, and it suggested all sorts of things. As soon as that was officially adopted, though—we had by then a certain amount of sports programs, and Budweiser used to give posters to

campuses that would allow them to advertise their sporting events. And so very shortly after it had been officially adopted as our mascot, Budweiser came out with a poster, which showed a slug looking like Rambo.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** A backbone, big muscles.

**Reti:** Gender politics.

**Cowan:** So the multiplicity of the way in which symbols could be used. Here was a notion of not banana slug, but Slug, with all its other connotations, slug and slime, and a more aggressive, more assertive, more competitive kind of thing. It was embedded sort of latently and could be brought out—and, in fact, you see that right now. I started the course, typically, by giving students a chart in which I asked them to think about why a symbol or a symbolic action was generated. Who generated it for conscious or unconscious purposes; how then the symbol was used, often in ways different from the intention, and often in ways that were unconscious or unintended. So what were the impacts? You invent a category like white. What are the consequences of acting as if that's a real category? How is it used to justify power and oppression and other things? White is a symbol. It's not really a color. America is a construction. It's not a natural thing. It's something that emerged out of history. In fact, the term *America* was first applied to the New World, if you will, on a map from the early sixteenth century. The map showed basically what we would now consider South America, and had a little gesture towards what we now would consider North America. But the term

*America* was on what we would now label Brazil. So the migration of that term, the issue of who controls the term *America*, whether it should just be the United States, how much does it apply to the Americas as broadly construed—an ongoing debate and a very lively one. It's a good example of a term which has a kind of symbolic valence.

Anyway, I mention this course because it was a fun course to teach. There was always new material. You could look around and almost anything would be grist for that particular mill. And students could bring their own issues, because they had to write papers where they finally identified particular symbols, symbolic actions, and then did some real work on that. But a lot of our other courses were of that nature. Whatever we started with in the course would be a kind of starting point for considering many of these larger issues about the negotiations of power and meaning and so forth. So that was always a lot of fun.

Students in American studies were asked to have a common experience but then given lots of flexibility for pursuing things that they cared about. And what we were trying to do in our foundation courses was to give them a series of tools and perspectives that we asked them to apply elsewhere. One thing that was very important for American studies, from the outset, was to have senior theses. I mentioned some of those [earlier]. One of the challenges that we faced among many things as we started growing—particularly in the nineties we were growing fairly steadily—was that the growth of the number of students we had was outstripping the growth in our faculty, and it was increasingly hard to do the one-on-one supervisions. Students [took] an independent study with a

faculty member but we were discovering that too many of them were finishing all their course work but not finishing the thesis. We decided we needed to get some greater help. And so Ann Lane, who was one of our central teachers in the program, developed a senior thesis seminar where the students would come together and work on their individual theses, still in conjunction with another faculty member, but then would talk to each other about the theses. She would talk about the strategies of thesis writing, and it would be a kind of mutual support group. And that worked very well. We had lots of good theses that came out of that. One thing we began to develop under the pressure the students were failing to graduate on time and the pressure we were faced with our workload was what we called a portfolio thesis, where students would be asked to take three papers they had written in separate other courses and then to find a way of pulling them together so that they would be, if you will, variations on a theme or a problem, and that they would try to find ways in which their papers could speak to each other.

**Reti:** There's that theme of border-crossing again.

**Cowan:** There's another way of having conversations. And I think as a whole that worked very, very well. One reason that early on we decided that we needed to have control of our faculty positions was that we realized that simply having a faculty volunteering to teach a few of our own courses from other departments, although important for building those connections, was also potentially a strain, particularly, as I mentioned last time, when the humanities and social science faculty moved from five to four courses that they were

teaching. It meant that that free course, that fifth course [from] some of who could contribute to American studies was no longer available, and boards or departments resisted, increasingly, having faculty give one of the remaining four courses to teaching American studies. So we felt that in order to be responsible for a core curriculum we needed that. Also, we felt if you had an appointment in American studies, you would have to be responsible for the curriculum. You would have a reason for staying in the conversation with the other faculty to plan something approaching a coherent curriculum.

And we had two transfers from other departments in the late eighties when we got the [FTE-holding] right: it was John Dizikes and Forrest Robinson. After I became dean (I couldn't do it until I'd finished deaning), I asked my FTE be moved over to American studies. I continued, as did the others, to teach courses in their departments, so that we were still trying to be good citizens and not leave them in the lurch until they were able to backfill us with some additional appointments. It was also true that you had three white men in the program, and it symbolically as well as substantively didn't make sense. For all that I would do to try to teach a curriculum emphasizing social and cultural diversity, I recognized that part of my identity, and my identity as it was perceived, was as a particular kind of a person. And so [this was] one of the reasons that we wanted to make sure we focused our appointments on diversifying our faculty. So again, appointments of an Asian Americanist, a Native Americanist. Our next appointment was Dana Frank, who we brought in because of her concern with gender, and also with labor, because we wanted to make sure that our attention

to class issues was brought in. She was a social historian and that also brought us some connections with the social sciences.

The nineties were particularly exciting times. That's when we had a major growth and by the late nineties we were the largest American studies undergraduate program in the United States. It helped to have that core group of faculty offering a group of courses. It also helped that the faculty were, to a person (putting my own record aside), terrific teachers, very dedicated teachers who worked very hard, saw students outside the classroom, These were all people who prepared carefully, I think it was that which brought students in. Because American studies is not one of those programs that you hear about if you're in high school.

**Reti:** No.

**Cowan:** There are very few places that organize curriculum in that way.

**Reti:** "When you grow up you can study American studies"—no.

**Cowan:** They may have heard about philosophy even though they've never had a course, or even linguistics, and almost all the other standard disciplines. It was only after they got here and took an introductory course from us, or one of our courses, that they said, "This might be a nice place for me to link my interests." And so at one point we were graduating close to a hundred students a year. And again, that was very exciting. And we were, I think partly because of our appointments, building a very ethnically diverse group of students. All of that

was very satisfying. It did mean that we had to cope with what, for a long time, was the highest student-faculty ratio in the division, and one of the highest in the campus. So we were constantly struggling with how we handle this, particularly since we were having our TAs brought from other departments. And so it's a matter of working with—.

**Reti:** Because you didn't have a graduate program.

**Cowan:** We didn't have a graduate program then. That was another thing that we tried very hard in the nineties to get off the ground, as women's studies was trying to do. And to do that we realized that we didn't have enough resources ourselves, even with the growing number of faculty. I think we had maybe by the late nineties about seven faculty, plus people like Marge and Ann who were helping. But it wasn't enough to both have a very large undergraduate program and a graduate program. And so we tried to figure out a way we could form a graduate group that would involve faculty from a variety of social science, humanities, and arts programs. Complicated story about why it didn't happen. Our dean of humanities at the time was not terribly sympathetic to us. He, in fact suggested that we just become a subprogram within the history department. Our view was not that we had anything against the history department, but that we wanted to be seen as a more interdisciplinary program, and we thought that that [location in the history department] might narrow our focus unduly. It was also true that history objected to our having a separate program because they were trying to get their own Ph.D. program up and running. They'd had real difficulty

doing that and they felt that we would compete for resources with their program. So it was partly campus resource politics, among other things.

But we were trying to use a model that had been used by UC Davis, called the graduate group, where you would have a graduate program and you would have some resources to buy faculty from other departments to contribute in the core courses, and then in addition the students in the program would have a core curriculum taught by the graduate program, but then would take their courses in the other disciplines and develop a disciplinary specialty, because we thought that was probably important for the jobs, because there were very few jobs in [American studies]. So we worked very hard. We even kept trying to find terms. We ended up talking about comparative American studies, to try to emphasize the fact that we were not trying hold onto the United States as the only American—I tried to make links. I remember having meetings with the emerging Latin American/Latino studies group to see if they might join us in a kind of trans-American program. And they were at the time very interested, though, in pursuing their own programs. So it was very hard to build those bridges. Again, an issue where unless you have very strong dean's support to help you with this— So every time a new dean came in we had to argue the case for American studies again, because they said, "What's American studies?" It wasn't just the students who didn't know, so we had to kind of argue. Nevertheless, in the nineties there was a lot of interest.

Now, there was another point of frustration then, and that was that we had a turnover of faculty. The scholars of color that we would hire were very able.

They would come and then they would realize that we didn't have a graduate program. And they wanted to have that. They also, since we were trying to bring them into leadership positions, they discovered that having to chair a program like this was very difficult for them, and they were exactly the kind of scholars who were highly sought by other places. And so, we were constantly bringing people who would stay for a couple of years and then get wooed away.

We kept trying to find ways of holding them here. We thought getting a graduate program off the ground would be one way of doing that. I think that would've worked. In other cases, they often had spouses who were also academics, and so we became a very strong proponent of spousal hires. At that time the campus was very resistant to that. [Central administration] thought it was inconsistent with campus goals. Everyone ought to be hired on his or her own merits. We also believed that everyone ought to be hired on his or her own merits, but we thought that at least you might look at the spouse and figure if they were of UC quality, and so instead of going for an open search—if they met programmatic needs and if they were of high UC quality then we thought that they should be given special consideration. That was a long struggle, and we tended to lose that battle. Occasionally we would be lucky that we would find a receptive board that happened to have a position open. The target of opportunity positions occasionally provided us with that opportunity. Eric Porter and Catherine Ramirez, for example, came as a part of that kind of package, if you will.

But others would come and we couldn't find a hire for their spouse. One example that was very painful to me was a young Chicano scholar, Curtis Marez, who was an assistant professor. He had been teaching at the University of Chicago and his wife was an assistant professor who then got promoted at the University of California at San Diego. So they were having this long distance, commuting relationship. There was nothing open in San Diego for him so we were able to get him here. At least he was closer and they only had the up-and-down the state commute. He was terrific and was doing exactly what we thought we wanted American studies to do, which was that he was not just looking at issues of Chicano culture, he was particularly interested in popular culture and literary studies, but his dissertation had been on the construction of the Asian in British writing and popular culture, the Fu Manchu notions, and he was working out of a kind of more global perspective about the dynamics of imperialism. And so we thought that it was again a great fit for us. So we brought him here and we kept trying to find a way of getting his wife here, who had published a wonderful book dealing with popular literature representations of, particularly the West, under a kind of framework of imperialist and colonial studies. She was Anglo. And we just couldn't do it, and so finally he accepted a position at the University of Southern California, and then about five years after that was able to get an appointment at San Diego. So they're both very happy down there. But it was a real loss for us. And those are the kind of opportunities that we weren't able to take advantage of, and it again has to do with the campus framework. So that was a major frustration for us.

I think an important part of the American studies story here is its own increasingly national, and I would even say international, visibility. It was an important part of what we wanted to do with the program, and we took advantage of a series of happenstances that made it possible. I had been actively involved in the American Studies Association, and in 1984 I had been elected to the national council of the association, and then by the president of the association put on the executive committee. It so happens that the president was a person who I had first met when I was at the National Faculty Institute back in the mid-seventies.

**Reti:** Oh, in New Haven.

**Cowan:** So there was that kind of network. He was a very distinguished scholar. Anyway, the association was going through some real rough times. It had developed a big deficit. It was located at the University of Pennsylvania and had been somewhat colonized by the university. There were people from other departments who were trying to affect the agenda of the American Civilization program there. So [the association] had been really struggling. It had lost membership and finally a new executive director had come in. But anyway, I was asked to stand for the presidency. At that point presidents [served] two-year terms. Two people would be put up and you would compete with each other, and then two people would be put up for vice president. The vice president didn't succeed the president. Anyway, I was elected by a five-vote margin.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** (laughs) I have a newsletter that was announcing that. It was a news item. The vice president was a feminist scholar from University of Southern California, Lois Banner, who's written some wonderful books. And we were the first president and vice president who were located in California. All the other presidents, almost all, had been on the East Coast or in the Midwest. So it reflected—I think, probably the reason I was elected—it represented a shift in membership, we had more people from the West Coast and the Western United States.

**Reti:** Well of course you have a Midwestern and an East Coast connection as well.

**Cowan:** Sure, so all of that probably played in. But again, another piece of luck, you know—what can I say?

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And of course luck breeds guilt in me, in the sense that I hadn't earned my good luck. So I worked very hard as the first California president, to not disgrace the West Coast—.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** —and not to disgrace the campus, because I realized that I was representing also the University of California and representing this particular campus. It was very interesting, because the executive director was in Pennsylvania and I was in the dean's office at that time here. Most of our

interactions were by long letters but also by phone calls, three, four-hour phone calls where he was of course under siege and I was trying to figure out what to do. But there were a couple of things that I was able to do that were actually important to the association, and then also turned out to be in various ways important for this campus and our program and the campus as a whole.

We were only meeting every other year as an association, biannual conferences. My view was that that was not enough to maintain and build a real national, professional identity. And so I pushed very hard and we moved to annual meetings, in the face of resistance, some people on our national council saying, "Oh, but nobody wants to come to a meeting every year. They've got all these other professional associations like the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association, and so they're not going to spend the time and energy to come." And I said, "No, if you build it that's one thing they will do." We revised the constitution, which was a rather moribund constitution, for the association to make it possible for more efficient operation. One of the things I did was to appoint a series of task forces, including a task force on minority affairs, because it was quite clear that we were still a very white organization, and it was clear that unless we did something about that we were going to become an irrelevant organization. We moved the association, liberated it from the University of Pennsylvania negotiated a deal with them, and moved it to Washington, D.C., using a consortium of [institutions] there. And moving it to D.C. was both a big, important substantive move, because there was a series of

organizations there that supported us, including the Smithsonian, but also it was symbolic.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And we figured that if we were closer to that action, in both senses, it would make an important difference. I, then, stayed actively involved in national association efforts, I was the association's delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies for five years, so was representing the association and looking at the American Studies Association in conjunction with all these powerhouses of disciplinary associations. I was a delegate to several international conferences, including one in Japan, one in Portugal, even went to Mauritius once, a small island east of Africa. It was a fascinating history, an old Dutch colony that then the French had taken over, and then the English, and then it had been liberated, and a lot of Indian immigrants were living there and been very influenced by Gandhi. So another little case study, comparative studies.

One of the things I did during and after my presidency was to write a series of papers on American studies as a movement, talk about its past, its complexities and its future. One of the major things I initiated, of which I have perhaps the greatest satisfaction, was to initiate the giving of a presidential address, that is the president would be actually give the address to the association. Before that there was always a keynote speech at the convention, but it was done by [scholars other than the president]. I thought that it was a place where the president of the association could make a statement about the nature of the field

and its challenges. And so I gave the first presidential address. The title was, perhaps revealing given my interest, "Boundary as Center, the Invention of an American Studies Culture." I was interested in the way in which American [ethnic] studies [like the early nation itself], was a construction that was on the margins and had to both struggle with its marginality, as was women's studies and American studies, and at the same time to declare as Gloria Anzaldua was to declare a few years later, that being on the margins was also a center point; it was also a meeting point. I used the term *crossroads* as a kind of metaphor for dealing with that. So it was a metaphor that was in the air, if you will, and I tried to capture it.

The other thing I was rather pleased about is that—we had never had a woman president. There had been two times where women had been up for presidency; in fact I defeated a woman for president. We'd had vice presidents, but they had been—. So I said, "You know, the nominating committee has to nominate two women as president." And it happened. So my vice president became president. We developed a succession model, president-elect and president. And since then about half of all the presidents have been women. The other major challenge was to bring scholars of color into the leadership roles. It took a few years, but we then started having a considerable number of scholars of color serving as president. In fact, the newest president-elect is Curtis Marez, who we had hired [at UCSC], who went on [to] USC—which had developed a program they called American studies and ethnicity, as a graduate program with an undergraduate

component. He became editor of the association's periodical, *The American Quarterly*.

**Reti:** Is this a journal?

**Cowan:** It's a journal, a quarterly journal. And so he became editor of it, and so now he's becoming president. So we have generated that. I certainly spent a lot of time working for the association and for the American studies movement, as a whole. As I say I gave lots of speeches, I wrote about and published about that. About ten years ago the association decided to publish an encyclopedia of American studies, a three-volume which is now online and so it's an e-publication.<sup>37</sup>

**Reti:** Yes, I came across your piece in there.

**Cowan:** I wrote the overview history of American studies. So I was constantly looking and meditating about the complexities of the movement. I was doing that, but I was aware that I was from this campus, and that if I could do good for the association I could also help achieve some visibility for this campus. And so one thing I did was that I encouraged faculty and graduate students from this campus to join the association and to give papers at the annual conferences. And gradually during the eighties, but particularly during the nineties and more recently, we had faculty from not only American studies but from literature, history of consciousness, sociology, politics, film and digital media, who started

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<sup>37</sup> "American Studies: An Overview" by Michael Cowan. In *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, edited by Miles Orvell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

giving papers. Angela Davis, for example, at one point got very interested in the association because she found a group of scholars from around the country who were interested in prison issues. It was a location. A national society for prison studies is not going to do it, but American studies—it's very capacious, its miscellaneousness gave it a useful home for this. And it became the major national professional association for history of consciousness graduate students, and we have had quite a few graduate students from this program as well as from the literature graduate program who have gone on to be regular participants in the association's work, members of the national council, who've written and become identified with American studies. Many universities and colleges in the United States did not have American studies programs, but scholars in English departments and history departments and women's studies departments and elsewhere found the national association to be a congenial home for them to meet scholars from elsewhere, so that we were able to take advantage of that. That's one thing that I can't take full credit for, but our having something here gave us a way of making a linkage with the national association and I think that was, for me, an important achievement.

**Reti:** Absolutely.

**Cowan:** That's something that will continue, I think. It was also helpful that many of our faculty were achieving—not just who were American studies faculty, that is had appointments in American studies—but other faculty on campus were achieving national [recognition] for their own scholarship. John Dizikes, for example.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** His book on opera in America won the National Book Critic's Circle Award. Forrest Robinson was getting prizes, Dana Frank's work on labor and women, a wonderful book *Buy American*; Judy Yung's book on Asian-American women was very important, and of course we had other faculty on campus who were then identified with [American studies]. Again, we tried to get a graduate program using this momentum; it never quite worked and I think that that was—it had the frustrations of the turnover in faculty. But hope sprang eternal.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** John Dizikes retired in 2000 and Ann Lane indicated that she was going to be retiring shortly; Judy Yung said she was planning to retire too. The dean of humanities at the time, Wlad Godzich, decided that he wanted to support an American studies program that would be a kind of new wave program. He said, "You're never going to have much respectability if you don't have a graduate program that has a strong research component, and then have faculty working together on issues so that it's not just individual faculty. We had Dizikes' position vacant, so he used that and a target of opportunity possibility, first to hire Patricia Rose in 2003, a very up-and-coming African American scholar who had written a book on rap. She was at Brown University, a very dynamic, charismatic person, and he brought her out to chair the program. And then she in turn hired George Lipsitz, who was at San Diego and was a major scholar in the field of American studies, and doing very important work in the intersection of

political studies and ethnic studies in particular. And Wlad's view was that if you bring a couple of highly visible scholars, added to who is here, you're really going to be able to mount a successful graduate program. Unfortunately, George had a wife who was an associate professor at San Diego, who was going to take a leave for two years—commuted for a year and then she took a leave—and George had been assured that the dean would find a position for her. Well, it turned out that we couldn't get a spousal hire—(laughs) we were still stuck in that problem. American studies finally decided that we would be happy to make a home for her in our program. There is always the risk of having two members of a couple—

**Reti:** In the same department.

**Cowan:** In the same department, but linguistics had pulled it off very successfully. They had a couple of those arrangements, and we felt that we could make it work. And in any case, we had a higher goal, which was to make sure that we retain George. Finally, reluctantly, the campus gave us a position but it was too late. By the time we were able to recommend her for an appointment, she and George had decided to accept appointments at Santa Barbara, which didn't have the same qualms about making a spousal hire as we did. We were the only campus, in fact, that seemed to resist that.

Once he left, then Tricia felt that there was no way of making the [graduate] program work, and so she went back to Brown. Then Judy Yung retired at the same time. By coincidence, I had then decided that, with the program in great

hands, if you will, of the second generation, I didn't have to spend my time fighting for the program anymore. And so I had applied for and had been accepted to be a study center director in the Education Abroad Program. I had already made that commitment. Just as I was going out the door, George's wife didn't get a position here and left. And then Judy left and Tricia left. Suddenly the program was virtually without senior leadership.

