

UCLA

CSW Update Newsletter

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Victoria Sork

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Victoria Sork

DEAN OF LIFE
SCIENCES PURSUES
INNOVATIVE
PLANT RESEARCH
AND ADVANCES
INTERDISCIPLINARITY
AND DIVERSITY IN THE
DIVISION

SINCE TAKING over as Dean of UCLA's Division of Life Sciences in 2009, Victoria Sork has developed a set of initiatives that delineate her objectives for the division and her understanding of the role of the university in meeting the challenges facing society. These initiatives reveal her conviction that interdisciplinary research collaborations will be the engine for generating fresh approaches and innovative methodologies. These efforts include the development of a robust computational biosciences program to create a research infrastructure, health research focused on interdisciplinary research collaborations, biological conservation projects, and mentorship programs to advance diversity in the division.

The mentorship initiative reveals her firm and lasting commitment to promoting diversity at UCLA. In an interview with *UCLA Today* when she was appointed Dean, she affirmed that maintaining a focus on diversity grew out of her own experience as a young scientist: "Early in my career, when I realized there were not many women in science, I decided that if I got in the door, I had to keep the door open for others. We also need to keep the doors open to underrepresented minorities. They need to know they are wanted here and what a great place this is for their careers to flourish." The mentorship program in Life Sciences is focused on recruiting, mentoring, and motivating underrepresented students and faculty. She emphasizes that her

belief in the importance of promoting access and opportunity for all groups was shaped in part by her experiences teaching women's studies in previous positions.

With a passion for science that began at age 10, Sork has never stopped doing experiments. A pioneer in landscape genetics and genomics of plants, she has spent the last decade as a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, which she chaired from 2004 to 2009, and the Institute of the Environ-

ment and Sustainability. She arrived at UCLA in 2000 as a fellow for the American Council for Education, working as Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Academic Initiatives until she received a faculty appointment in AY 2001/2. Before coming to UCLA, she was the founding director of the International Center for Tropical Ecology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Sork is a senior associate editor of *Molecular Ecology* journal and has served on many editorial boards, advisory

Dean Sork's current research uses genomic tools to study the valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) in California

groups, and academic program review boards. A native Californian, she received her bachelor's of science degree with honors from UC Irvine and her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor.

While being Dean keeps her very busy, Sork continues to pursue her own research, which examines ecological and evolutionary processes in plant populations that will shape the ability of trees to respond to human-caused landscape change and climate warming. Her current research uses genomic tools to study the valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) in California. She has collaborations on other tree species in Mexico, Ecuador, and China. Sork's research is a model for how innovative research can be applied to a contemporary social problem.

Dean Sork recently recognized CSW's own innovative approach to fostering interdisciplinarity by providing support—along with the UC Humanities Research Institute, the Institute of American Cultures, the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, the Institute for Society and Genetics, the Division of Humanities, and the Department of English—for CSW's upcoming "Cultural Politics of Seeds" symposium, which is on May 17th..

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Photo credit: Valley oak by Philip Bouchard, Flickr