**Reti:** And Dana Frank had moved to history.

**Cowan:** Dana had moved to history. Her interest had shifted and you know she's now working in Honduras and other things. There are always complex personal reasons there too, but we figure that those kinds of things happen. After all, Forrest and I and John had moved to American studies, not because—you know, for the same reason. If you have a critical cluster of faculty you can make that work. Anyway, we didn't have that good fortune. So we were in effect in receivership. We had a faculty member from another department who was interim chair for three years. I was watching all this from London, feeling that there was not much that I could do. It was a kind of perfect storm. Loss of senior faculty; there were issues around morale. Basically you had [mainly] junior faculty trying to keep the program alive; we still had lots of student interest. The program had gotten very favorably reviewed, I think in a 2005-2006 external review.

And then the campus budget crisis started hitting a couple of years ago, and positions started getting lost, and the positions that we had lost through

resignations didn't get returned. We got a position back to replace Judy's position and then we were able to get a target of opportunity for another young scholar doing Native American studies, but these were coming in at the junior level, and it wasn't enough to really replace the [losses]. And so during the budget cuts of the last couple of years this was seen as an expendable program.

I think the other that happened was that the remaining faculty got disheartened, got demoralized. It was also the case that a number of them really had a large vision of American studies not at the center of their interest. They were more interested in ethnic studies as ethnic studies. And so they in turn didn't resist when it looked like other options might begin to emerge on campus. And so one of the faculty members moved to Latin American/Latino studies and it left an even smaller group. So finally there was a feeling that since the campus wasn't going to put more resources back in it would be better just to suspend the program. Technically it's still a suspended program. The department has been dissolved but the program at least exists in nascent form and perhaps it might emerge as a subprogram within some other department like history, but I'm not counting on that.

So anyway, a lot of things happened together. It's sad. But I must say it was a good ride. It's a kind of case study in institutions and the complexities. I think that among the other things it's a case study in that for a small interdisciplinary program to succeed it needs to have a much larger penumbra of sympathetic and supportive faculty—women's studies, feminist studies being a good example of that, a very small department, but with lots of enthusiastic support. You need the

student interest, which we had, but you need a committed group of faculty. We ran the program with a very small group of faculty initially. But you need them all committed to a kind of common enterprise, and I think that had begun to fade. You need a supportive dean who's going to advocate on your part, and in the face of all the other competition for resources that the dean faces be willing to at least maintain your claim. And you need a friendly administration [campuswide] that believes that having your program is good for the image and reputation of the school as a whole. I think the present administration, for understandable reasons, feels that it can get more symbolic advantage out of other kinds of programs, like an ethnic studies program. And then of course you need good economic times; you need a basis to make it work. So all of those things I think have to come together, particularly for a small interdisciplinary program.

I think the other piece of it is that the notion of organizing something around this particular nation-state, America, is particularly problematic at this time, both because of the notion of global studies and other forms of subnational and transnational identification being more important. There is a kind of sense that it's a rubric whose time has past. Now, it's not true nationally and internationally, partly because they understand the somewhat arbitrary nature of using a term like *America* (laughs). It's seen as a rather capacious home for people who have all sorts of interests, including subnational and transnational interests, whereas here you need a variety of people to be supportive to that as a notion of organizing.

**Reti:** Well, why do you think that difference exists between how American studies is thought of here and at other institutions?

**Cowan:** I think the increasing examination of global issues around imperialism, which have been with us for some time, has caused a belief that you don't want to focus your attention on a nation which has—.

**Reti:** I understand that. I mean, certainly in a post-9/11 environment nationalism is problematic, but I'm more thinking about the difference in why other American studies programs on other campuses are not experiencing that issue.

**Cowan:** I think they have some of these things I've talked about.

**Reti:** I see.

**Cowan:** Those things are working for them. [But small interdisciplinary programs face special challenges.] A small program—think if you have one faculty member out of a faculty member of five [in a department] who leaves, and suddenly you've lost twenty percent of your faculty. In a department of forty people, you lose a faculty member or even two and you haven't lost the same proportion. You may still have some gaps that you're not going to fill. You have a small department like philosophy that has its own problems, but you would never dream of getting rid of a philosophy department—

**Reti:** Right, right.

**Cowan:** —at a campus because it's seen as a real program rather than an interdisciplinary program or a marginal program. So I think a lot of these factors—I wouldn't—it's no one particular factor that could explain either our rise or our fall, it's just that a series of things came together. Leadership, I think, makes an important part, is an important part of that story, but it's not the only part of the story.

**Reti:** Okay. Is this a good breaking point?

**Cowan:** It might be. I'll say some things about ethnic studies next time because I think it's an important part of the campus theme.

### **UC Santa Cruz in the 1990s**

**Reti:** So, today is Wednesday June 27, 2012, this is Irene Reti. I'm here for my seventh interview with Michael Cowan. And so Michael, today we're going to start by talking about the 1990s at UCSC.

**Cowan:** Well, it's quite an interesting decade. Maybe every decade here has been interesting in its own way. But in thinking about the 1990s and then about aspects of my involvement there, I think that the 1990s was the decade where the campus finally matured, or was seen to mature. That was, by the way, a term used by the 1995 WASC accreditation committee, which offered an unusually detailed and thoughtful assessment of the campus, praised it for many of its traditional aspects, and at the same time pointed to a number of challenges the

campus faced—not uniquely among UC campuses, but certain particular dimensions of the campus.

I think the decade got off to a pretty rocky start. There was a combination of significant budget cuts right at the start of the nineties, and then an abrupt and rather contentious turnover in the chancellor's office, with the departure of both Robert Stevens and then his acting academic vice chancellor, Ronnie Gruhn. And his leaving supposedly caused President David Gardner to remark that the campus once again seemed ungovernable, and that was part of the standard view that the Office of the President would like to trot out periodically when something happened that caused them a little more work, like trying to find a new chancellor.

I think, though, that the decade ended on a pretty high note for the campus in terms of the new programs that had been inaugurated during the nineties, the various buildings underway, the enrollment growth of the campus, increasing research visibility nationally and internationally, and I think general campus morale, despite a series of ongoing limitations. The campus faced uncertainties about the future, particularly about funding, the ongoing problematic town-gown relationships which waxed hot and cold as they always have, and the inevitable internal quarrels that the campus faced.

But it seemed to me it was a decade that was generally an upbeat decade, despite all the problems. There're a couple of themes that occur to me that characterize the decade. I can't possibly mention all of them. But it seems to me that the

departure of Robert Stevens was followed by two successive chancellors who were very strong and stayed around long enough to offer some stability, and in each case to leave what I think of as a lasting and positive legacy in the campus. The campus settled into a physical development cycle that was important to help making the campus more connected—infilling, clustering of structures and so forth—and at the same time was demonstrating the campus's increasing environmentalist sensibility in terms of reserves, in terms of the decisions that essentially preserved the Great Meadow, the controversy over the placing of the music building, of whether Meyer Drive was to be extended—all those were part of this decade. And those issues I think were pretty much resolved during the nineties.

I think the rebuilding of downtown Santa Cruz after the earthquake in 1989 turned out to be more significant for the campus than perhaps has been fully discussed, and I'm not the one to discuss it, but among the things that it did was to highlight the university's more stabilizing presence in the economic recovery in terms of money that people had to shop with, in terms of housing and lots of other things. But I think, at the same time, the rebuilding of the downtown made it a much more vibrant and attractive place, particularly for UCSC students. That probably added to the campus's attractiveness. And of course the students themselves particularly were contributing to the liveliness of the downtown. And although there were ongoing town-gown tensions—that's a constant theme—it seems to me that it was a point where there was not only a certain

amount of collaboration, but a certain amount of mutual benefit that came out of what was a very traumatic period.

There were ongoing debates during the nineties about the roles of the college, about the grading system and the Narrative Evaluation System, about general education, about all those kind of long-standing issues. But I think that many of those debates, at least as I look at it, begin to seem rather routinized. I don't think that the way those debates took shape in the nineties was as polarizing, and didn't for the most part arouse the same degree of passion, that they had in previous decades. There was almost a kind of ritualistic aspect of continuing to raise that.

**Reti:** Why do you think that is?

**Cowan:** I think it's partly that the campus was tired of the debates.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** One of the major elements was that the budgetary crisis in the nineties throughout the UC system had led to the establishment of the VERIP program—I think it was 1991, it was kind of over three years, between 1991 and 1994—in the face of that, of course, the VERIP, the early retirement program, a large number of faculty and staff, not only here but elsewhere, retired. That meant that by when the dust had settled on the VERIP in the mid-1990s, over half of the campus faculty had arrived after the reorganization of the campus in 1979. Therefore they weren't a part of the often bitter debates and hard feelings that

were left in the wake of reorganization. And so many of the issues that had been fueled in those founding years simply didn't resonate with many of the new faculty.

**Reti:** Yes, that makes sense.

**Cowan:** And there were other factors other than that: the Narrative Evaluation System, which kept getting watered down and watered down as somewhere—I don't have the dates—the grade option was universalized for all courses on campus, and then finally in the last decade grades became mandatory in all courses.

So there was a gradual evolution, but those latter changes simply didn't spark the same degree of contention that they had with proposals of that earlier. I think that turnover of people who had founding memories of pre-reorganization was a very important part.

One of the continuities—and I'm struck by the continuities of the 1990s with the 1980s—were continuities in the campus's aspirations. In the mid-1980s as the campus started growing again, the new academic plan of the mid-eighties and the long range development plan began to use 15,000 as its ultimate growth figure hoped to be reached by some time around 2005. And the fifteen percent figure for graduate and professional students was [raised] there, but that was quite a difference from the 27,000 figure and about forty percent of the student body being graduate and professional students. But those were figures that maintained themselves into the 1990s, and you could see them in virtually all the

planning documents of the 1990s, and even the so-called Millennium Report at the end of the 1990s.

Now, the graduate growth aspiration was of course a particularly important strong part of that. The campus moved into saying we're a campus that cares a great deal about undergraduate education but we also care about graduate growth, and we aspire to the fifteen percent which we think we need for healthy balance. There was a gradual change in the language, and now typically what we say is that we are a major research university that pays particular attention to undergraduate education, so there's been a slight shifting of the way in which those dual aspirations are expressed in our literature.

The major barrier, of course, to the fifteen percent growth has been funding, and that's been noted over and over. Mounting graduate and professional programs is more expensive in terms of bringing in faculty but also in providing graduate student support.

I think another theme of the nineties was an increasing discussion about how to reduce the campus's dependency on state funding, which was steadily declining, and as the WASC review in 1995 pointed out, this campus was more dependent on state funding than any other UC campus, had a higher proportion of its budget coming from state funds than did any other campus. And that was true even of Riverside. So external fundraising became an increasingly important concern in the 1990s and related to that, alumni relations a particularly important concern, external relations and publicity in general. Those were all building in

the 1980s, but in the 1990s there was really a much more concerted attempt to organize the campus's efforts in that area.

I think the 1990s were also characterized, as one would not be surprised to know about, by debates about how to use the faculty positions and other resources that were released when faculty and staff took retirements, and also then how to best invest new faculty positions coming to the campus in the latter part of the decade. Those battles always can be heated battles, but as long as there's a certain amount of growth, those battles are somewhat less heated than when you have a steady state and one unit is going to gain only at the expense of some other unit. As long as everybody has a piece, a small piece of growing pie, they're more distracted by how they're going to use that piece than they are about competing with others. But the competition is [always] there.

Another dimension of the 1990s is related to growing unionization, again a story that I hope somebody will be able to tell. I certainly don't have the expertise. It's not that many unions had started in the 1990s; they were already in place in the 1980s, including a faculty association at this campus. But it is particularly in terms of graduate students and teaching assistants. And that added a new complexity in terms of the negotiations that the campus and the senate were constantly involved in in the 1990s.

And then there was always the press for greater campus diversity in faculty, students, staff, courses. That pressure was constant and in some ways even continued to mount, became more persistent during that period. It was, I think,

fueled not only by student activism but by concerned faculty and administrators. At the same time the campus and the UC system as a whole in pursuing affirmative actions goals had to deal with countercurrents that—in fact, both the Regents and the state as a whole, and SP1 and 2 and then Proposition 209. I can talk about that maybe in a minute.

Well, during this very interesting decade what was I doing?

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** I guess, as I was talking about last time, a lot of my focus was on chairing the American studies board, which had become a board, like women's studies, and then like the other campus boards had become a department in the 1990s. I was cheerleading its growth and trying, quite unsuccessfully finally, to get a graduate program going, trying to both take advantage of the campus's ambitions to grow its graduate programs, but having to negotiate all the internal battles around that. I was also staying actively involved in the Academic Senate particularly in the first part of the nineties. That included five years a member of the Committee on Planning and Budget between 1991 and 1996. By the way, that five years happened to coincide with Karl Pister's time here as chancellor. And then I spent two years as chair of the Santa Cruz Division of the Academic Senate, that was 1994 to 1996. Interesting enough, that was my second stint as chair of the senate. I guess I have been the only faculty member ever to have undergo that gauntlet twice—.

**Reti:** (laughs). Did you get a merit badge for that?

**Cowan:** Oh yes, several merit badges (laughs). And I was involved in the senate while the campus was wrestling with all the issues that I've just discovered. So it was an interesting time to be involved there.

And I guess the other major field I was involved in in that period, less inside of the senate formally than in a variety of other committees and task forces, was my involvement in a variety of initiatives to further the campus multicultural efforts, its diversification efforts. Now, the Academic Senate in the 1990s had I think pretty much settled into the routines of a senate. The Committee on Planning and Budget, on which I was participating, was one of the really powerful committees. It had no plenary authority but its consulting power had been well established in its relations with administration. It was, I think, one of the two most time-consuming committees of the Academic Senate, the other major time-consuming committee was the Committee on Academic Personnel, which was reviewing all campus hiring, promotions. But our committee met once a week for three, three and a half hours every week. There were also numerous subcommittee meetings, joint committee meetings, ex officio service of various representatives from that committee on various administrative committees. And in addition, of course, we were spending a great deal of time reading piles of documents related to the committee's work, and also drafting the reports for the committee's consideration. We were spending ten, perhaps as many as fifteen hours a week on the work of that committee. We had some course relief but it was something close to a full-time job. (laughs) But I enjoyed working on CPB, given my interests. I found it a way of looking at the campus as a whole, to stay in touch

with all of these aspects of campus growth and the issues involved, and I found it a pleasure to interact with faculty and administrators from all parts of the campus. For me, it was just an ongoing educational experience. Among the things that that committee was involved in were reviewing all proposed new programs for their resource and structural implications. We had a major responsibility for reviewing the budgetary and structural implications of proposed new programs, new academic programs. If they were undergraduate, it had to be approved by CEP, the Committee on Educational Policy, graduate programs by the Graduate Council. But we got in because then we also had to look at the implications for funding the programs, what it meant in terms of faculty positions, space, a whole range of things like that. We also reviewed, along with the Graduate Council and the Committee on Educational Policy, the reports of departments by external review committees, and also commented on any of their recommendations having to do with funding and the like. We consulted on the general campus budget, which included not only the academic budget, but all other aspects of the budget, and the capital development program and so forth. We had a representative on the Space Committee—

**Reti:** That's a huge charge.

**Cowan:** So, we were again very busy. We were consulted on organization issues, the structuring of various units, and we offered advice on lots of other matters. We had our fingers in probably more pots than I care to mention.

**Reti:** (laughs.)

**Cowan:** And we also worked to persuade the administration to mount various sorts of studies, statistical analyses, surveys and other things that we felt were important as a basis for making a decision. One of the most consistent aspects of our work was the committee's call for a comprehensive and transparent campus budget, and for a transparent and efficient decision-making process.

By the way, during this period there were two very active, well-organized chairs, Todd Wipke and Paul Lubeck. And I was reminded again of how important it is to have a chair who is well organized, who is assertive, who is not afraid to confront the administration on issues but also to work closely with the administration. I think they were both very effective chairs, although each had quite different styles.

We interacted with members of a lot of administrative offices, for example, Planning and Analysis and the Chancellor's Office, but our major point of interaction was the executive vice chancellor, who was Michael Tanner during that period, who had been appointed by Karl Pister. Michael had been dean of the Natural Science Division and had been very active in the Academic Senate, I think chaired the Committee on Educational Policy and many other things, but he became vice chancellor. And Karl moved his title from academic vice chancellor to executive vice chancellor. This was something that had already happened on many UC campuses. Later, about a decade later, they would add provost to the title.

**Reti:** Right, and you'd end up with CP/EVC [*Campus Provost/Executive Vice Chancellor*].

**Cowan:** So you had a longer title.

**Reti:** Very awkward title.

**Cowan:** You just keep adding titles. It's like adding badges to generals' uniforms.

**Reti:** (laughs.)

**Cowan:** Michael—he would meet with us for an hour or so at each of our meetings, and then we would have our own session after he had left. Michael had wide-ranging interests. He was fluent in French; he cared about the arts, particularly music; he really considered himself an advocate of the liberal arts. I think of him as a very honest and fair person. He worked very hard. He was very organized. I remember how he used to, in our conversations with him, pull out a small sort of two-by-four card, just a very small card, and he would, in very small handwriting, write notes to himself to keep in mind. So he very much cared about that. He, I think, had a large philosophy of general education and about the role of the university. He also was highly detailed; he loved to immerse himself in the details and documents, and he could quote statistics and the like. If, from my viewpoint Michael had a limitation, it was that in terms of trying to deal with this complex and often contentious issue of how the campus used and distributed its resources, he kept searching for the perfect formula. Now, I very much appreciated his desire to have a multifaceted approach to budget

decisions. I was among many people that had been arguing for years that that is what you needed, a decision made on hard data and nuanced analysis. Michael did a lot of that analysis with Dick Jensen, his assistant. He worked very hard to refine, improve, elaborate the data that was accumulated to provide the basis for decisions about who got their FTEs, how budgets got allocated to divisions and other units, and so forth. But I think Michael kept searching for the perfect formula. He was reluctant to make a decision until he had everything in place. Sometimes the times called for making some decisions and using one's own judgment, and then taking responsibility for making one judgment that had to do with one's own sense of what made sense. I think Planning and Budget felt often that decisions got delayed unnecessarily because Michael kept searching for the right formula that would cause everything to fall in place in terms of the decision.

In any case, I had a great deal of respect for Michael, though I know he was in many areas controversial. Because Karl Pister was an engineer and Michael was in computer sciences, there were segments of the campus who felt that the campus was going too much in that direction. And add to that the fact that there was a push again to get to the engineering school going. In fact, it got through the campus, got all the way up through the bureaucracy, and then Karl Pister decided that, given the state budget and the cost of doing that at this campus, he would hold it back. So it wasn't until M.R.C. Greenwood came along that all that preparatory work then finally came to fruition. And I think Planning and Budget on the whole was—I certainly was—supportive of an engineering school and

building that as an important professional component of the campus, long delayed, of course.

**Reti:** Certainly.

**Cowan:** But there were quite a few voices on campus that were concerned about what that would do to the campus balance, and also the concern that start-up funding would be required for the engineering school, that if the Office of the President didn't give it, would have to come out of the hide of other parts of the campus. So that was a kind of characteristic controversy. Nevertheless, I thought, again, Michael did very well.

### **Chair of the Academic Senate (Part II)**

That leads me, perhaps, to my [second] two years as chair of the Academic Senate. I'm not sure that I can say anything particularly insightful about those two years. A lot of the work of the chair of the Academic Senate is pretty routine. It's preparing agendas for meetings, serving on a variety of administrative committees and ex officio committees, dealing with all sorts of minor diplomatic issues. Again, it was one of those things which keep you in touch with what's going on in the campus as a whole. In the eighties, the senate had developed what came, I think, to be called the executive committee. It was essentially a committee of the chairs of the senate committees that would meet occasionally, discuss issues. I was certainly interested in making sure that the work of committees that had overlapping portfolios was coordinated. So I spent some of my time trying, as I think my predecessors had, to coordinate those kind of

activities, to encourage intercommittee task forces and so forth to work on a variety of issues. Almost all the big campus fights came through the door at one point or another of the Academic Senate, often in individual committees, but then inevitably if they were big enough came to the floor of the senate during our quarterly meetings. I actually think we scheduled five meetings a year and rarely had five meetings. We didn't have a meeting if there didn't seem to be much business.

There were a couple of (pause) complications that made my time as chair, well, interesting.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** One was the faculty association which had been formed [in the 1970s, one of the few in] the UC system, when faculty got a right to unionize. It was not called a union, but it had some of those elements to it. The Office of the President had to negotiate with the faculty association over terms of conditions of employment. If you had an active head of the local association, that could give that association a powerful wedge. We happened to have a very activist chair of the association during the 1990s.

**Reti:** And that was?

**Cowan:** I think it was Robert Meister. Now, it was an interesting position because the senate had its own kind of stake in many of the issues of the association. The association felt that the senate, though, was often toothless when

it came to negotiating salaries and so forth, and so focused its attention particularly on that. But there were a couple of times where leaders of the association were also members and even chairs of major senate committees, and there was always a question of whether there was a conflict of interest in playing those two roles—an issue that's never been fully resolved.

One of the controversies that emerged when I was chair had to do with some decisions Michael Tanner had made in his capacity as executive vice chancellor in a faculty discipline case . . . [*Material excised for reasons of privacy—editor.*] And that issue constantly rolled through the senate offices. I can't even remember all the details now except that it did consume a great deal of time. And Karl Pister was faced with coming to the defense of Michael Tanner, who was then also being accused of a variety of other malfeasances. And there was a press among a small group of faculty to have Michael Tanner removed as the executive vice chancellor, which Karl Pister wouldn't do because he thought very highly of Michael. But that was constantly roiling the waters during this period of time.

Added to that was that there were a couple of faculty, particularly one whose name I will not mention, who was what I would call a parliamentary troublemaker. It was a person who had an intimate knowledge of Robert's Rules of Order and the Academic Senate's bylaws and regulations, and who made a positive nuisance of himself in Academic Senate meetings, constantly standing up to protest the way he was represented in the minutes of the senate, rising for points of order constantly, dominating discussion. He had something to say about every issue and was speaking for a great deal of time. The senate at that

time didn't have any rules about protocols, limits to the amount of time people could—I was faced, as senate chair, as were predecessors and successors, with trying to be evenhanded in whom I called upon, not preventing anyone from speaking, but trying to be evenhanded. This individual, abetted by a small number of others, was constantly essentially making the senate meetings difficult to run, and a lot of faculty started staying away from them. The faculty, as I have said before, didn't usually come to those meetings except for major issues, [and] although it was a floor show of sorts—

**Reti:** (laughs.)

**Cowan:** —it was not the way to get things done. Affirmative action debates were taking place during that time; there were a number of other issues that were on the table that deserved serious discussion—issues around the budget, issues around the engineering school, lots of things. And it was very difficult to often move various pieces of legislation through that. I resorted at several points to forming the senate into a committee of the whole. When you did that, you were exempted from some of the usual Robert's Rules of Order and it meant that you could establish your own ground rules for who could talk and how long. So I did that at several points, simply to try to get a lot of [the debate] out before then we came back to our formal business and tried to get something done. I'm not sure that I handled all of that very skillfully, but the problems we had in doing that led one of my successors, George Blumenthal, who was an excellent parliamentarian himself, when he became chair of the senate in 1999-2000, somewhere around there, to put into place a series of understandings about what

should be included in the minutes and what not, recording of minutes of speakers so that one wasn't relying on claims about what had been said or not said, a whole set of protocols that made it easier to conduct business.

But there was a lot of that kind of process-oriented stuff, which I hated (laughs) during the time. That same group of faculty, I remember, was also constantly creating problems for our senate office staff. Michael Thompson, director of admissions, had been brought by Karl Pister. He happened to be the husband of the woman that I decided to hire as the executive assistant in the Academic Senate office. And she was highly qualified. She had been doing that work at Irvine, where Michael had come from. But I was accused of nepotism, of not going through due processes. And the executive assistant was constantly being harassed by some of these faculty. And finally, I think shortly after I left the chair, resigned herself. I think it was one of the things that led to the director of admissions' departure to, I think, back to Irvine.

I would come away from senate meetings exhausted. Fortunately, again, there were only a few general meetings and the major work of the senate, as has always been the case, was being done in individual committees and I think a lot of [good] things happened [in the committees] during that time.

The other thing I did as chair of the senate was to serve ex officio on a variety of other campus bodies, and that was a lot of fun. I got involved, for example, in the revision of the campus physical plan that resulted in the so-called Bender Report, which essentially stopped the Meyer Drive extension, agreed that the campus

would be built up in the campus [core]. It was essentially a plan which had continuity with the 1980 versions, but was solidified and focused on what the campus would actually look like at fifteen thousand students. So it was a very important document. I was an ex officio member of the Santa Cruz Foundation board, the campus foundation board for the two years, and it was very interesting to see that at work. One of the issues confronting the foundation—and this was pointed out in the WASC review also—was that it had a lot of members who cared a lot about the campus, but themselves didn't feel that they had much responsibility for raising funds. Now Karl Pister was very interested in raising funds and so he took an active role in that, and I think he was, as was M.R.C. then later, an important figure in getting that foundation to think of its role as not just a friend of the campus, but as really playing a major role, including their own contributions to fundraising.

One of my most interesting tasks was to serve as liaison with the Alumni Association board. The Alumni Association was in a similar position of having representatives. They were chosen basically out of the colleges; there were a few at large members, but basically representatives from each of the colleges. It was in the process of reorganizing itself during the nineties, but on the whole it didn't see itself as having a major development and fundraising activity. So, I was beginning to figure out how [the Senate] could play a role in that. The association was beginning to be more active in recruiting students, but not yet very much in fundraising. Its initial fundraising interests were in the colleges and in providing scholarships in particular and awards for college service and the like. And so a

lot of its attention, to the extent it was fundraising, was in that direction. But it had not really revved up its own activities, or it was in the process of doing that. So it was very interesting to watch that transition.

One of the things I did was to promote a meeting between the Alumni Association board and the chairs of major senate committees and the deans. One of the things I realized was that the alumni had not been kept up to date, except through very circumscribed channels, with what was going on on campus. The Alumni Association consisted of loyalists who cared a great deal about the colleges, about the Narrative Evaluation System, about undergraduate teaching, who were very disturbed that the campus seemed to be moving in directions that were antithetical, not sympathetic to their concerns. And I thought that the Alumni Association could profit by, and had the right to interact with faculty and administrators who were involved in making that decision, not just to talk to the chancellor or the EVC, or to have the campus's work channeled through the staff and the administrators of the University Relations office, but to talk directly [to the faculty and deans]. So, I arranged with the head of the association to have a meeting which then I think became a regular meeting where the councilors on the association board and major faculty and administrators could talk face to face, where the alumni could express their concern and where faculty could, and administrators could—particularly faculty, could express what they were doing. The goal was to try to make them aware that there was still strong commitment to undergraduate education, that although the colleges had been transformed there was still a great deal of concern with making the colleges do important

work that benefited the students, and to take the alumni's own views seriously. So it was one of the things that I'm pleased about.

**Reti:** So you felt that the outcome was positive dialogue?

**Cowan:** Yes, it started a dialogue which had really not taken place. The alumni had been basically talking to the old guard in the colleges, and not to many of the newer faculty who had come. They didn't even know the newer faculty because they hadn't been here when they had been students.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** So it was a matter of both sides keeping updated. At the same time, it was important for faculty to hear their concerns, and to take them seriously and recognize that the alumni are an absolutely critical part of the support, and if they don't understand what's going on, they're not going to be actively involved.

The other thing I argued with the Alumni Association, and with only more mixed success, at least at that time, was that the alumni should be concerned with more hooks for their alumni to get them involved with the campus than the colleges. Colleges—very important, but students' participation in student organizations, in majors, in sports, in lots of other activities were also things that some alumni cared about. And the issue was whether they were being involved. I remember the alumni magazine, for example, when it would, in its section recounting alumni activities, would put in parentheses the alumni's college affiliation, but not her or his major.

**Reti:** Yes, so it was all organized around the colleges.

**Cowan:** That was not a bad point of organization, but to make it the only point of organization seemed to be a mistake. So I tried to encourage the association to think more broadly about the interests of its alumni. And I think over a period, the last decade or so, that has slowly taken hold, although it's a slow process.

I, by the way, thought a great deal of Karl Pister. An immensely fair, thoughtful, caring person, wonderful interactive skills; he cared immensely about diversity—his initiatives in terms of outreach, concerns about working with K-12, his initiative to establish a leadership opportunity scholarship for students transferring from community colleges—many things he did, he put his actions where his mouth was on that. And I think that on the whole, despite the various controversies he had to deal with, he really played a very positive role and left the campus in very good shape for his successor. So I'm very grateful to him.

I guess the final thing to say about my involvement with the senate during the nineties was that in 1998 at a meeting of the Academic Senate it was suddenly announced that I was the recipient of the first Dean E. McHenry Award for service to the senate. It was a complete surprise. I was almost speechless when John Isbister announced the award. I think he was chairing the Committee on Committees, and joked about how I seemed to be uncharacteristically speechless.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** And I still am not sure why. There were a number of other wonderful people who had been actively involved in the senate over the years. But it was a pleasure to receive it, a bit of irony since it was named for a chancellor with whom I had had my own disagreements over the years, but whom I respected as a very dedicated and forceful presence in the campus's history.

### **Diversity and Ethnic Studies**

Maybe I can turn to issues around diversity, ethnic studies, and so forth.

**Reti:** Sure.

**Cowan:** Certainly one of the major, ongoing issues at Santa Cruz ever since its founding, certainly since the student protests of the late sixties, has been the issue of how the campus can become a more humanly diverse place. There actually is a series of interrelated but distinct issues, I think, that are involved in diversity. One had to do with curricular issues, not only how you make the curriculum more diverse, how more people of the campus can participate in forwarding that curricular diversity. Then there is of course the whole issue of how that diversity is organized, should it be a major, a department, and so forth. And then there were what I'd call campus constituency issues, that is, how can the campus diversify its membership at all levels, particularly attracting large numbers of students and faculty from non-European backgrounds, how it can provide the support for them that it needed?

I think it's important to stress that the issues of diversity and minority status, of course, were not merely issues of race and ethnicity. Issues of gender have been present from the outset at the campus and remain live issues, but also issues of sexual orientation and identity, issues of disability, [social] class, age, of veteran status—a whole series of other issues. But the hottest of all those issues has remained ethnic-racial diversity.

I think the third issue that is perhaps not as marked as it should be, and of course it reflects my own interest in symbolism, are the issues of language and symbolism. For example, who gets counted as ethnic, or as minority? To what extent is the language of race productive as distinct, say from the language of ethnicity? Think about the constant evolution of terms for describing peoples in various categories—minority, students or people of color, underrepresented. The language is constantly—

**Reti:** *Third world*, that's a term we've used a lot in these interviews.

**Cowan:** *Third world*. The language itself is constantly changing, and these are, of course, not abstract questions, because the language people use reflects and affects the way the way they think and the way that they act, so that racial and ethnic labels are important, both as tools for discrimination and oppression, but also as organizing tools to bring people together on behalf of causes. They're not merely imposed, they're chosen. And they're adapted to create collectivities out of diverse constituencies that sometimes have very little in common other than the common label. They're also used as devices to separate groups and peoples

from each other. If you think about racial or racialized and ethnic groups as not built into the firmament of nature, but as historically specific, socially constructed groups, it's important to recognize that those groups themselves change. What memberships constituted change, understandings of what they mean by change. But that doesn't mean that they don't have real impact. So that the symbolism around the discussions and actions in terms of diversity—what kind of diversity? And race and ethnicity is, of course, I think, very important.

Now, students at this campus have often been the most visible force pushing the campus towards greater diversity in its curriculum and its membership. It's remained a pretty constant refrain in student newspapers, student organizations for the nearly fifty years of the campus's history. And nearly every large student protest on this campus has had, to a greater or lesser degree, something to do with ethnic studies and ethnic diversity issues. In fact, quite regularly these concerns have taken dramatic and more public forms—demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes. An example—I was trying to make a list the other day of some of these and I can think of the 1968-1969 protests that led to the forming of College Seven, initially to be called Malcolm X. And then the protests of the mid- and late seventies that led to the formation of the Task Force on Third World studies that I chaired. And then the protests in early 1981, which were stimulated by the non-removal of a lecturer of teaching Native American studies.

**Reti:** Ed Castillo.

**Cowan:** Ed Castillo, and a variety of other issues that led to the administration's agreeing to continue to fund some courses in a variety of ethnic studies areas. The themes of these protests were quite similar. The students argued that the campus was very white, that the administration was racist. They demanded more hiring of faculty of color, more attention to admitting students of color, more academic and non-academic support for those students once they arrived, and almost always for the establishment of an ethnic studies major and even a department. And typically the administration acceded to some of their demands, and then the students would claim victory for having been responsible for achieving some of those objectives. Virtually every time there was a major student protest it seems that the campus administrators appointed another task force to address their concerns. And the coming of every new chancellor seemed to do that. Every chancellor wanted to make a mark, and showing a commitment to diversity was one thing the chancellor wanted to do. It was true of Sinsheimer; it was true of Stevens; it was true of Pister; it was true of M.R.C. Greenwood. It's been a very important theme.

I think one of the things that the students didn't fully acknowledge, and I understand why, is that there were a number of faculty, and in fact a number of senior administrators throughout this period, who were also strongly committed to furthering campus diversity and were working through boards, through campus committees, often behind the scenes, to achieve that diversity. And they often used the students' protest as an occasion for taking further concrete steps. Sometimes they were accused by some faculty of giving into the students, but I

think often it was the case that they saw this as a way of doing things that otherwise they might have had a little more difficulty doing. So I think it's important to give student activists credit for their own very important contributions to making this campus a more diverse and vibrant place. But I think it's also important to give credit to faculty and administrators in a variety of areas who worked through often quieter channels to make some of these things happen. And I include in that the chancellors and vice chancellors who were very much involved in the process.

Well anyway, for whatever reasons, including my own interests I guess, and the various positions, administrative and senate, in which I found myself serving, I often found myself a member of and on several occasions chair or co-chair of a number of these committees and task forces. I've already mentioned my work as chair of the Task Force on Third World studies, and my involvement in, not only Merrill in the seventies, but Oakes in the 1980s on behalf of some of these issues. But here are a couple of other points of involvement.

In the fall of 1988, my last year as dean of humanities, Chancellor Stevens, who had arrived on campus the previous year and like Sinsheimer was facing student protests over campus diversity, asked me and Bill Friedland, who was at that time acting dean of the social sciences, to co-chair a small task force. And our charge was to consider issues involved in providing ethnic course and programs on ethnic studies at Santa Cruz. Now, the task force included, in addition to Bill and myself, four senior faculty of color and representatives from the four major ethnic student organizations. The task force issued a report in the spring of 1989,

and among the things that we concluded was an agreement that although Santa Cruz had the most diverse faculty of all the UC campuses in terms of percentage of faculty who were scholars of color, the campus needed to achieve even greater diversity among its faculty and should aggressively pursue affirmative action goals, use tools such as target of opportunity appointments to identify real opportunities in this area, and appoint new faculty who had active interest in teaching ethnic topics as a part of their overall teaching portfolio. We also recommended that the administration, in addition to pursuing a general increase in ethnic studies courses, make a special effort to increase the number and variety of lower-division courses dealing with U.S. and California minorities. That was something that students were particularly interested in. And we also urged the administration to publish a comprehensive list of faculty and courses involved in ethnic studies, to provide information on clearly defined pathways for pursuing ethnic studies in a variety of existing majors and also as individual majors, and then to identify clearly advisors who could help students pursue those options. We also recommended the deans of humanities and social sciences issue an annual report on the status of ethnic studies on the campus, including data on faculty participation, advising procedures, numbers and kinds of courses offered, data on student participation in these courses, and we recommended that students pursuing these ethnic studies within another major be able to have a parenthetical annotation in ethnic studies included in their graduation certificate. We also recommended that the administration provide resources for

the development of what we called a minority scholars research group. So those are the things that the task force agreed upon.

Most of those recommendations were implemented, except for the implementation of a research group, but they began to publish materials in the general catalog, an annual brochure that listed courses and faculty and pathways and so forth, so that was an important achievement. But the thing that the task force couldn't agree upon was whether an ethnic studies major or a series of group-specific majors should be formed. The students in the task force all wanted that to happen. What was striking was that none of the faculty on the task force did.

Our minority colleagues on the task force argued a number of things. First, they feared that a separate ethnic studies board would let existing boards off the hook in terms of diversifying their own curriculum and faculty. Second, they argued that faculty, new faculty FTE devoted to ethnic studies, should be housed in existing boards and thus to contribute to those boards' diversity, and argued that that was a more effective recruiting tool for those faculty, rather than isolating them in a small and often vulnerable ethnic studies board. Third, they argued that high-quality scholars would be more likely to want to be appointed to standard departments because they were professionals in their area. And finally they argued that the current scholars of color at Santa Cruz were already spread too thinly in terms of their scholarly teaching and service demands, including their work with minority students, [and] that they couldn't spread themselves even more thinly in order to keep an ethnic studies program going in addition to

the regularly scheduled board and campus duties. They looked at the experiences of ethnic studies departments at other campuses and universities as a part of their argument.

Anyway, that was a theme that we had found in the 1970s when we did the Third World studies report. It was to be a theme that was to pursue us throughout the 1990s. But it's important to remember that it was the scholars of color themselves, not alone, because I and Bill Friedland, for example in this case, agreed with them—but that one had to consider the welfare of the faculty and what it would take for a stable program. They said if you're going to make a program like that work you got to put lots and lots of resources in it. And in any case there may be other reasons for wanting to pursue it in other forms.

Now, Karl Pister was really supportive of these diversity efforts during his own five years as chancellor and it was really a pleasure to work with him on these matters, as it was with M.R.C. He, for example, strongly supported a jointly developed proposal that John Isbister and I developed—John was provost of Merrill at that time—in the mid-nineties that led to a successful grant from the Hewlett Foundation for what we called a "diversity in unity" grant. It was designed to enable every college to sponsor a multicultural studies course taught by a regular ladder faculty member, and then to mount a series of related co-curricular activities. I think it was a two-year, or maybe three-year grant. The notion was that the campus itself would pick up the funding of these kinds of courses and activities after the grant ran out. I served as academic coordinator of the grant, wearing my American studies hat in part. And the grant also funded a

culminating campus conference on diversity and unity where we tried to bring students from various organizations together, interested faculty, provosts and others to talk about the campus's commitment. So it was an important symbolic event, but it was also designed to keep the momentum in this area.

Now, the grant ran out; funding to replace it was uneven. But it's very interesting when you look at the content of each of the colleges' core courses now and the way they are described in the catalog, that virtually all of them make a point of saying that they pay some attention to diversity, to these issues, whether in a U.S. context or in a larger global context. I think our report and the Hewlett grant had something to do with that, but a lot of other forces were converging to make the colleges receptive to having that as a central part of their core curriculum.

Now, during this period, the nineties, I also continued to write occasional white papers on these issues pressing for a more comprehensive systematic, proactive campuswide approach to ethnic studies curriculum and faculty and other resources. For example, I wrote two drafts of basically the same paper in 1995, when I was chair of the Academic Senate, arguing for a curriculum that would educate both Anglo and non-Anglo students in a way that would help them live effectively and responsibly in a multicultural world, argued for a curriculum that would attract more undergraduate and graduate students of color and then retain them by showing that the campus really did want to take their own experiences, perspectives, backgrounds seriously—both an important symbolic statement as well as a substantive statement. I argued in the paper for increasing

the number of ladder faculty positions that involved a specialization in some aspect of ethnic studies. But I was recommending particularly paying attention to faculty who could teach both ethnic studies and some other professionally important area for their department so that they wouldn't be isolated. I knew that there were quite a few scholars who were out there who would meet those particular categories. I also argued that more Anglo faculty needed to be involved in the teaching of ethnic materials, and more involved in modeling what I called the kinds of collegial interaction across ethnic lines that we would like to see in the interethnic interactions of our students. I pressed in my white paper for more TOP appointments in the natural sciences, arguing that we also needed scholars of color who weren't teaching ethnic studies courses but would add to the diversity in those areas and serve as role models for students in those areas.

**Reti:** Did that happen?

**Cowan:** Yes. Those were things that, again, I wasn't arguing for alone, but I was constantly trying to keep my oar in on that. I also argued that there should be an increasing number of faculty that were undertaking more theoretical and applied perspectives in ethnic studies, and, in fact, argued that this campus should become a national leader in such research. And I had suggested again, as we had in our 1989 report, establishing a center for the study of race and ethnicity, or at least expanding the purview and strengthening some existing research centers working on that at that time. The Chicano/Latino research center had been formed; the Center for Cultural Studies was very interested in this issue. A center

was about to emerge—the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community had been founded initially as a sort of Center for Tolerance and it was expanded. Manuel Pastor was the first chair and I had been involved in the committee founding that center.

But I also indicated in these papers that instead of a separate department or program of ethnic studies, I favored myself what I called a network strategy, one that would create a variety of academic centers on the campus for multicultural and ethnic studies, and that would involve building critical clusters of strength in a number of individual boards on campus, and it would involve maximizing interdepartmental cooperation. I thought that we could make ourselves a national model for such networking strategy. I argued that it was crucial the faculty and administration get ahead of student pressure on this issue for once, and develop our own plan and rationale and take the initiative to persuade students of the value of that approach. And I also acknowledged that that would not be an easy sell, given the ongoing pressure for a separate program in ethnic studies.

In 1998 and 1999, when I was chairing American studies, Emily Honig, who was then chairing the women's studies program, and I took a major role in drafting for the Humanities Division as a part of the division's own six-year plan a proposal for a humanities initiative designed to strengthen research and teaching in both gender and ethnic studies. It was an initiative that we would hope would spark similar initiatives in the Social Sciences and Arts divisions and would then create the basis for a productive collaboration across divisional lines around the

issues of what we called diversity and citizenship, citizenship [playing] a very important role. Emily and I worked very closely on that. Nothing really happened with that. Jorge Hankamer was dean at the time. We were hoping that the central campus might provide a little more funding. Although indirectly some things began to happen along that line that maybe I can talk about.

My major campuswide involvement with these issues of diversity during the nineties came with the arrival of M.R.C. Greenwood as chancellor in 1996. The protests over the Regents' enactment of what were called SP1 and SP2 in 1995, and then the California voters' subsequent passage of Proposition 209 in November of 1996 stirred up this campus, as it did many campuses. Karl Pister and the other chancellors, for example, had protested the Regents' passing of SP1<sup>38</sup> and 2, which was done very suddenly and with very little consultation. And those propositions, or the Regents' enactments and also Proposition 209, as you know, banned the use of race, ethnicity, gender as criteria in admissions and hiring and contracts and so forth.

One protest in response to those activities occurred shortly after Chancellor Greenwood had arrived at Santa Cruz in 1997. It took the form of a sit-in in Hahn Student Services building. M.R.C. engaged in face-to-face negotiations with the protesters. I remember the stories about how her staff advised her not to go directly, but to let [*Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs*] Francisco Hernandez handle

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<sup>38</sup> In 1995, the Regents of the University of California passed two landmark resolutions, Standing Policy 1 (SP1) and Standing Policy 2 (SP2), prohibiting "preferential treatment" on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, and national origin in admissions, employment, and contracting. These resolutions were followed by the passage of the 1996 voter initiative Proposition 209, which incorporated similar prohibitions into the California State Constitution, effective August 1998.

the negotiations, "We're concerned about your safety." And she said, "What are they going to do with me? I'm just a little woman and I can do it." And so she went over and engaged in face-to-face negotiations along with Francisco, and that led, among other things, to her appointment early in the winter of 1997 of a forty-person commission. It consisted of faculty, some major campus administrators, some staff, some graduate and undergraduate students, and a representative of the Alumni Association. I was asked to cochair the commission along with an undergraduate student, a young African American woman. M.R.C. was very conscious of the symbolism of this commission, and appointing an undergraduate as cochair was a very important sign that she cared about student concerns in this area.

The charge of the commission was to consider how the campus might achieve the goals of greater diversity in a manner consistent with the new state and regental restrictions, the post-affirmative action strategy. I think she wisely decided not simply to focus the committee's work on issues of ethnic diversity for students and faculty and curriculum. She also wanted us to focus on staff diversity, and she also wanted us to focus on issues of gender diversity. I decided, as cochair of the committee, to retitle the committee and to call it The Chancellor's Commission on a Changing Campus. I liked the fact that four-C was easy to say and it was also a kind of pun on foreseeing the campus of the future. After an elaborative consultative process, the commission's work resulted in a six-part report which I called "Making Diversity Work," which was published in, I think, December of 1998.

The report in part was intended to inform the deliberation of the so-called Millennium Committee, which was chaired by Professors Mark Mangel and Gail Herschatter, that Chancellor Greenwood had appointed to develop a vision of what the campus should be in the year 2005, when we thought we would be reaching, or close to reaching our 15,000 student target. We wanted it to be an action report that would be taken seriously by the Millennium Committee and by deans and other administrators and departments, that would lead to concrete changes in the campus's strategic actions on behalf of diversity. Now, this report ended up, of course, building on a lot of the work that had been done previously, but we wanted to add a few additional wrinkles. We pulled together, for example, an immense amount of data on the actual state of diversity in a variety of areas. I appointed four task forces within the commission: one focused on undergraduate diversity, one on graduate student diversity, one on staff diversity, one on cultural diversity in the campus's teaching efforts. And each task force developed an analysis and set of recommendations that after a very wide vetting on campus and discussion by the entire commission were incorporated as sections in the final report. I was responsible personally for drafting the introduction of the report, the section on faculty diversity, and the section on curriculum and research diversity. It was published in December of 1998. I couldn't possibly summarize [the reports' huge number of recommendations] now.

**Reti:** That's okay, because people can look at the report.

**Cowan:** But among the things we did, and there are familiar themes, we recommended a series of concrete outreach activities to increase the number of both undergraduate and graduate students, particularly from low income and underrepresented communities. We identified some strategies to improve retention and graduation rates. We urged faculty in individual departments—and that was an important part of our recommendation—to become more collectively involved in outreach and retention activities. We urged the campus to encourage the campus's growing number of ethnic minority, and also women faculty, to assume campus leadership roles, and to be supported in that. There was very little of that kind of faculty development taking place. We proposed steps for identifying diverse pools of potential faculty candidates using target of opportunity appointments in recruitments more forcefully in a way that got around the SP1 and 2 and 209 regulations. And I can talk about that perhaps. And we certainly argued for the filling of gaps in the campus's ethnic studies curriculum, of stabilizing that curriculum, ensuring that the core curriculum was taught by ladder faculty and not by merely temporary lecturers. And we also argued that we wanted to promote research efforts on ethnic studies that would make our campus a nationally visible center for work in this area. And that would involve, we felt, interdepartmental and interdivisional collaboration on behalf of both teaching and research. We also recommended the establishment of minors in various areas of ethnic studies—African American studies, Asian American, Latin American, and Latino/Chicano, and Native American studies.

At the same time, the commission did not make any recommendation on the establishment of a separate ethnic studies major or department. What we did was to urge the administration and the senate to pull together all interested faculty for a very public discussion of these issues, of the pros and cons of such activities. And that, by the way, was something which many scholars of color were reluctant to do because they didn't want to be publicly identified with the position. It would look like [they were] not supportive of a separate ethnic studies major, although many of them were several members of the committee who were still reluctant to see that kind of an enterprise done, and we didn't want to put them on the spot, and so we begged the question. And as I said, we then renewed a call, which I had already written about, for establishment of a faculty group on race and ethnicity, to promote individual and collaborative research in that area.

M.R.C gave the report a pretty wide circulation. I was particularly concerned that the report not merely be yet one more that got buried someplace, as these reports often do, and so I took advantage of John Simpson's arrival in 1998 as our new executive vice chancellor to press for the implementation of some of the commission's recommendations. And perhaps the major result of my advocacy was his formation in 1999 of a small seven-faculty member task force, which I was asked to chair, that operated under the rubric of what John called the campus curricular initiative, a neutral sounding title, but one designed to promote many of the things that the commission had recommended.

The task force was charged by the vice chancellor with recommending the use of eight new ladder faculty positions that he had reserved for this purpose that would be aimed, in his own words, at defining a curriculum that deals with present-day societal issues related to gender, ethnicity and culture. And therefore, positions that could help us respond creatively to the challenges presented by an increasingly diverse student body and an increasingly diverse state.

Now the task force actively solicited proposals from faculty, from departments, from the divisions. We were particularly interested in proposals that crossed divisional lines and that had appropriate departmental and divisional support, and that would strengthen relevant research areas and generate good enrollments, increase student and faculty diversity. We submitted our report in May of 2000. We recommended, in fact, when we did our report that each ladder position be allocated to a division only if the divisional dean was willing in turn to allocate a matching ladder position from the division's own pool of faculty positions, thus effectively doubling to sixteen the number of faculty positions devoted to this initiative. And we identified three thematic areas for these initiatives and actually made specific recommendations for the eight we controlled as to which departments ought to have them located in, what the recruitments ought be in. We also recommended that the campus pursue cluster hiring as a way of highlighting its commitment to these particular areas. We thought that if you advertise three or four positions nationally it really shows that the campus cares about this and it's not merely making a token effort to do

something. And we thought that it might even attract faculty who might not otherwise be attracted to the pool.

We really urged Simpson to encourage more interdivisional collaboration between deans on behalf of such efforts, and we argued that, to quote from the report, that "such active collaboration would help the campus develop a teaching and research agenda that will make UCSC a national and international center for a comparative social and cultural studies that can contribute to a progressive public policy on behalf of a just and more humane society." Rather large rhetoric, but it was designed to give some real visibility to this campus.

Now for the most part, Simpson did follow our recommendations, although he didn't, as far as I'm concerned, put enough pressure on deans to provide matching positions. But it did lead to some strong new ethnic minority faculty appointments, including a number of senior women faculty, in ten or so different departments in the humanities, social sciences and the arts. Maybe a footnote—I was very pleased when a few months later Provost Simpson shared with me a letter that he'd received from then-President Richard Atkinson that praised the campus curriculum initiative and said he was circulating our report to the other UC campuses as an excellent example of what a proactive diversity strategy might look like.

**Reti:** So, you did not mention the sciences as one of the divisions that you were concerned with.

**Cowan:** We focused our attention here on the curricular initiative, that's what it was. So we wanted to make sure that we were strengthening the curriculum in many of these areas around gender and ethnicity. We had in the commission's report emphasized that we wanted to see TOP appointments also in the natural sciences to diversify the faculty. This was the ethnic studies side of that.

**Reti:** I see. So there was no kind of new curriculum, say in the history of science from a perspective of ethnicity, or something like that. That wasn't part of the picture.

**Cowan:** No, we didn't get any initiatives proposed from the natural sciences. One of the things we were disappointed in was that none of the divisional deans worked with other deans to submit a joint proposal. So we had to cobble together proposals that were coming from faculty groups in separate divisions into larger themes that we should support.

**Reti:** So you actually functioned as the—.

**Cowan:** So we acted as that kind of [inter-divisional cobbler]. But it's been one of my, as you know, ongoing frustrations that although there are often useful cooperations across divisional lines, in these kinds of areas there has often not been as much as I think would have been profitable.

Well, I guess that sets the stage for maybe just a few words about the present proposal that is currently underway and is very likely to be implemented within

a year for a major in critical race and ethnic studies, about what, a little over a decade after these other end of the 1990s reports—

**Reti:** More like fifteen years (laughs).

**Cowan:** Fifteen years, that is finally coming up again, not for the first time. But this time I think it's likely to take hold. And I've been meditating a little on why it should happen now, how all the stars seemed to line up this time in the way they didn't before.

I think a number of things were partly the result of the fact that some of the earlier diversity initiatives had created a cadre of students and faculty and curriculum that would seem to make this a more realistic possibility. Certainly the growth of the number and percentages of students of color at Santa Cruz, particularly African American, [Asian American], and Latino students, has made a real difference. They've played a very important role in this. And it's important that the growth has been not just at the undergraduate level, but the graduate level. Graduate students have been a very important part of pursuing this particular proposal. And I think that there were a number of other factors that then brought that increase together for the proposal. The retirement of a number of faculty of color and resignations a couple of years ago, people like Angela Davis, for example—created some concerns from students of color, as well as some administrators, that that was not good publicity, and it also created some other curricular problems that needed to be addressed.

I think graduate students in a variety of programs, but particularly in the humanities and social sciences, and particularly in programs like, interestingly enough, histcon, which has been going through its own particular crisis, were looking for a home for their interest in ethnic and racial issues that could cut across departmental lines. I think the campus administration has been very concerned to make the campus not only be, but appear more welcoming to students of color, and establishing a major in this area would be at the very least an important symbolic statement that can be used in campus publicity. Both George Blumenthal and Alison Galloway have been very supportive of this initiative, and I think they do it on genuine academic and educational grounds. So I'm not arguing at all that their move is a cynical move but it's also a politically savvy move, and it has to do with the campus's positioning itself.

And then, of course, there is the undergraduate desire to be like other UC campuses, in some ways wanting to argue that we are distinct and different from other UC campuses, but also, as you see if you read student newspapers and statements about this, the argument that we are the only general UC campus that doesn't have an ethnic studies program or two, although we do have the Latin American/Latino Studies program. But that was an argument that the students have been making for forty years, and I think that took hold. So in any case, I think the establishment of this kind of program plays a very important symbolic as well as a more programmatically substantive role.

I think that the program has considerable promise, but I think, based on my experience with these issues over the years, that it also has some potential

pitfalls. Like American studies, I think it potentially could be seen to be too broad—it wants to cover the globe—and to think about how you organize a curriculum and organize resources to make sure that you're not just dealing with issues of race and ethnicity in a U.S. context is a quite challenging activity, especially when you ask what faculty specializations are. At the same time, it risks becoming fragmented. To what extent, for example, will the undergraduates in the program want to have their own ethnic specific groupings, so that it in effect becomes a de facto series of ethnic studies majors, rather than one? As the proposal suggests, it's going to focus on transnational, global, and theoretical issues as well as offering, if you will, case studies that locate those issues in particular experiences and situations of various groups.

I think some key questions include whether the major will feel that it should deal [with] the experiences of European and Euro-American ethnic groups, or only focus on the experiences of what we call ethnic minority, or underrepresented groups. Will it deal with case studies of ethnic and racialized groups throughout the world, or how much focus will be on U.S. groups? Will its theoretical bases be sufficiently broad? Will it deal with race and ethnicity as historically specific social constructs, and to talk about the complexities of labeling and so forth? And how comparative will it be between groups within the United States and across lines? How provincial will it be, or how nonprovincial would it be?

I think there are some other practical challenges that it will face. One is finding enough faculty from other departments willing to devote themselves to teaching the core courses needed by the program, to serving as program advisors,

becoming actively involved. Some of the same concerns that faculty have expressed for years are going to be at play here, concerns about being spread too thin, about being distracted from their research, and so forth.

I think the chancellor and campus provost are strongly supportive of this verbally and sincerely, but they're not, at the moment, putting much in the way of resources in—only enough resources to allow for a very small core curriculum, perhaps to provide some staff support. They face the issue of buying out faculty from departments who might be willing, persuading departments they ought to let faculty—

**Reti:** Literally buying out, like they actually asked for money?

**Cowan:** A faculty member willing to teach and craft a course would not be teaching a course that they otherwise would be teaching in their department, so you're taking resources away. So will they just buy out the course, or agree to give a particular department a whole position, provided that that department contributes a certain amount of curriculum to—and even bodies, faculty involvement—to this.

**Reti:** And this is all happening in the context of the worst budget crisis we've ever faced.

**Cowan:** That's right. So again, we're trying to do this now, when we are now going through a crisis which is more sustained than any of the previous crises we have ever had because enrollment growth is not just going to get us out of this as

easily. And also, our enrollment growth is very limited. We're already well above 15,000 students, and although we have plans to get up to 19,500 I think whether we're actually going to make it there is another issue. In these constricted times, the administration doesn't have many resources to devote to it.

**Reti:** No.

**Cowan:** So what they're devoting is a sign of their earnestness. But whether it's going to be enough to overcome some of these other kinds of concerns and dynamics remains to be seen.

I think the final question is whether they can find vigorous, skilled, and effective leadership for the program, somebody willing to chair the program who is really committed and has the savvy, the diplomatic skills to make it happen. I think that there are faculty on campus who have those qualities, but whether they are willing to devote themselves to this, because it could very well affect their scholarly careers and other things, is another matter.

And so all of that remains to be seen. I think that there will be a continuing push from the students for eventual departmental status for this program, so it's not merely a program, a group that consists of faculty with departmental locations elsewhere. If a department, would it have joint appointments? How would it actually operate? Lots of issues. But I think there will be a push for that. There may be even a push eventually for a graduate program and not merely parenthetical possibilities, which is now built in to that for graduate students. So I wish it well. I'm sorry that American studies was part of what got thrown out

of the back of the bus in order to make it happen. But I understand. It's part of the evolution of the campus.

**Reti:** So literally you think there's a direct connection.

**Cowan:** Yes. I think the faculty who remained in American studies had the option of turning American studies itself into the core of an ethnic studies program. They already had departmental status. It would've been a matter of further building that core faculty. But the faculty who were there I think were concerned that that would be a workload that they couldn't [handle]. Some of them wanted to be already in departments that had graduate programs so they wouldn't have to struggle to get their own. They were concerned about the impact on their research, and in these tough times didn't think that other positions would come to American studies. They could have, I think, transformed the name of the program into ethnic studies or American and ethnic studies. There's a program at the University of Southern California called American studies and ethnicity, a very strong graduate program with lots of support. It has a core faculty; it has joint appointments; it has lots of administrative support. They could've also moved it in the direction of a kind of Global Studies, which is an extremely successful major that was founded about ten years ago at UC Santa Barbara and is one of the most popular undergraduate majors there. So they could have globalized American studies in this way. A number of other options were available, and for a variety of reasons it didn't happen. In any case, once that [American studies] faculty moved into [other] departments there's no returning.

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** So you're not going to reinvent that particular—

**Reti:** So it's not that literally the resources that had gone into American studies are now going into ethnic studies?

**Cowan:** No, the resources that are there are—you have funding [of] ethnic studies courses in those departments to which the faculty went, they're teaching the courses there.

**Reti:** Right, right. I just wanted to make sure I understood you correctly.

**Cowan:** That's right. I think that the other thing is, as I think I said before, that the notion of organizing a study around a nation-state has gone out of fashion. The emphasis on subnational and transnational issues here is much more important. And so without a kind of core in the American studies program, it's almost inevitable that it would disappear. Now that hasn't been the case in many places that have very successful American studies programs in other universities and colleges, but each of those has its own history. It's probably not worth getting into. In any case, I very much wish this well as a program, although it's got some very significant challenges.

Maybe two final thoughts. I think the same thing could be said, by the way, about gender studies. To what extent should men teach women's studies issues? And to what extent should women be focused on teaching issues about men? Now, that's a silly question.

**Reti:** (laughs) It's an interesting question.

**Cowan:** I say it recognizing that many of our major scholars, feminist scholars on campus, are in fact teaching not only about women's issues, but as feminists are looking at issues that involve gender differences and negotiations, and male as well as female topics. But asking that with regard to ethnic studies has a slightly different cast to it. I believe that white faculty, if you want to use that symbolically laden term, have a responsibility to incorporate concern for the perspectives and experiences of peoples of color in their own work. Often that will be within a comparative framework, within larger thematic problem-oriented concerns. And many faculty on this campus do.

But whether any of those faculty will be invited to participate as central players in this new program remains to be seen, or whether this will be a program where it is felt that both for symbolic and other reasons the leadership and core participation should be by scholars of color. What will the students want in that area? How will participation of faculty from across all sorts of racial and ethnic boundaries be encouraged in that proposal? And it's not just an issue of this major. It's a more general issue for departments. And it equally works in the other direction—to what extent should scholars of color be encouraged to teach white studies, be encouraged and helped and rewarded for not only teaching their own group, but for looking comparatively at, not just ethnic issues, but all the other issues that people are interested in? We have some major scholars of color on campus who do that now, but it seems to me constantly an issue I think

that scholars of color have to face, whether they're being disloyal if they show that they're very much interested in studying other areas.

So I think it remains an ongoing issue, not just for Santa Cruz, but for the profession as a whole, and how that plays out will depend a great deal on particular locations. I would like to think that this campus can model a very generous understanding of who is responsible for and who can take part in concerns about these extremely important issues and extremely important parts of human experience.

And I think that the other thing I might mention is that the campus spends a lot of time talking about the percentage of minority faculty and percentages of minority students that it has. It's trying very hard to become designated as Hispanic-serving institution by getting up to 25 percent [Hispanic students]. I think that those percentages are important indices, and they also have practical consequences, as in the Hispanic-serving designation. But I think in many respects the numbers are more important than the percentages. I remember when I first came to Santa Cruz there were very, very few students of color and very few faculty of color.

**Reti:** I remember that too, yes.

**Cowan:** And that meant that if you were a black student in a course and an issue around a black subject came up the class would turn to that student and say, "Tell us about the black perspective." That's a real burden, I think, placed on them. If you were a small campus, having a somewhat large percentage of

students of color, say black students, means that still you have a very small number of students. In fact, you can have a much smaller percentage of, say, African Americans students at another UC campus, but because they have a much larger student body there's a larger number of such students on campus.

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** The issue of visibility is, I think, a key factor. At some point this campus became large enough that the number of visible students of color began to make a difference, not just overall, but in pockets of the campus, in individual colleges, in individual departments, in individual courses. That visibility has been one of the most important aspects of the transformation of this campus. I think it's appropriate to use percentages for purposes of public relations and because there are some concrete benefits attached to that. But I think even more important is to keep the eye on how to make sure that the members of our community who often come from underrepresented backgrounds are visible and play central roles in the life of the campus and are not forced to represent their entire group but to, while celebrating their membership in groups, also celebrate their membership in a variety of other groupings, and to recognize the diversity within, as well as between various kinds of groups on this campus. I think the campus has made tremendous progress in this area. And if a program in critical race and ethnic studies can move forward, then more power to it.

**Reti:** Great. Thank you, Michael. Let's stop for today.

### **Chair of the UC Academic Council**

**Reti:** So today is Friday, June 29, 2012 and this is Irene Reti. I'm here for my eighth interview with Michael Cowan. Michael, we're going to start out today by talking about your time on the Academic Council.

**Cowan:** Yes, this leads me from the 1990s, which we were talking about last time, to the past decade. The Academic Council, as you probably know, is the central advising committee of the systemwide Academic Senate, the steering committee, if you will, of the senate. It's actually a committee of what's called the Academic Assembly, which is a large body consisting of several representatives from each of the campuses, plus the major officers of universitywide committees, which meets only twice a year, and focuses on, essentially, formal legislation, regulations, bylaws, deals with formal petitions from campuses, and a number of things like that. But [most of] the work of the systemwide senate is done by a series of committees. And the Academic Council is essentially the central coordinating committee. It has about a dozen and a half members. It includes the chair and vice chair of the Academic Council. And it includes the chairs of several major university-wide senate committees. I, of course, had already served on that as the chair of our senate in 1979-80, and then again between 1994 and 1996. So I had some sense of what was going on.

It's mainly an advisory body. It has very little plenary authority over issues. It met monthly for an entire day up in Oakland at the Office of the President. And the mornings were spent primarily consulting with the president of the

University [of California] and a series of vice presidents. It was a kind of show and tell, where the president and his senior group would update the senate leadership on a variety of issues that concerned the University. And there would be a Q&A session where the senate would ask questions, and so there would be a pretty lively give and take about a lot of issues.

The council chooses its own officers, that is its chair and vice-chair. And in the spring of 1999, I was asked if I would be willing to stand for this position of vice chair, which is a one-year position and then involves an automatic movement into the chair. Interestingly enough, Helene Moglen, who was our Santa Cruz Division chair at that moment, and a very active and effective representative of the campus there, had been offered the vice chair, and she decided that it was not something that she wanted to do. It was essentially a full-time job that involved either daily commuting to Oakland or living up there. So she had suggested my name, and she urged me to accept it. And so I did, (laughs) for whatever reasons. As is typically the case, it came out of the blue. I had not expected to be asked to do something like that, and, as is often the case, I felt the pressure to rise to the occasion to show that the appointment was not a bad mistake on the part of the council.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** I was certainly aware that I was representing this campus and that my performance in that role would, justly or unjustly, be seen by other members of

the council and by the president's office as a reflection of the state of the campus itself. So I went in with a great deal of self-consciousness about that.

The experience was a fascinating one, of course. It provided an opportunity to see the University and the other campuses from a universitywide perspective. You certainly learned a great deal, not only about the president's office and its workings, and about the Regents, because I was *ex officio* a non-voting faculty representative to the Regents during both of those two years. So I sat in on all of the Regents meetings, including their confidential sessions, which generally dealt with personnel issues of various sorts. And I, of course, learned, as you do if you are sitting on any of those systemwide senate committees, about what the other campuses are doing and not doing. So you're constantly comparing that. There's always an interesting tension in those committees, as there simply is in the counterparts here on our campus, between the campus's representatives there to represent the campus's interests and the goal of developing a systemwide posture, which is good for the University as a whole. Mediating those and negotiating those tensions is always a very interesting challenge.

But the other thing I thought that that experience was important for is the opportunity to make this campus more visible—one more opportunity—to other campuses' representatives and to the Office of the President. The president's office is often rather isolated from the texture of campus life, and so the major opportunities for the president's office and its senior and middle-range staff to contact the campuses is through these formal channels, systemwide committees

and their meetings with the Academic Senate. And so the impressions that are often formed come from these kinds of interactions.

It was very interesting that in terms of this project, which had been one that I had been interested in for a long time, of making UCSC more visible to the system, that in 1995 and 1996, my second year of being chair of this Academic Senate on the Academic Council, we actually had four council members: myself as divisional chair; Stanley Williamson, who was chairing what's called BOARS, the Board of Admissions and Relations, which is a very critical senate committee because it's the one that recommends eligibility standards and admissions procedures to the campus; Roger Anderson, who at that time was chairing the universitywide Committee on Planning and Budget; and Carol Freeman, who was chairing the universitywide Committee on Educational Policy. So three very major committees, and we just happened to have four of the seventeen or so members of the council in that particular year, so collectively we were in a position of showing that this campus was capable of generating solid leadership to the senate. It was a point of real satisfaction to me when that happened.

Now, my vice-chairing and then chairing of the Academic Council included ex officio membership in a whole range of committees, some senate, many of them universitywide administrative committees, including several major policy-recommending bodies. I was on several search committees for vice president positions in the Office of the President, representing the Senate. As the chair of the senate, I was always involved in a confidential review of one of the campus's chancellors, a very interesting experience to watch that. And one of my key

memberships was service on the President's Advisory Council, essentially his cabinet, which met once a week and included all his senior officers and unit heads and one faculty representative, namely the chair of the senate.

Dick Atkinson was quite an extraordinary person, a very effective president, very smart, very quick, and he had in fact a very quick tongue, which he used quite tactically. I remember many occasions of his impatience, but you could see it was an impatience where he would push and then he'd kind of pull back and say something very charming. But he would remind people of his role and theirs. He ran very tight meetings, going around the circle, asking each member in his cabinet to comment, and asking me also, for the senate. He expected us to keep our comments short, to the point and focused, and not repeat ourselves. And if we weren't prepared he would let us know that we weren't prepared at the time. So it was very interesting. He was also very proactive in a lot of areas, and I can mention one area in another moment.

Now, I think the staff at the Office of the President was, on the whole, an extraordinarily able staff. I worked with one of the senior vice presidents, the University Provost John King, for example, who was a more low-key person but very effective, very efficient, got a lot of things done. He was the equivalent of the campus provost. He was the internal [academic] officer keeping a lot of things moving. But I worked with several other of the senior vice presidents. They were a very interesting group. But it was the group down below them, the people who were heading various units—that's where you started seeing women

in the equation in the president's office at that time, who were again, very smart, very knowledgeable.

One of the challenges the Office of the President faced was the fact that they were somewhat isolated from the campuses, didn't get out and tour the campuses and talk to people. Their interactions were basically through committee meetings, which typically involved people from the campuses coming to Oakland, so it was Mohammed coming to the mountain. (laughs) But it was an extraordinary group of people. At times I used to think of the Office of the President, like the system as a whole, as a kind of spastic octopus.

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** (laughs) Lots of branches that didn't quite coordinate with each other, and even the Office of the President had some of that feel. Pulling this vast, complex organization together is not an easy task in any event. But it was fascinating to watch the dynamics of that operation.

**Reti:** Did you actually move up to Oakland?

**Cowan:** Yes, I lived in Oakland for two years. Byron wasn't terribly happy about that. I commuted back here on weekends. But there was just no [other visible] way. It was my typical pattern. I'd get up at 5 a.m. I'd be in the office by 7, 7:30 so I could have some quiet time before the phone started ringing and the emails started pouring in, and the meetings started coming because the number of

meetings that one would be involved with in a typical day or a typical week were really quite extraordinary.

Now, there were some fascinating issues, many of which were continuing and some of which emerged during my time as vice chair and chair, several things that I tried to do. In our office itself, there were a series of analysts who were assigned to particular senate committees. They were the ones who kept the committee minutes, kept the documents going. The senate had fallen into the habit of assigning particular analysts to particular committees and let them develop real specialties. One of the problems with that was that the analysts began to think of those committees as their turf, and they, in a number of cases weren't very interested in what was going on in the other committees. So the issue of coordinating across those lines was a challenge, and my predecessor, as chair, took that on as a project, to try to build more cross-ties. I agreed with him and tried to develop a process of rotating the analysts every three years or so around the committees so that they would have a better sense of other committees. That created some real problems in at least one case, where the chair of the committee and the analyst really resisted that, which led to too much time dealing with the personnel issues.

But I initiated an annual planning retreat, which was designed to bring the chairs of all of the senate committees together and the entire staff of the University Academic Senate office together to share their agendas for the year. The goal was to look for those points where the agendas of individual committees overlapped, and to also give each chair and their analyst a better sense of what was going on.

It was a desire to not have it quite so scattered but to create conversations. And I don't know whether that's still continuing, but George Blumenthal, when he was chair of the Academic Council, I know continued that, and I think that was important. By the way, I might say that I was the first chair of the council from this campus. This was after forty years of the campus's history. And I do think that the council had perhaps decided it was probably time to give Santa Cruz the opportunity to be chair.

**Reti:** (laughs) We were old enough.

**Cowan:** Right, it was sort of that: growing up. It was interesting that four years later George Blumenthal was chosen for that position. So there was a rhythm building up.

It was certainly, for me, fascinating to look at, if you will, the politics of the University at several levels—the politics of the senate, the politics of the Office of the President, regental politics. There were lots of interesting battles often played outside of the scrutiny of the camera, if you will, in Regents meetings, over particular personnel, and it was fascinating to watch Regents line up and negotiate those issues.

But the senate had its own kinds of internal battles. There was, for example, an issue over two campuses, Irvine's and Riverside's, push to have law schools. Riverside had actually initiated the first proposal. The chancellor there was very ambitious, wanted to get some more professional schools there to get Riverside some visibility and clout. But Irvine, very shortly after, also began to push for a

law school. And so these two proposals had come together. And one of the things that was apparent was that the Office of the President had no way of making meaningful comparisons between the two. It was generally agreed—first there was the question of whether the University needed any more law schools, or the state, and if it needed one more law school, where should it be? There were no real criteria for judging which campus ought to get it. It was finally resolved politically, frankly, in my mind. Irvine got the law school, finally. That's because it, I think, had finally more political clout, for a variety of reasons that would be difficult to go into now.

But it was interesting to watch the fights there and then watch the way in which the senate representatives in those battles played their particular role in fighting for their campuses. I had urged the Office of the President to develop some criteria that would apply not only to the law schools, but to other proposals for professional schools, to develop ways of judging whether it made sense, not only for the campus, but for the University to have the place, that if every campus, for example, needed a certain range in its portfolio, then one might very well want to ask where you would locate such schools.

I got very much involved in the national laboratories. There was a president's council, of which the senate chair was an ex officio member, to oversee the management of the national labs, that is, the one at Berkeley, the Lawrence lab, the Lawrence Livermore Lab, and the Los Alamos Lab. The labs were constantly under assault. One scandal or another would happen. For example, one person at Los Alamos took home a disk that had had classified information on it.

**Reti:** I remember that, yes.

**Cowan:** So we were constantly dealing with the fallout. And then the University was blamed for not managing the labs well. And it was important, because the University, as part of its contract with the Department of Energy, got a lot of money for managing the labs. And they got a lot of prestige, but also got a lot of headaches. There were issues of contract renewal that came up when I was chairing the senate, so the various senate committees, particularly the Committee on Research, got very much involved in the question of whether the labs should be renewed. In fact, there was a procedure whereby every campus was asked to opine on the issue of lab renewal. That had happened when the previous contract came up for renewal in the 1990s, and actually the majority of campuses had voted against it. But it was an advisory vote and the Office of the President renewed. This time the majority of the campuses voted for renewal. But it was not an uncontroversial activity. One of the major issues that concerned the faculty was the secrecy of the labs, the fact that the research done there could not be scrutinized by external review.

**Reti:** Right, so what does that mean in an academic research environment?

**Cowan:** Absolutely. There were some people who just didn't want the University to be involved in the production of weapons, involved in the war effort. They felt a lot of the lab stuff was, if you will, more defensive stuff. Nevertheless, various things that had been developed in the labs, which had weapons-related potential, it wasn't just a question of keeping a nuclear stockpile safe, it was a matter of

actually developing things that could be used in an active way in U.S. military endeavors. There were, of course, a lot of domestic side effects or payoffs from laboratory weapons, for example, a lot of developments in biotechnology, in electronic, computer-related things, which ended up in the public sector. And so it did have a stimulus in that way in civilian life.

Nevertheless, it was a very hot and remains a very hot issue. It was even hotter then. So seeing that close-up, not as a person who had any expertise in these areas, and sitting on several committees—I sat for a total of five years, even after I had left the chairing on the [Academic Council], on the Environmental Safety and Health, ES&H, which met at the various labs, so I had to get security clearance in order to do that. The technical name of that is Q clearance. So what was I, as a gay faculty member, doing—they had the guy from the FBI coming around and interviewing people on campus. The major concern was whether I was blackmailable.

**Reti:** Wow. A generation earlier you would not have passed security clearance.

**Cowan:** But no, I wasn't, because when I was interviewed I said, "No, I have a partner." It was very interesting. It was the security part of that that was at stake.

I was also involved with union negotiations, particularly the lecturers' and TA unions, and I remember trying to serve as a kind of informal mediator. There was a vice president at the Office of the President and his staff whose role was to take a very, very tough line on union negotiations and not to give an inch if possible. And the unions, of course, were pushing back. I was, frankly, very

sympathetic to a lot of the union considerations, particularly the lecturers' situation, because they didn't have security of employment. Out of that came the kind of six-year eye of the needle review, and the possibility of, if you passed that, of indefinite renewable contracts. I do remember negotiations over salaries and all but the issue of security of employment was a very important part of the negotiations. So it was, again, fascinating to watch both sides of that equation there.

I was also involved in the planning of UC Merced, which, given this campus's history, was particularly interesting. As you probably know, there was a great deal of skepticism about the founding of a tenth campus—

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** —a feeling that it would divert resources from the rest of the University. Small developing campuses like Santa Cruz were certainly very concerned about that. But it was a fairly general feeling among the faculty, I think, on the other campuses, and I think even some of the administrators. But the argument was that we needed a campus in the Central Valley. In fact, David Gardner had proposed that when he was president to meet the anticipated growth of the number of students who we would get in California. It was also a very political decision because the University very much wanted to cultivate legislators in the Central Valley, and they thought that by locating [a campus] there it would give UC a basis. So there was a big debate about where the campus would be located, just as there had been when Santa Cruz was located. And finally Merced was

chosen, very much as in the case of Santa Cruz, because a foundation that was associated there promised a lot of free land.

So the debates about the location of the campus were really interesting. But then the debates about, then, where in the Merced area the campus would actually be located were also very interesting. The site was changed a couple of times. The senate established a committee to act as essentially the senate committee for the campus until faculty started arriving in Merced and could actually form their own Academic Senate. So I was *ex officio* there along with chairs of several major senate committees.

One of the major issues was, of course, the environmental issue, something that surprised everyone. Initially, the campus was supposed to be located in an area that turned out had vernal pools. These were small pools of water that appeared in the winter with the rains and then dried up. But there was a small creature called the fairy shrimp that lived in these pools and during the dry season would essentially hibernate and then come back out. And environmentalists—not in Merced because Merced was not a terribly environmentally conscious community—but from the state, objected to the initial location of the campus because it included some of these vernal pools. And so finally, in order to avoid ongoing lawsuits, the campus was located basically on an old golf course that was at the outskirts of Merced.

It did remind me, watching those environmentalist fights, that if this campus [UCSC] had been proposed to be built in 2000—because the planning for

[Merced] started in the late nineties and I was there around 2000, 2001—it would never have been located here. It could never have been located here. The environmentalist movement, as well as the local community's sensibility, would have prevented it. I think that would have been the case even in 1980. So there was a funny window in the early 1960s before the politics of Santa Cruz changed which made possible the location here. It was one of these strange, contingent moments in the history of our own campus. And watching the debates, political and otherwise, at Merced made me very much aware [of the factors going into Santa Cruz's own founding].

I got very interested in the campus's academic programs, and in the structures also, because it seemed to me that, given my Santa Cruz experience, that there were some things that Merced might learn from our experience. And one of the things that I proposed and wrote a white paper on was that instead of having too much of a multifaceted administrative structure, the social sciences, arts, and humanities ought to be within one school on the campus. I proposed that there be an engineering school—they felt from the outset that they had to have some sort of professional school right away; they were going to take advantage of engineers from the labs at Lawrence Livermore to anchor that school. And they obviously needed a School or a Division of Natural Sciences because this was going to be that something that the [Central] Valley would find of practical use, so you had to have some practical programs and science programs.

But my thought was that the campus could take advantage of its situation by looking for a more integrated approach to those other areas. So I wrote a white

paper which, among other things, argued that there should be a limited number of majors initially, a limited number of departments, particularly, and any department might house more than one major, and that as the campus grew some of those majors might [separate] off into other departments. But initially you'd bring people together from a variety of areas, essentially create interdisciplinary boards of studies, even if they were administering a series of disciplinary programs, and also some interdisciplinary programs. I suggested, for example, a kind of California studies or global studies. I thought that hiring of faculty should be focused on bringing faculty together who had wide-ranging teaching interests but [also] common or related research interests, so that from the outset you'd be forming research clusters of faculty, so that individual faculty wouldn't be isolated. Trying to overcome what was [at UCSC a] kind of Noah's ark process. And then one, I argued, should build graduate programs around those collective research interests of the faculty rather than assume that you needed a separate graduate program in English and so forth.

Many of those recommendations were finally embodied. They do have a School of Social Science, Humanities, and Arts. They have a graduate program in global studies. And they have a graduate program in what's called world literatures and cultures, which has a kind of Hispanic-focused, transatlantic focus, and then an English-speaking focus that includes Australia and New Zealand and other parts of the world where English is spoken. And they're kind of holding companies. Now, I don't know how much interaction is done by research, but at least the goal was to try to create a structure where that would be possible,

particularly in a very small campus trying to get going. Anyway, that was a very interesting experience.

Another experience that I was involved in was called the Commission on the Support and Growth of Graduate Education. It was a very large body. It included several chancellors, including M.R.C. Greenwood. We were the only Santa Cruz folks on that committee. And its goal was to recommend to the Regents a strategy for growing and supporting graduate programs to meet statewide needs, of course, for people with advanced graduate professional degrees, and to meet UC campus ambitions to increase their graduate and professional populations. Part of the notion was to bring to the Regents a strategy which would do that and also sell the strategy to folks that had to fund such work, mainly in the state, in particular.

Everybody recognized at that time that it was increasingly hard to develop a lot more graduate programs and professional programs, given the reluctance of the state to provide funding for those kinds of activities, and the need to go after private resources, foundations and all. So it was an interesting exercise in systemwide ambitiousness. (laughs) Whether it had much of an impact remains to be seen, but it was a way of pulling together a lot of data about what the campuses were doing, what the campuses wanted to do. So it was very interesting to look at this campus's ambitions in the context of that and to figure out what might be possible for this campus within the frame of the universitywide's ambitions, which to a certain extent, as with the law school, involved competition between campuses.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** But MRC was a very eloquent spokesperson for graduate programs. She had been graduate dean at Davis, and so she was very experienced there, and had a sense of what it took to develop graduate programs. And her being there was also an occasion for making sure that the kind of concerns we had weren't left out of the equation. I, at one point, looking for a few sellable sound bites, proposed that we talk about an intellectual energy crisis in the state. The state was having brown outs during this period.

**Reti:** Oh, I remember that.

**Cowan:** (laughs) So I argued that we had a danger of brown out by not producing the kind of advanced talent that we needed to serve the state. Anyway, that was my very modest contribution. But it was fascinating to watch. It had Regents on it. It had alumni. It had people in the president's office, people from the Academic Senate, people from other sectors of industry on it. So it was very interesting to be a part of.

The other such large group I was part of was something called the Presidential Humanities Commission. This was a product of Helene Moglen's efforts when she was representing us on the Academic Council. She had argued that, given all the emphasis on graduate growth and on research, the humanities were being neglected. So she proposed a commission. She was very persuasive, so Dick Atkinson agreed. Now, I happened, as a humanist, to be the vice chair of the council when this possibility came up. So I took the lead, working with the

president's office, to form that committee. And one of the first things I did was to persuade Hayden White to cochair the commission. And then he and I, and the other cochair, who was a dean at Irvine, essentially formed a committee with a lot of heavy hitters from the campuses—people like Judith Butler, for example; Wendy Brown, who had left here but was at Berkeley, was on the commission. I was also concerned that there be a significant presence of women and scholars of color on the committee. And the campuses, for the most part, were generating names that were a part of the usual cadre. So I suggested that we bring in a couple of people from major universities in the private sector, USC and Stanford. And in doing so, I was able to bring a couple of scholars of color onto the committee.

**Reti:** So I'm confused about why you would, if it was a UC commission—

**Cowan:** The notion was to develop a case for the importance of the humanities to the University, as a service to the campus. Part of our goal was to make a large case for the humanities, and the other major California institutions that were involved were a part of that. So it was a part of that and to show that we weren't simply being provincial on behalf of UC.

**Reti:** I see. To meet the broader needs of the state's population.

**Cowan:** That was the way we framed it. I must say, as we were trying to wrestle with the draft, there was that whole question of how defensive in tone our report would be, because there was a sense of the humanities being under assault, and you could have a defensive posture—oh, yes, we really are valuable—that kind

of argument. It was the problem that humanities nationally had been facing for years. And so there was a somewhat defensive element to it. After all, the humanities enrollments were declining relative to other parts of the University, certainly declining university attention in terms of where the investments were going. But we argued for the social value of the humanities, for the importance of literacy in a broad sense, cultural and technological literacy as very important, argued, of course, for more bucks. (laughs) I mean, that was really the bottom line—more for graduate student support, more for faculty research support. We urged more multicampus collaboration on behalf of the humanities. We also argued that the humanities should be supported in reaching out to K-12, both by bringing the University to classrooms in the humanities in the high schools, and also by bringing teachers from the high schools to the campuses for conferences, for special workshops, as a part of their own development. That was a part of our public service.

A lot of this, of course, was dependent on what individual campuses were willing to do. And there were a few campuses that were doing a great deal, and other campuses simply weren't very interested in it. And so, because it had a lot of [requested] money attached, not very much happened to it. It was more interesting to see how the humanities could frame itself in the times, which were beginning to be growth times again, at least for that decade, but were ones that were not necessarily favorable to growth in the humanities.

Anyway, I was involved in a couple of other things that might be worth mentioning. One was that I was a member of what was called the Intersegmental

Committee of the Academic Senates. This consisted of representatives of the community college Academic Senates, the CSU Academic Senates, and UC Academic Senates.

**Reti:** Very interesting. I didn't realize there was such a body.

**Cowan:** It was a body that met once a quarter, about three times a year, and the chair rotated among the three segments. And so it happened that when I was chair of the Academic Council, it was UC's turn. So I chaired that for a year. It was fascinating to have conversations across those lines and look for common ties, because each of us had our own interests and it was very easy to see us competing for shrinking resources in this state. But my view, and I think the view of many of the members of the committee, was to look for things in which we could find common cause, that is to make a case for higher education as a whole. There were some interesting tensions there, because the chancellor of the CSU system was pushing very hard for CSU to get the right to offer its own doctoral degrees.

**Reti:** Yes, I've had this conversation with some other narrators and it's a major contradiction.

**Cowan:** That's right. That would have forced a modification of the Master Plan for Higher Education in California. What finally emerged was a kind of compromise, which was a proposal that UC campuses and CSU campuses could propose joint doctoral degrees. But this was a part of the fight.

The other major issue had to do with transfer students—how one could ease the way for community college students to move into the CSU and UC systems. And that was not necessarily an easy thing. There were certain parts of it that one could address, such as making sure that, if the students achieved a certain grade point average in a set of courses at a community college, every UC campus would count that as meeting the general education or breadth requirements for their particular campuses. Harder was to persuade every UC campus, which meant every department, to allow the lower-division courses that were taken at a community college to count to satisfy the prerequisites of the majors. And every department had its own right to decide what could be met. So trying to coordinate that was a real challenge. Anyway, it was a fascinating experience to work with members of the other segments on this. I really enjoyed that.

The other big thing I was involved in, and perhaps the thing that I was most interested in, had to do with admissions. In 1995, as we've talked about, the Regents passed SP1 and SP2, one of which essentially barred the University [of California] from using race and ethnicity as criteria for admission. And then Proposition 209 made that a statewide mandate. I was chair of our division when that emerged, and although I didn't talk about it last time, that became a major topic of senate meetings on this campus during 1995 and 1996. And I even had to call a special meeting of our division to deal specifically with that, because there was a resolution that was going around the campuses that would protest the Regents' decision.

It's very interesting that there were two different lines of argument for protesting the decision. One was substantive, that is, that the Regents were in effect preventing us from engaging in what we thought was important, affirmative action on behalf of creating a diverse student body and a diverse faculty body. That was something that was not universally shared. I mean, there were quite a few faculty in the system who really agreed with those Regents who had pushed SP1 and SP2, that students should be judged based on their own individual merit and not on the basis of their membership in a particular group that was declared underrepresented. And Ward Connerly, who was, of course, the Regent who led this battle, argued that it was certainly appropriate to look at issues of income, that is, if a student had overcome handicaps as a result of being low income or being in a poor school, that that was individual merit. But to automatically assume that an upper-middle class African American or Chicano should deserve favorable treatment was, to his way of thinking, not appropriate. I think many of us felt that, although there was some merit to that argument, it missed the larger point of what we wanted as a system to do. Private universities could basically have carte blanche in forming their classes to meet a variety of larger institutional needs. And so we felt to focus admissions only on the individual, and not on the institution's interest, was a real mistake.

The other major objection to SP1 and SP2 was that the Regents hadn't really consulted the senate. The Regents had delegated long before to the Academic Senate, the responsibility—it was a Regental allocation—but the responsibility for determining the criteria for admission to the University. And the Regents in

doing this [adopting SP 1 and 2] had not only not consulted with the senate, but had essentially taken back powers that they had delegated to the senate, without that kind of consultation. It was right, technically, but it was not a great way of handling it. Those were issues that really had to do with shared governance. So in addition to this immediate issue, there was a larger issue of the faculty's role in shared governance.

Now, there were a couple of things coming together at the same time, and I think it's useful to distinguish between eligibility—that is, what it means to be eligible to be considered a part of the top 12.5 percent of the high school students in the state who would be eligible to come to a UC campus, not necessarily a specific campus, but a campus, and admissions. That is, out of that eligible group, what can any particular campus do in selecting a particular cadre of the eligible students if it has more eligible students applying than it has slots to fill? Those were separable issues that often got confused. But there were a number of things going on in terms of the eligibility. For example, BOARS, which was the major senate committee that was charged with recommending eligibility criteria, had been, even before I came to the council, exploring the possibility of what was called "eligibility in a local context," that is, to have a certain portion of the students that were admitted to the University be eligible because of their standing in their own high school classes.

**Reti:** Do you mean geographically?

**Cowan:** Yes. The thought was, what if you have a school that is in a very poor area, a rural area or an urban area, and it simply doesn't have all the classes, the advanced placement classes and others things that give you an edge up in terms of being admitted, in terms of taking SAT's, the scholastic aptitude tests, and so forth? But if you were in the top percentage of your school, that would indicate that you had at least worked very hard to achieve relative to what was available in that school. So BOARS was trying to find a way of pursuing, using eligibility and local contexts as eligibility criteria for at least a certain percentage of the students. The big debate was then over the percentage of those students. I remember at least some Regents arguing, well, students at the bottom of the 12.5 percent probably are not very good anyway. The notion that they were already in the top twelve and a half percent didn't seem to be an important criterion. So there was resistance to that. There was finally a compromise; I think 4 percent of the eligibility pool could come from the so-called local school criteria.

So that was one thing going on in terms of eligibility criteria. The other element of eligibility had to do with the relative weight of the grade point average, and the scores on the SAT tests. There was a general test, SAT 1, and then a series of individual subject tests called the SAT 2 test. Now, Dick Atkinson, when I was vice chair, had himself taken the initiative to argue that the SAT 1 was not a good predictor of academic performance at the university level. It gave too much weight to certain kinds of skills but not others. His argument was that the SAT 2 tests, the subject tests, were a much better predictor of performance. So BOARS was very much involved with that. I was not officially a member of BOARS, but I

took a great deal of interest. And so I sat in on all the BOARS meetings for that because it was important to me to be informed.

So these two things came together, the eligibility criteria and the relative weight of GPA's and SAT's, and which SAT's were a part of that. There was a lot of studying done, a lot of statistical analyses, and persistence rate studies, and all sorts of things were going on there.

The other issue was the issue of whether students would be admitted by formula to the campuses. For example, if Berkeley had four times as many eligible students applying to it, should it be mandated to simply use a formula based on GPA, SAT's, and so forth, to admit those students? Or should it have more discretion? And Berkeley had pioneered, within the UC system, what was to be called the comprehensive approach to admissions, which was to take account of a lot of other factors. And there were a lot of debates about that, but it was trying to act more like private schools within this framework, and particularly was interested in that because it had lost some students of color, not Asian American students, who were meeting these criteria and were often at the top, but had lost Latino and African American students to this. And so internally Berkeley was trying to find a way of dealing with this. Other campuses, like UCLA, were very much resisting using comprehensive exams or criteria for admission. They really wanted to be able to brag that their students had extraordinarily high SAT scores, or extraordinarily high GPA averages. So every campus was approaching this differently. That part of the debate was not terribly relevant for our campus because we were still having to take every eligible student.

**Reti:** Because we were still trying to grow.

**Cowan:** We were still trying to grow, and we weren't yet what we called selective. In any event, all this came together finally, and after a lot of back room negotiations that involved a very skillful vice president and a very powerful and skillful regent, in April of 2001, the Regents—essentially the proposal was that they rescind SP 1 and 2. And in a mixed vote they agreed to do that. Part of their argument was that, well, Proposition 209 now is a state law and so it's no longer necessary to have SP1 and 2.

**Reti:** Why would that be meaningful, to rescind something that is already superseded by California law?

**Cowan:** Because it was a way of acknowledging the shared governance. And I was really at the center, and I remember speaking when Regents, during the meeting where they did this, were arguing that the faculty would use this as a way of trying to get around 209. That was a constant refrain. I argued that we took very seriously our responsibility to work within the frame of 209, to apply appropriate criterion to determine the eligibility for admission, but that the Regents needed to trust the faculty, that we were accountable to the Regents but they should not preempt our delegated responsibility. And I remember that after the vote Ward Connerly passed a small note over to me saying, "I believe that I need to give every Academic Council chair the benefit of the doubt in one vote that comes before me. This is my one vote."

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So he voted for the rescission of SP1 and 2, but wanted to make clear his objections.

**Reti:** It was a one-shot deal.

**Cowan:** Anyway, I felt very pleased about that. It's certainly not something I can take credit for. BOARS and the president's office came together to make a proposal and work with some key Regents to do it. But symbolically it certainly was a very important action.

Now, interestingly enough, there was, ironically, a benefit to this campus by 209. Because we were taking all eligible students and Berkeley was not able to do so, and was handicapped, if you will, or tied by 209. We, I think, picked up some students of color, some Latino and African American students on this campus that we would otherwise have not picked up. Because we didn't have to apply it differently. If they were eligible and they applied, then we could admit them. So we didn't have to go through [an elaborate selection process], at least at that point. And I think that, although I haven't looked at the data, I think that one could probably trace the increase in our own proportions of students in part to 209. And once we achieved a certain number of [underrepresented] students at this campus, there was a kind of building effect, because they would go back and talk to their friends in high school and it became a place that was increasingly seen as not unfriendly to students of color. So it was a very interesting, ironic side effect of 209.

### **Faculty Advisor to Chancellor MRC Greenwood**

Well, I think that's probably enough to say about my time at the Academic Council. At the end of that—we met year round in the Academic Council and we were meeting in July—but I remember in the summer of 2001, shortly before I was to end my time as chair, M.R.C. [Greenwood] asked me to have lunch with her, and she said that she would like me to come into her office as a faculty advisor. Now, it turned out that Dick Atkinson had had such a faculty advisor in his office when he was chancellor of San Diego. So he had suggested, I think, to M.R.C. that this might be a useful thing for her to have. He probably felt that I needed something to keep me busy. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** So he had suggested—and I, of course, had worked with M.R.C. in other contexts. So I agreed to a 40 percent position in her office. I had a sabbatical coming and I wanted to find a way of keeping my own research going, and I had some teaching and other responsibilities. So I finally agreed to do it, and I suggested that I not be called a faculty advisor but a senior advisor. I don't know why. Maybe I was getting old and I thought senior looked like I had more weight. (chuckles)

Now, that was interesting. It could be considered an experiment that was never tried again (laughs), for there's never been such a position again in that office. I think it was an awkward position. I wasn't a line officer. I didn't have a formal set of responsibilities, no formal authority. I think that other senior

administrators initially viewed my arrival with a certain amount of skepticism or at least confusion about what was happening. I think what M.R.C. wanted was somebody who could offer informal thoughts about faculty views on a variety of things, serve as a kind of informal liaison from her office to a variety of groups, that would not wire around the senate's channels, which I was a strong advocate of, but do some things in the interstices that might not be done otherwise. So I was a part of her inner cabinet, which met once a week, six, seven people and other people brought in. And again, it was a funny position to be in for a while.

So she suggested—she didn't have any particular things she wanted me to do—she suggested a couple of things, but suggested that I look for projects in which I might be useful and take on one or two a year. And I'll mention a couple of those.

I got involved in a number of things. I was involved in the later stages of the revision of the campus plan, a ten-year plan which had been inaugurated by John Simpson in his role as campus provost in around 1999, 2000. And so I came in when the preliminary work had been done and they were trying to finish up that plan. Interestingly enough, it was a plan which focused on the campus's becoming and solidifying a presence as a national player. So visibility was one of the most important goals. There was even a committee that M.R.C. had appointed on the campus image. (laughs) The goal was to brand the campus, to find a slogan. I, at one point proposed that we use the term "Santa Cruz: A Campus on the Edge." I thought, cutting edge. And David Klinger strongly

objected, I remember, he was on that group. He objected because he said it made it sound like we were about ready to fall off. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** But anyway, I think there was that whole notion of trying to make us visible, and of course part of that was to gain visibility through higher-powered research and, to make that visible, to upscale our publicity. Also, one goal there was to move to being able to claim selectivity in our admissions. And during this period we did, finally, start being able to have modest selectivity, not very much, but enough for us to brag that we weren't admitting every eligible student. Now, we, at that time, were the only campus outside of Riverside—and then, of course, Merced was coming later—that didn't have the claim to selectivity. Santa Barbara had gotten that around 2000, 2001, and made a big thing out of it. And that was another thing that we wanted to do as a part of showing that we had prestige.

Another part of it, of course, was graduate and professional growth. M.R.C. worked very hard to get the engineering school that had been long time aborning up and running. One of her major ambitions was to get us membership in a rather elite group of U.S. universities called the American Association of Universities, the AAU. About sixty, seventy universities in the United States—it was an organization founded around the turn of the last century, about 1900. And all the other UC campuses, except for San Francisco, which was not a general campus, and Riverside and Santa Cruz were members of the AAU. One of the problems was [that] to be a member of that group you had to meet a

variety of criteria, including research output, grants, size of library—a whole range of criteria. And M.R.C. was focusing on trying to do things in this campus that would get us to that membership, which was, again, putting ourselves along with the other UC campuses in that membership, as well as this rather elite group nationally. She tried very hard and it didn't happen. It still has not happened. I think budget cuts probably are the major reason it hasn't happened. But the campus is still trying, if a little more quietly, to achieve that goal.

One of the criteria was to have our library designated, become a member of the Association of Research Libraries, which is, again, about a hundred university libraries in the country, or something. But that depends a lot on the number of volumes, the budget for the library, all of those criteria. And we were still not—mainly because of the size of the campus and because we didn't have the graduate programs and professional programs at a time that would have built that part of our library, we just couldn't [meet] the criteria. But she really wanted that to happen, too. So she was trying to find a way of supporting the library too, but in these very difficult times—

Part of the ambitiousness of that ten-year plan was, of course, to raise more external funds, because there was a feeling that there was no way we were going to achieve what we wanted to without that. So she was very active in ties to Silicon Valley, the NASA-AMES agreement, where she was able to win our campus's administration of that from Berkeley, which also wanted it. It was a measure of her skill and determination to establish a major foothold in Silicon Valley. And, of course, for fundraising and visibility and a lot of other purposes,

that was certainly a very important achievement. It also helped this campus deal with some issues around enrollment and space, because a part of the ten-year plan, that is up to the year 2010, involved this campus's growing, not merely to 15,000, which had been the goal since the mid-eighties, but to close to 17,000. The administration argued that we had a state mandate to absorb our share of the so-called Tidal Wave II, and that all the campuses had to do their job. It had been the rationale for establishing Merced and all of the other campuses, or, not all the other campuses, not Berkeley and UCLA, but the other campuses were supposed to do their share, including Santa Cruz.

But I think a lot of that 17,000 goal really came from internally. I think that the campus quietly told the Office of the President that they really wanted to have a higher bar than the 15,000. Many faculty wanted that higher bar. In fact, as the next wave in our planning came out, in our Long Range Development Plan of 2005, the one that was going until 2020, many of the faculty were arguing that the campus ought to be up around 22,000, 23,000. Now, you can imagine what that did in terms of both, some people on campus, less faculty at that point, but students, and in terms of what it would do to the environment, but particularly in terms of the city and county leaders. And one of the things I had to do was to sit in a small negotiating group—it wasn't a formal negotiating group—but to talk with city leaders and county leaders, including Mardi Wormhoudt, about that growth. And conscientiously trying to represent the university's position, I at one point indirectly accused Mardi Wormhoudt of having positions that were strangely close to those people who wanted to block immigration into California.

It was a kind of pull up the drawbridge attitude. And rather than see that the Santa Cruz area had a responsibility for trying to be hospitable to a more diverse, which meant a larger group of population, weighing that against environmental and other concerns, but recognizing there was another important responsibility, that this campus also had a responsibility for diversifying its body and it had to do that by growing. Anyway, that was the argument. It was not a happy confrontation. I was unusually undiplomatic. I'm usually better on [such] matters. Anyway, what finally happened, as you know, is when George Blumenthal became chancellor he negotiated the 19,500 figure with the city.

**Reti:** And some of these negotiations were tied to the long range development plan—

**Cowan:** That's right.

**Reti:** Not just the academic plan.

**Cowan:** Oh, no. The long range development plan was an outgrowth of the academic plan. Every time you do an academic plan you have to revise the long range development plan. There were important spatial, environmental, other activities. But this was the time when the campus was trying to make a kind of a final assault on growth. It was really its last opportunity, I think. So it was very interesting to watch all that taking place.

Interestingly enough, we also had a WASC review, a Western Association of Schools and Colleges review, that I was involved in because I was in the

Chancellor's Office during this period. I was involved in drafting parts of [the campus self-study]. Lynda Goff was a major figure in doing that drafting. It involved a lot of people in the office, as well as people in the senate, pulling things together. One of the major themes of that, in addition to the standard themes—we care about undergraduate education and want to be a major research university—was graduate growth. And essentially what the WASC review, which was headed by a very able person, who I think at that time was head of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, said, "You're doing a great job on all sorts of fronts, undergraduate education, research. But your aspirations to grow to 15 percent graduate and professional students are unrealistic."

**Reti:** Why?

**Cowan:** They require funding. It requires support. "The state is not going to provide support. You don't have any obvious plan that will allow you to get to that point." And so they basically said, "We understand the argument but you should face up to the fact that you're probably going to have to achieve what you want to achieve in terms of research distinction and visibility and other things without that percentage of growth." So it was a very interesting exercise to be there.

There are a couple other projects I got, related to, again, looking for ways of being useful during that time. As a part of the academic planning process, M.R.C. wanted to revisit the college question, which remained an ongoing burr under the saddle of the campus. She wanted to get ahead of the accusation that

the campus was really still trying to destroy the college system, didn't care about the college system. And so, at her invitation I wrote a couple of white papers, I think one in 2001 and another in 2003, that were essentially a refinement of some of these themes, where I tried to find another way of approaching the college question. I decided that it was probably important to back up and look, not at the big-level rhetoric that had always surrounded the colleges, but to kind of break it down into parts and ask different kinds of questions about the colleges.

For example, I tried to ask a series of functional questions that started from a campuswide perspective and looked at the colleges within that perspective. One argument I remember making, for example, was that all academic experiences on this campus could also be called social experiences, that every classroom is a social experience as well as an academic experience. And to simply assume that the colleges should have the [major] responsibility for the social experience misses the point that the campus as a whole ought to be asking how it could enhance the social experience of all its work, not just the non-academic or extra-academic, but academic work, that the colleges, then, could play a very important role in that.

I also argued that if you thought about the colleges as space, you could argue that anything that took place in a college, whether it was controlled by the college or not, could be seen as a college activity. It was part of what made the college visible. So that a department office, in the college, was in effect bringing people to the college, which then were a part of the college ambiance, if not being formal members of the college. I also argued that the college could think about its

purview as extending beyond its own physical boundaries. What would happen if colleges decided that they would want to sponsor some campuswide activities for the benefit, not just of their own membership, but of the campus as a whole? What would happen if colleges got together to sponsor joint activities—social, cultural, conferences?

**Reti:** Well, doesn't that happen fairly often?

**Cowan:** It is happening more. It had been happening. But I argued that it been happening almost in a happenstance way, not because it was seen as a mission that the colleges pursue. Individual provosts were pursuing possibilities. But it wasn't as if there was anything approaching a kind of explicit, coherent approach to this. I was making an argument of taking a lot of stuff that was happening and seeing it as a part of the campus mission. So instead of being apologetic about it, the campus could brag about the fact that the colleges were serving a multitude of missions and had a multitude of constituencies.

Another thing I argued, not successfully—nominally every new ladder faculty was supposed to be assigned, made a fellow of a college. But that wasn't happening uniformly. Many faculty were coming to the campus, particularly people in the sciences who had offices centrally, and were not really being a part of the colleges. And many of the colleges, even if they were assigned [faculty], the provosts were uneven in terms of trying to take advantage of that. In fact, if the colleges went after those faculty, it was often to ask them to do something like advise, rather than asking, "How can we be of service to you, help you in

your work? Is there anything that we can do for your department, for example, such as provide a space for an informal meeting, like a provost's house?" Some provosts were doing that, but many were not. So it was a way of trying to do that. And I argued that, in fact, maybe we should get away from the notion that every faculty should be a fellow of a college—or, that just because you have an office which was located in a college that should mean that you should be a formal fellow. And by formal fellow, I mean having bylaw voting rights in the colleges. Because the colleges maintained their official status as academic units, which meant that the academic program of the college needed to be voted on by the fellows of the college.

**Reti:** And the academic programs of the college at that point would be the core course and the advising program?

**Cowan:** And graduation requirements. For example, colleges had the opportunity, as they do at San Diego, to require that all of the students in their college take a particular department course before their graduation. I mean, to set graduation requirements that would not be inconsistent with what the campus did, but could be in addition to that. Technically, the colleges were the ones who were awarding degrees to the students.

**Reti:** Right. So is this vestigil at this point, this academic authority of the colleges?

**Cowan:** Well, it had become somewhat vestigil. Essentially, the provosts [as individuals] had become the kind of de facto boards of studies. In some colleges

there were advisory committees, but the provosts, or the provost's staff were essentially making a lot of these judgments. So I argued that every college should have at least an executive committee of fellows, and that there ought to be incentives to do it, that there should be some financial or other support to do that. And that not every faculty member should necessarily be a part of a college, but that every college to [meet its] academic responsibility—I was wearing my senate hat, as you can see—should do something like that. It would be a way, I thought, of making sure there was a committed group of faculty concerned with making sure that the academic parts of the college's dimensions were still being taken seriously. And I thought that there were groups of interested faculty in the colleges. I even argued that if colleges were given resources, they even could negotiate with boards of studies to offer specific courses of interest to college membership, but they needed resources to do that. So it was partly a plea for finding a certain proportion of academic resources that could go to the colleges, but within a certain set of mandates.

Anyway, like many white papers that I wrote, this disappeared into somebody's file, and not much happened with it as a kind of systematic activity, although there are individual provosts, certainly, who are pursuing aspects of these interests. I'm not claiming these as my ideas, but I was trying to pull together ideas that I thought were in the atmosphere. And I thought that it was important that the central administration show, not just in rhetoric, but in substance, that there were some things that they could do within the limits of their budget and within the frame of the way the campus was developing to make this happen.

**Reti:** Well, so did M.R.C. take some of these ideas and run with them?

**Cowan:** Well, I think she did, but it has to do with then the turnover. Some of these things were emerging— I can talk a little about that in a minute.

**Reti:** Okay.

**Cowan:** One of the specific assignments she gave me was the notion of developing a proposal for a graduate college. This had been something that had been around, rather vaguely, for some time, but she really thought that it was something that she might be able to raise funds for. She thought that a graduate college could be an important recruiting tool for graduate students too, if we were trying to build graduate enrollments and also to build a high quality cadre of graduate students and have a competitive edge over other universities competing for the same students that we wanted for graduate work.

So I wrote a white paper around 2002, 2003, sometime in this period. And I spent several meetings talking to the Graduate Council to try to get their support. And I think on the whole they were pretty sympathetic with it. The proposal was to have a college which wouldn't necessarily have housing attached. It would be more of an experience designed to reduce isolation, to provide some graduate student social and psychological support, to give a sense of community across lines, to link graduate students living on campus and off campus, to encourage interdisciplinary interactions between students from various fields. I thought it could involve faculty. You would have a group of faculty who would be fellows of the college, and you could have a fund to sponsor colloquia and talks. A lot of

things to try to make the graduate students' life itself richer here, and also to use that as part of trying to persuade more graduate students to come, to make the campus more visible externally as somebody doing something. So I thought it was a good idea and I thought I wrote a pretty good paper.

And again, it kind of disappeared because—M.R.C. really saw it as something that she might be able to use funds for; the graduate student building was coming on line about then. And that was about all that could happen. I was less interested in physical space per se than the structure that would be a programming structure. And it hasn't happened yet. It could very well happen at some point. It's just one of those unfinished businesses that are still there. But anyway, it was fun for me to write these kinds of papers. It played into my habit of liking to write think pieces.

**Reti:** We should archive these in Special Collections, if possible.

**Cowan:** "Collected unacted upon papers by Michael Cowan." (laughs)

Another paper I wrote, which I had given to John Simpson as a part of the academic planning process was a paper I called "Ravines and Bridges." I was interested in both the literal and metaphorical barriers and connections on the campus. It is, as you know, a theme of mine. But barriers and bridges can be built between divisions, between divisions and colleges, between the colleges themselves, between graduates and undergraduates. It was a very short piece, but basically looking for some memorable language to capture this kind of goal.

I also wrote a paper in the spring of 2002 called "Strengthening a Leadership Ethos." And this was a paper in which I argued that we had a very strong service-oriented culture and had from the outset, but there had not been enough attention, I thought, to thinking of ourselves as a place that generated leaders—among students, among faculty, among staff. And that we wanted to be known for leaders with a certain kind of set of values: a sense of social responsibility, a sense of being able to make a difference in a whole range of fields. Leadership can be a scary thing. People think of it as something that satisfies egos or a lust for power. But I think of it often as a burden, as a responsibility. I think that a lot of people, certainly colleagues of mine, would rather hide from leadership positions because it puts you in the crossfire. You have to be accountable in certain ways. And it's easy, simply, to hide as a part of the more anonymous group of people. It wasn't that leaders hadn't emerged, and some terrific ones—students, faculty, staff, administrators—but I thought it was something that could involve more attention. Thinking of leadership itself as a vital form of service to the campus and its units. It involved trying to build more trust across lines of the campus so that you immediately didn't assume that if you were a leader the only thing you were going to be doing is working on behalf of the narrow agendas of whatever organization you were at. So asking for leaders who were statespersons, citizens in the larger sense.

I also thought that the campus ought to be encouraging more creative risk taking, that a lot of what I thought had been done had been often rather cautious. Now, M.R.C. was a risk taker in many ways, I think. She was pretty bold. She

wasn't alone. We've had a number of them. But I thought that in terms of a number of things the campus might have done, we could encourage that. And I thought that strengthening the culture of collaboration as well as creating competition was an important part of the campus ethos and that could be strengthened and encouraged. Anyway, that was another one of those pieces that went into somebody's file.

Oh, I also, I think it was [pause] September of 2001, after I had just come back from the Academic Council, M.R.C. asked me to chair her annual conference. It was a conference that brought together staff and faculty and senior administrators. It was a kind of pep rally. It was also in the wake of the long range development plan and the academic plan. And so I used [my opening remarks] as an occasion for pursuing a lot of the themes that I've talked about. I won't bother quoting from it. But it was essentially many of these themes: that we needed to recognize the need for creative energy and collaboration; it was a real opportunity for us to do that.

### **Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood**

I haven't said anything about M.R.C. I think that the major thing I might say was that I really enjoyed working with her. She, as you know, was a vivid personality. I referred to her in one of my public remarks as a *whirlwind*. She really moved through the landscape. She was very sociable, easy in all sorts of crowds. She was quite creative, I thought, and was constantly looking for new ways of solving problems. She pushed very hard and some people don't like to

be pushed very hard. But I think she did a series of very important things for the university and she was around long enough to, I think, really make a difference. I've mentioned a couple of things: the NASA-AMES initiative, the Silicon Valley. She was great at fundraising. I think she really revved up the campus's commitment to and ability to go after significant fundraising. And that is a work still in progress, as you know.

The University Center is another real example of her creative thinking. Here they were building a college, which had state funds, and then the loans coming for building student housing. And she, being frustrated with the campus's ability to get a faculty club anywhere, proposed that we use the building of Colleges Nine and Ten as an occasion for building this, which meant building it as a part of it, as you will, on top of the dining hall, and doing it with private funds. And so, she took the initiative to go out and solicit lots of funds from faculty administrators and from people in the community to build that, and called it University Center. It was meant not just for faculty, but for the entire university community. It was shrewd and it was appropriate. It was something that was possible to do that couldn't have been done if you were looking for a separate place to put a building and were going through Great Meadow debates and all of that.

And although it's a place that doesn't have a lot of parking around and that's probably the major handicap, and in that sense is invisible, it still is a place that—because it has several conference rooms, including a dining room that can be used and is large—provided a physical base that has continued to evolve and be

a very important resource for the campus. And creatively putting together lots of different funding, including, very significantly, the private funding that she solicited, not just from outside, but equally important, from inside the membership of the campus. There's a wall that has names of lots of donors on it and individual rooms that are named. I think it may have been one of the first places on campus where they started naming individual rooms or fireplaces or other things for particular donors. She was very entrepreneurial in that way and created and set an example that the campus is now pursuing in a lot of other ways. The library is a good example of that.

Well, anyway, I also thought that her staff was terrific, as is the case for staff throughout the campus, who are often appreciated only rhetorically and not in the substantive way that they need to be. She had an extremely able group of people around her and often unsung, but absolutely essential to, not only to the running of this office, but to this campus. They can make an administrator look great, and they can, if they're not good, make an administrator look terrible. (laughs)

Anyway, M.R.C. was active, and then there was a series of transitions during the time I was in the office. In 2003, John Simpson suddenly announced that he was taking a position as chancellor of the SUNY-Buffalo campus. And so Martin Chemers was brought in as campus provost, executive vice chancellor, from his position as dean of social sciences. And then a year later, M.R.C. was out, to go to the Office of the President, and Marty Chemers was moved up in the role as acting chancellor. And Peggy Delaney, Margaret Delaney came in [as interim

provost and EVC]. Then a search was started for a new chancellor, which resulted in the arrival of Denice Denton just before I was leaving my position. I remained in my position during this transition, but it was clear, first, that I was [still] there because M.R.C. wanted me to be there, and because I had a few projects that I was still involved in that Marty felt that it was appropriate for me to continue to work on. And so when Denice came in, I went out with a little plaque. (laughs)

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** My final big task the last couple of years was to chair the committee for a search for the new university librarian. Lan Dyson had retired and he had an interim replacement. That turned out to be a two-year search. I was the only person outside of the library staff who was involved, and I was chairing the search. Consistent with my general philosophy, I had always thought of the library as being critical to the health of the campus. And I thought that it could become an even more dynamic place than it had been, not merely to be an archive of materials, if you will, waiting for people to come to take advantage of it, but an entity which facilitated interaction across all sorts of lines, which pulled parts of the campus together, which reached out. And, of course, then a librarian who could deal with the challenges of fundraising and the digital age and all of those things.

The library staff who were on the committee were an active, feisty, smart, committed bunch. And the first year resulted in essentially finding nobody who

they agreed on to come. We finally suggested a couple of names of some people but nobody was willing to come. And so Marty decided he would appoint a search firm to help us in the next year and identify people. Fortunately for us, Ginny Steel, who had not been interested in the first year because she had only recently gone, I guess, to Washington State, as a librarian, and felt it was premature for her to be interested, we were able to interest her in the second round. And we were fortunate that that happened. But again, she came after I was out the door. But that was something that took a great deal of my time during that last year.

So I then went to London and spent three years directing one of the Education Abroad Program's study centers. It was initially a two-year appointment but turned out to be three. And then for my sins was asked by the University Provost, Rory Hume, to be acting executive director of the entire EAP operation. So I spent two years in Goleta, [*California*] wrestling with major budget cuts and restructurings, a story that I will not burden you with. And then in June of 2010—even though I was asked to stay on in that position—happily retiring, because I was commuting between Santa Barbara and—I was living down there like a graduate student and commuting every couple of weeks back and forth. And I felt that I had done the damage that I could there by having to deal with some hard budget and structural decisions. And so I figured that was my last major university service. So I came back here happily in July 2010.

### **Oliver Johnson Award**

Oh, one thing I might mention as a sidebar. In 2006, when I was in London, I received a phone call telling me that I had been named as a co-recipient of the Oliver Johnson award, which is given for systemwide service to the Academic Senate. It was an award that was established in 1998 to honor very active members of the Academic Senate. It's given every other year, and sometimes given to a single person and sometimes given to two people. So I was one of the co-recipients of the Oliver Johnson award in 2006. And my co-recipient was Karl Pister. And then, interestingly enough, in 2010 George Blumenthal received the Oliver Johnson award. Of course, he was chancellor here at that time, but had been chair of the Academic Senate four years after me.

There have been to date, including this year—remember there are co-recipients—thirteen recipients of that award. And three of those recipients have been from this campus, one by inheritance, if you will, Karl. But two of us are homegrown. And I think that it's a measure of a certain progress the campus has made to achieving some visibility.

**Reti:** Yes, indeed. Were you teaching during this period?

**Cowan:** I was teaching during the time I was working in M.R.C.'s office. I kept teaching courses for American studies during that period. In fact, in the spring of 2005, my last time there, I had developed, actually, a new course, which I never was able to teach again. (laughs) Yes, I tried to keep my hand in. I thought it was, again, important because one of the concerns I always had was that

administrators, whether they were at the campus level or the systemwide level, got isolated from the texture of dealing with students and with colleagues in that capacity.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** As a peer. I always thought of myself, and I always still think of myself, more as a teacher who took on some administrative responsibilities than as somebody who became an administrator, who moved entirely onto the dark side.  
(laughs)

### **Thoughts on Leadership**

**Reti:** And in terms of, speaking of putting yourself in the crosshairs, so to speak, what advice do you have for people on how to deal with that stress?

**Cowan:** Well, that's a good question. One is that I try not to take things personally. I have always thought that if you move into a role, it's a role. You are an actor in that role. How you perform the role is not unrelated to how you are as an individual, but you have a responsibility for playing the role as well and as responsibly as you possibly can while you are in the role. And so when you're attacked—I chose, perhaps naively, to consider that the attack was of the role and not me. You are never fully successful in separating the two, but I try to separate my sense of myself as a person, as a private person, as a person who had other memberships (laughs), other identities—

**Reti:** Yes.

**Cowan:** —from my particular administrative roles. So that was an important thing.

I think another was my sense of myself as trying to bring people together, bring ideas together, bring people together to help identify common cause in the face of competition, in the faces of differences of opinion, and looking for those things that could be the basis for people joining, could then be the basis for expanding that joining. I used in my presidential address for the American Studies Association the metaphor of a crossroads that I thought the association could be. And I guess I kept looking for ways in which various things in which I was involved could be crossroads, where there could be an honest, respectful exchange of talents, of goods, of all sorts of ideas, experiences. The library is another example of that.

**Reti:** As a crossroads, yes.

**Cowan:** All of these— So for me it was a useful metaphor, maybe another way of talking about bridges, and perhaps the metaphor that is closer to the kind of electronic age, of the Web. You have a web but you also, in terms of all of the intricate kinds of different sorts of relationships, it's good to have a place where elements of that could come together. After all, the Web itself needs some physical spaces where people and electronic impulses come together. So the notion of an active switchboard, a crossroads, something like that—was important.

So I think to be in an administrative position where you are looking for commonalities, ways of creating and strengthening crossroads, was very important. There are a lot of frustrations, and you try not to take them home with you and lose sleep over them. It's not always possible. But I think separating the role—thinking of ourselves as necessary actors on a set of stages was an important part of it. And recognizing that any one role is not the only role that you have in life. We all have multiple identities. That was sort of the theme of American studies. And to ask people to think carefully and creatively about those multiple identities and roles, and the ways that they intersect with each other, the ways they conflict with each other, the way roles sometimes involve inequalities and injustices, but ways in which they can also involve collaboration on behalf of social betterment that are important.

So I don't know that that's advice, but it seems to me that a lot of the major administrators I know, whether they are department chairs or heads of senate committees or senior administrators, are people who have been successful at that. Those are the ones, I think, whose legacies are likely to be the most lasting. But I wouldn't want to make that too much of a generalization.

**Reti:** That makes sense to me, for sure.

### **What Sort of a Story is UCSC? Reflections on the Past and Future**

So now I think we're at the point in our oral history where you can reflect back on where we've come from and where we're going. I was thinking that an effective way to do that might be to return to the paper that you wrote in 1981,

"Institutionalization and the Costs of Innovation: the Santa Cruz Example," in which you used some very evocative metaphors about different literary ways of characterizing the campus: "What sort of story is UCSC? Is it a lyric poem in search of an epiphany? A pastoral romance? A rather diverting, multi-volume serial novel?" You were writing this paper right after reorganization. The enrollment crisis had just happened.

**Cowan:** That's right.

**Reti:** We were really not at that period of growth yet. It was a very different place you were writing about. I was curious about what you would say now, thirty years later. If you were to write a paper like this now, how would you characterize the campus?

**Cowan:** That's interesting. It was a paper that I gave because I was invited to be the keynote speaker at SUNY Buffalo, which had established in the early seventies a sort of residential college system, like many places, cluster colleges. And so I was asked to go. I always felt that it was important that we share our experience outside. There had been a lot of attention [to the UCSC "experiment"]. So whenever I was asked to talk about the campus I tried to do it. And I tried to do it in a way that was reflective, that wasn't simply a celebration, but it was certainly not trying to be a diatribe. I tried to reflect on the nature of the experience and what other places might learn, recognizing that each of us had different institutional and historical situations. And so I tried to find a trope, a master image, if you will, for that. And I found myself asking, what kind of a

story was Santa Cruz? And I decided that I would pursue the notion that it was a kind of multi-volume, nineteenth century novel, one of these, what Henry James called "loose baggy monsters."

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Cowan:** That had lots of parts, things not totally cohering, lots of characters, lots of actors, lots of different agendas. So I played with that, thought about it, tried to divide the campus at the time into three books: the first book was the kind of founding years, and then the period of the late seventies, the mid- to late seventies crisis where lots of things were happening. And then to suggest that we were just in the process of beginning to write the third volume.

And the story that I tried to tell is the story that we've been talking about for the last several weeks. I used the notion of institutionalization and innovation as a way of dealing with it. What was the relationship between them? How innovative was Santa Cruz? How experimental was Santa Cruz? And what happened when you tried to institutionalize various aspects of innovation and experimentation? What were the complexities of that? What were the unanticipated consequences of various forms of institutionalization?

So I was inspecting the language of the campus's founding documents and statements. And I was interested, of course, in thinking about the ways that the campus was symbolizing itself and using its various institutional arrangements as parts of its symbols for, not only displaying itself to itself, but talking about itself to the outside world. So given my professional training and my academic

training, I was interested in that. For example, I was interested in the notion of the campus as being a *tabula rasa*, the notion that it involved a fresh start. I was interested in the context of that understanding of a fresh start, beginning anew, a new eden, a new whatever, a city on a hill, a utopia. That had a long tradition, and trying to locate us within that kind of language.

One aspect of that was the Romantic understanding of the role of nature, of the environment, in the campus. I used the term *pastoral romance* for example. The pastoral in its traditional role and version involves a group of city people leaving the city to go out to the countryside and interacting with the rural folks, and creating a rural harmony and peace away from the corruption and conflicts of the city. The typical structure of the pastoral is eventually those people go back to the city, taking their newfound wisdom and experiences with them to reform the city. And that was part of the whole notion of the city on the hill. But what happens if you go out and then you find yourself stuck out there? Or what are the unintended consequences? I argued that pastoral is really a vision of a world of the sun. It's a daytime world. But what happens if it turns dark? In other words, what's the dark pastoral? "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep," says Robert Frost. But there's something scary about them.

**Reti:** Well, it reminds me—I've always read that the Ohlone people didn't live in the redwoods, because they were not good places to find food and they were dark and scary, probably.

**Cowan:** Yes. That's right. My sense is that once the decision had been made to put the campus here, that, in effect, it offered not only extraordinary beauty, the beauty of the landscape, but that it offered an educational opportunity. The notion that nature was automatically educative, though, which was a very romantic notion—you can see it in Thoreau, and you can see it Emerson, and you can see it in a variety of landscape paintings all through the nineteenth century—I thought that was perhaps questionable. I thought that there needed to be an active approach to understanding the natural environment, not just to look at the environment, but, if you will, the ecological complexities of the environment.

I thought the campus was not really, at the time I wrote this paper, taking full enough advantage of the educative [possibilities of the environment]. I, at one point, had the fantasy—what if, as a part of every core course there was a section on the history of the campus, reminding us that this is a campus that had been ranched, that had been dug out, that had trees cut down. It had a complex human history. And to understand that, [and] to understand the ecological evolution of the natural environment over a long—over not just a few decades or a century or two, but over a long [time]. And to sensitize them more, in effect, to being in a place that was not just a given, but was self-consciously in process. And to recognize that human intervention, as Thomas Church and others had pointed out, was going to have an impact on the environment. So the issue of what stewardship meant was very important, and to set that up in a way that caused really careful, systematic, and not just sentimental, easy thinking about that. Environmental studies was already a program aborning, but when you

think about what's happened since, that's become a much more powerful program that *is* taking advantage of the campus. So things like that happened. But I felt at the time there was too much [of] what I would call a kind of sentimental understanding of nature, [not] recognizing its many parts—and I had made that point in my inaugural lecture in the mid-seventies. So I was doing that again.

Then I used the Buffalo paper also to talk about the checks and balance parts of the campus, the federal system, which McHenry himself had talked about as a checks and balance [arrangement], balancing the colleges and boards and so forth. My argument was that it had some consequences that had not been fully appreciated, that it had created some competition and ravines, if you will, that had not been there initially and that were not necessary to the campus. There had been multiple bufferings of the campus. The campus had been located away from the Bay Area. In the early campus planning documents it talked about [being] "insulated from the urban problems and yet able to take advantage of the resources of the urban area." And we had also buffered ourselves from the city of Santa Cruz by moving up into the redwoods. And then, in turn, the campus had created buffer zones between colleges, between core and colleges and so forth. So I played out that notion a little in the paper. But I concluded that it was really still an evolving story. And I was optimistic. So I tried to end on an upbeat [note].

Now, I look back thirty years later on that and realize that I was so close to everything that was happening that I probably didn't have a fully measured perspective. I was trying to be judicious but I probably had some axes that I was

grinding in that paper. I find myself engaged periodically in what I call a "what if" exercise, which is a trivial, unproductive exercise. But the notion would be, what if, as you look at those founding moments of the campus, if you changed one variable but kept all the rest of the variables the same, would the campus look like? What, for example, if we had ended up overcoming all of the economic and other problems and been located in the Almaden area, the San Jose-Santa Clara area, which was the alternate site, but had instituted the college system, had instituted a narrative evaluation system, had instituted all of the other parts—what would the history of the campus have been?

Asking that in that way, though, is a kind of unproductive question, because it's not clear that if we had located there those other pieces would have fallen into place. We might not have attracted a Page Smith, or certain kind of students. Pressures for different kinds of development—engineering might have developed much earlier over there because there would have been support from an emerging Silicon Valley that might have given us a little political clout. We had no political clout [in Santa Cruz] because we didn't have representatives from major urban areas who were local. Our relationship with San Jose State would have had to be negotiated early and would have made a difference. We wouldn't be having the same kind of environmental battles.

The notion that you change one variable and others could stay the same is simply not likely to have taken place. Anyway, it's fun to play out that way and I can imagine people writing a novel or two about that. Clearly, there are things now that we not only can't change, but won't change, don't want to change.

The location. Our location, for all its complex history, is an important social, psychological, some would say spiritual resource. It's a recruiting resource. It wasn't sufficient as a recruiting resource and that was one of our problems. It was not alone enough to bring enough students and faculty and others here. It's been a fundraising resource, and it's also become a major academic resource for a series of programs. So, given what I've talked about earlier—everything having its costs as well as benefits—it's a benefit that has had a series of significant costs, but it's also been a very significant benefit. In any case, we can't change it and our challenge has been to make the most creative and effective use we can of it.

Our distance from the Bay Area has also had its costs. It's something that we can't change. And as we put programs into place in Silicon Valley and as we become a magnet, in some sense, for people over that distance—that is, think of the number of faculty and staff who live over in the Bay Area. It's created its own problems.

The size of the community that we're a part of can't change. We have been a significant growth element in the community but the same community has now grown up to enough size that they provide a set of resources—shopping, cultural, others—that are valuable for the campus. And if they don't cover the whole range of things that it might be nice to have—we are going to have a Warriors franchise. I think that will be the first big venue, outside of an outdoor venue, that the area has. And whether that's good or bad depends on one's sports views and others. (laughs) Nevertheless, the fact is that wouldn't have happened if the city hadn't been the size it is and had a population that it could

grow into. So I think that has been a resource that is inevitable and something that we are learning to constantly take advantage of and be a good partner in.

I think that our size relative to other UC campuses still offers certain kinds of handicaps. There are certain programs that we are likely to never have because of our size, especially with the truncation of graduate and professional growth. Our goal now, as has been said recently, is to try to grow to 12 percent of our total student body.

**Reti:** The graduate students.

**Cowan:** Yes, from the 10 percent where we are at now. And that may be realistic but 15 percent is no longer. Again, when and if we are ever going to become a member of the Association of American Universities or the Association of Research Libraries—being given what you need in the way of resources—is still an open question. It might happen at some point but it's not certain. And also, an alumni base. If we had had a larger population earlier we would now have a larger alumni base for fundraising and other purposes.

Those are all, relatively speaking, handicaps. Nevertheless, I think we are now large enough to create a critical scale in many of our academic and other areas and to have a range of programs that provide significant visibility for us within the UC system and in the outside world. We wanted to have 15,000 undergraduates in our 27,500 initial plans and we are now actually pretty close to 15,000. What we haven't had is the 12,000 graduate and professional students. But we have essentially achieved our goal at the undergraduate level. And

because there are so many undergraduates, willy-nilly we will have to, and as I think will want to, maintain close attention to undergraduates. That's a different kind of mix, but I think it's a mix that actually could work for our campus.

And then, of course, the campus has had an increasing focus on the applied programs, professional programs, not just within engineering, but in economics, in the digital arts fields. And to meet student interests—and that's affected our ability to bring students of color here and I'd say working-class students whose parents are concerned about upward mobility and the ability to get jobs. So I think we have made some progress and will continue, I think, to see that many of our developments are in those areas on campus. We're not going to have many more opportunities for new programs, but we'll have a few in the research [area], as well as teaching in that area.

A major challenge for the campus remains attrition. It's one of these areas that is constantly talked about but it's something that the campus doesn't want to spend a lot of time advertising. We still have one of the highest attrition rates of all the UC campuses. I think it has to do with some of these other factors I've talked about. Students come here and then decide they want a more urban area, or there are not enough practical programs for them. The fact that we finally, very recently went to, not just optional grades in all our courses, but to mandatory letter grades in all of our courses, except if the senate is willing to give an exemption—

**Reti:** Do we still have evaluations as well?

**Cowan:** They have essentially disappeared. They are optional; they're not mandatory. It's an issue around faculty workload but it's also part of this goal of trying to keep students here. But that remains a challenge. The campus is looking at that, continuing to look at it quietly; it's hard to know what could happen that would dramatically change that attrition rate in the short run.

I think, nevertheless, overall, the campus in 2012 has certainly a greater collective self-confidence than it did in the early 1980s when I was writing that piece. And that's been, with a certain amount of ups and downs, I think steadily there has been progress as the campus has grown in terms of its population and its programs, and as it's had some stable leadership. When you think about the situation of Denice Denton's tragic loss and how that also meant a situation where you suddenly had a chancellor coming in and two years later is gone—and when you think about the other times when we've had a quick turnover—and the fact that although it created some difficulties, it was not something that was not seen as a product of an ungovernable campus, but just a tragic accident. The ranks quickly filled. The campus united behind George [Blumenthal], who was our first homegrown chancellor, another major—in the sense that we were producing leaders out of our own ranks—it was very important.

Maybe two other brief comments. I think the campus has never been as different as it may have wanted to think of itself as being. I think the rhetoric of difference was probably overstated rhetorically in the early years. It wasn't that we weren't in some respects different. But I think that we could argue that any campus is different in various ways. I think a lot of the things that we argued that we were

innovative at weren't, even in the context of public universities and even within the UC system, particularly innovative.

For example, the concern with undergraduate teaching. We place a great deal of concern on that. But I know colleagues at Davis and Berkeley and Irvine and San Diego and the other campuses who are equally dedicated, excellent teachers who spend a lot of time thinking about undergraduates even while they are working with graduate students. I might say that I have over the years myself worked with quite a few graduate students, in literature, and history of consciousness, and some other programs. I've had great experience with them and it's never seemed to me that my work with them has conflicted with my work with undergraduates. In fact, the graduate students have been extraordinarily important resources in working with undergraduates. So I've really enjoyed that. For me, the discussions that have had to do with that kind of dichotomy have never played themselves out. I think that's true of the natural scientists too, when you think about the research teams that pulled graduate and undergraduate students together. So I think that those kinds of differences, those kinds of innovations have been overstated.

There are ways in which we are different and we have, in effect, pulled back from, I think more of an overemphasis on our differences than—I don't think we were that different from the outset, and so the pulling back has been, to a certain extent, an optical event rather than substantive event. Some things, like the loss of much of the academic power of appointments at the colleges, have been a

change. But I think that much of what was going on the campus was there all along.

We were a part of the UC system. We were helped by being a part of the UC system. We were helped through our crisis because we had a salary base that was set by the UC system. We had resources coming to us that were resources coming to the UC system. And so we were helped in very significant ways even when sectors of the campus wanted to argue that we had gone our own way and we were independent of [the system]. But I think that was true all along. We still are different, as various other campuses are different. I'm proud of those differences but I just don't think they should be overemphasized.

And then I guess the final thing is that I've often thought about what this phrase that's often used, Clark Kerr's phrase, "the campus wanting to seem small while growing larger" really meant. In many ways it's a symbolic phrase. "Seem small" is in many ways a statement that covers lots of different things. If you think of it not just in terms of the population of the campus, but in terms of what "seem small" meant: attention to individuals and their development—and that, I would argue, should include staff as well as students and faculty—an emphasis on human-scale interaction; an attention to mutual support, community building, if you will. If you think of that as the meaning of seeming small, then it's interesting to trace the history of the campus. I think we started by saying that we could seem small while growing larger, but with an attention, perhaps undue attention, on one particular mechanism for doing that, which was the residential college system. Where, in fact, that goal could be seen as a campus goal that

could and should and I think, in many respects, does apply to the campus as a whole. I think we went through a period in the 1970s where it seemed that we would seem small because we couldn't be larger. (laughs)

**Reti:** Right.

**Cowan:** And then I think for some it began to seem that we could seem small only if we *didn't* grow much larger. The loss of the faith of the ability to grow larger and at the same time seeming small. But again, if you consider the key meanings embedded in that phrase, I think that today, as we *are* much larger, we do seem small in many different campus locations: we cultivate the attention to individual development, to human-scale interaction, to collaboration in a lot of places. That's what's happening on Science Hill in the labs and in the research groups. It's what's happening in lots of other organizations, including in the college.

I think the library could be seen as a major symbol of that. When you think about the library as a place that cares about individuals and their development—the service given by the library staff has always been extraordinary. Here, the attention to people's individual problems and needs and the helpfulness of that. They're not a college. But you could call them their own residential college. Think of the library as providing human-scale interactions with people, with small groups, even putting in the group study lounges is a type of example of the fact that these kinds of activities can take place all over the campus in all sorts of units. And then, of course, the notion of mutual support, the library as a place

where people support each other, not just the staff support each other, but the faculty and staff and students and administrators coming together in a kind of mutual support.

So it seems to me that the slogan is still an appropriate slogan for the campus. What I think needs to be recognized is that while the one mechanism for that has changed—the colleges—the campus has always been a place where the much more unsung ways of being a place where the seeming small and its meanings can be seen as a value that we all pursue. I think, to the extent that we understand that as a campus project that involves all of our citizens, and not merely people who are located in particular locations that we call colleges, to the extent that we understand that and affirm that, I think we do ourselves a great service.

**Reti:** So that we don't allow the colleges to become symbols, as you might say, for smallness.

**Cowan:** The colleges have become an important symbol, but are not the only symbol.

**Reti:** That stand for it and then if we don't have the colleges as they were originally constructed—

**Cowan:** Then we are seen as a failure, when in fact we can see that we, even before reorganization, and certainly after reorganization, had established those

[values] elsewhere. And in fact, cultivating those is a laudable goal and an art that we need to continue to pursue.

**Reti:** So I think I would be remiss, given that we are recording this interview during this massive state budget crisis, if I didn't ask you how that is affecting this kind of vision. Because I'm certainly aware that class sizes are increasing, all of the accessibility issues that we've talked about in the last eight interviews we have to revisit—

**Cowan:** Yes. Good point.

**Reti:** —because of the lack of financial accessibility to education. Do you have any comments on that? (laughs)

**Cowan:** Oh. (sighs) I guess I do, although I don't think I have any wisdom about it. I do think it demands the utmost creativity on our part. Let me give you a couple of examples, and these are things that the campus has wrestled with before. As our student-faculty ratio increases and every faculty member has to teach, therefore, an increasing large number of students, and knowing that faculty are not going to take on additional courses than they now take on—as a matter of fact, there was that attempt in the 1990s to add one three-unit course that every faculty member would teach every three years; they were designed to be focused on the colleges, so that you would give the colleges an opportunity for interaction with faculty. By the time it got to the senate that was watered down so that it was stated that they could either do those one, three-unit courses

every three years for their college or for their department, or their board, and that it could be service in lieu of that, so some took on more advising.

And as soon as that happened (it was the only way of getting it through the senate) but it meant that there wasn't going to be much teeth in it. And after several years it just sort of faded because there wasn't anybody really watching out for it. But, as you have more and more students that an individual faculty member has to deal with, the faculty member has to think more creatively about how you divide your time between your large courses and small courses, and how, if you increase the large courses, to make them even larger in order to cover your enrollment quota, so that you can keep some of your [small-course] teaching, not just at the graduate level, which inevitably is going to be small course teaching, but at the undergraduate level. Now, that is not just a matter of individual decision. It really is a matter for departmental decision, but it's also a matter of administrative leadership. From the chancellor and EVC/campus provost on down through the deans, there has to be an understanding of that as a responsibility. You can't rely simply on individual good will. You have to create a structure and to build that, in part, into a reward structure. A department's ability to get resources, to maintain or get resources should be based in part on whether it has a responsible curriculum in place that makes it possible for at least students in their major to have a couple of small course experiences, to be paced in a way, so that at least there will be a couple of moments when they are dealing directly with a ladder faculty member.

**Reti:** Yes. (sighs)

**Cowan:** Now, it can be done. But it requires constant attention and you need to have leadership to make it happen. You need administration working closely with the Academic Senate, but articulating it as a matter of principle and saying, "If we really care about undergraduate education, this is an important part, if we really care about that kind of interaction." We've had a reduction, a rather steady decline in the number of students taking individual studies courses, because faculty are no longer willing to do it. So how much is that a matter of simply individual student initiative, going to a willing faculty member, and how much is that trying to create equitable opportunities for students who want to have that opportunity? How do you spread that around equitably? That's a policy issue that has practical consequences. If we're serious about undergraduate education, particularly in these tight times, increasingly tight times, we have to take that into account.

Take the other end. If we are going to have increasingly large lecture courses, how do you make those as educationally effective as they possibly can? And of course, with the electronic capacities and then with having to deal with students with laptops and ipods and iphones and everything else in there. (laughs) Pedagogical challenges that are extraordinary. We are lucky that we have a significant cadre of faculty who are very good lecturers. But to make those courses work well, we need to find ways of supporting faculty and even training faculty to be more effective in those roles. I think that all faculty members can take on those kinds of responsibilities, regardless of their personalities, whether charismatic or not, in those roles. I remember arguments in the literature

department, for example, or board, where some faculty said, "Well, I'm just not a good lecturer so I shouldn't have to do that." I've always thought that was a cop out, because some people will be more effective lecturers just as some people are more effective as seminar leaders. That doesn't get them off the hook. But what we have is a responsibility to help those faculty members be as effective as they can be.

What happens if you don't have additional graduate support so you can't have as many teaching assistants? In the courses I've had, and women's studies and American studies are good examples of that, but not the only places on campus where you have huge numbers of students and you don't have many TA's to help. What do you do with that? Well, we've used undergraduates as section leaders, but you can't just throw them to the wolves. You have to actually work with such students so that what they do is as effective as it possibly can be within those circumstances. I always felt when I was working with undergraduate section leaders that it was also an opportunity for them to gain some skills. For them, some of the best experiences were that the students were doing that.

**Reti:** Yes, I got to be a section leader as an undergraduate at UCSC.

**Cowan:** So I tried various things in the courses I would—I would have some sections led by graduate students and TA's and some by undergraduates. I even put together situations where I would pair students. You try different kinds of things. But this is where, if you are experimenting you want to monitor it. You don't want to just do it and you don't want to be casual about the results. If it

begins as an economic necessity, you want to turn it into an educational opportunity. I think that that requires some very creative thinking. We've got great pockets, places on campus where that's happened, and successfully. But I'm not sure that we've found ways of sharing those experiences.

When we had the Teacher on the Hill enterprise in the late seventies and early eighties, faculty were coming together and talking about these things. But I don't think we have much in the way of an ongoing forum for these. I think that is the responsibility of administration, to encourage that, but also provide some concrete support for it, and to honor faculty who are taking the risk of trying to try things more effectively, even if they fail initially, not to have them get zinged because they're trying something and it doesn't work in a particular class, but honor them for the fact that they are doing it, so that they are doing it within the framework of a campuswide commitment to that.

So I think there are things like that, that in the teaching area, the learning area, while you are teaching you can do. Peer education is very important. We know how much students learn from each other. How do you strengthen peer education? How do you take more advantage of the most experienced seniors, who've gone through the process, not just use them in advising capacities, but in various curricular ways, in ways that are good for them as well as for the students that they're working with.

It's a matter of framing expectations so that people don't expect that if they come to this campus they're just going to get a bunch of small classes. We still

emphasize that too much. Many of our small classes are, in effect, discussion sections taught by TA's. Those are not necessarily bad, though. In fact, they are often extremely good. But we need to be honest with our constituents, but also look at how we can do that ourselves.

The battle for private resources—creatively using the resources that we have, including the diminishing state resources and the increasing tuitions from students, which makes them and their parents expect more and more. If they're paying more and more, they want more out of this. So we owe it to them to take the money that's coming in from the state, particularly from students and parents themselves, and use that creatively. But we have to go after more private funding in an increasingly competitive market, because as public institutions as a whole, whether it's public radio or universities and colleges, or all sorts of nonprofit organizations compete for these same resources in tight economic times, it's really a challenge. And we have to continue to do that.

It requires unusually skillful leadership, but part of that is recognizing that no leader or small group of leaders can go it alone. You have to, in effect, have us all thinking of ourselves as contributing to that creative system. But you have to have conversations about it. And they have to be in lots of venues. You just can't wait for a committee report on improving undergraduate education, or an occasional senate meeting, or an occasional conference. You have to have constant conversations about these as people look for new ways. How often do boards, the faculty, talk with each other about their teaching practices? They talk with each other about their research. But how many of them are in a rather

formal, or explicit way, building in those [teaching] conversations as a part of what they do? Does the administration encourage that? I think that remains an important challenge. I think it's a manageable challenge. You're never going to get it all right. Do we have a half-full or a half-empty glass? We may not achieve what we want to in that area but we can't wait for the resources to achieve it. Half a glass is better than a quarter of a glass.

**Reti:** (laughs) Thank you. Well, Michael, I want to thank you so much for this oral history which covers such a vast sweep of the campus's history and is so reflective. It's been a treat for me.

**Cowan:** Well, thank you very much.

**Reti:** Is there anything you wanted to add?

**Cowan:** No, no. It's been a very interesting trip down memory lane. I realize that my memory often goes off into strange bypaths and dead ends. But it's been useful for me to rethink, not just my involvement with the campus, but the campus as a whole. So I thank you for the opportunity.

**Reti:** You're welcome.

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