

# UC Santa Cruz

## UC Santa Cruz Previously Published Works

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Preface to Seeds of Something Different

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# Editors' Preface

## A Place to Pause and Reflect

UC Santa Cruz began as a place apart and a force for change, its charge nothing less than the reform of higher education. The sweep of the campus's founding idealism is dramatized by its extraordinary natural setting: 2,000 acres of redwood forest and open meadow perched on the slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains, overlooking the Monterey Bay. During the more than fifty years since a group of faculty, administrators, and pioneering students participated in that inaugural burst of optimism and reform, UCSC has undergone profound transformation. Decades of change are often summarized in extremes, as either a tragic narrative of decline or a triumphalist story of reinvention and upward trajectory. What is missing is a more nuanced telling of UCSC's history, a collective narrative that charts the less-traveled latitudes between the poles of triumph and decline and shines new light on UCSC's first half-century, both for readers who know and love the campus, and for those who care about the past and future of public higher education.

This book, *Seeds of Something Different*, brings together multiple voices to convene a new conversation. It grew out of the extensive oral history archives of the UCSC Library's Regional History Project (RHP). Since 1963—two years before the campus admitted students—RHP has been documenting the unfolding life of the campus and the surrounding region through oral history

interviews. These are recorded first-hand accounts told to historically informed interviewers, which are transcribed, edited in collaboration with the narrators, and archived in the library. RHP was one of the very first formal programs of any kind at UCSC, established with extraordinary foresight by founding chancellor Dean McHenry and founding university librarian Donald Clark.

Modeled after larger programs at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library and the UCLA Library, but still very much a rarity at universities in the United States, RHP began contributing to the emerging practice of oral history when that field was itself still in its infancy. Elizabeth Spedding Calciano, RHP's founding director and initially its sole staff member, was UCSC's thirteenth employee, joining the architects and planners housed initially in the campus's temporary offices at Cabrillo College and later in a converted barn on the old Cowell Ranch. Calciano's initial charge was to interview longtime residents of the Central California coast whose observations would add significantly to the region's then-limited written history. Within a few years, RHP's mission expanded to document the unfolding story of the campus itself, beginning with a massive oral history of Dean McHenry.

Now the oral history tape has been rolling for more than fifty-seven years. RHP has conducted, recorded, transcribed, published, and digitized about three hundred oral histories with individuals

on and beyond the campus. Over the decades, researchers in diverse fields have used the published oral histories in books, articles, films, radio documentaries, and museum exhibits, as well as in classroom settings. But despite the wealth of stories and perspectives housed in this archive—and the fact that it is available to the public via RHP’s website and in bound archival volumes at the UCSC Library—the collection remains a lamentably well-kept secret. The same is true for the rich world of photographs, posters, audio recordings, and other ephemera available in the library’s Special Collections. One goal in producing this book is to draw attention to these resources.

*Seeds of Something Different* captures and transmutes the big-picture story of UCSC for the first time. In choosing and juxtaposing excerpts from the transcripts in the oral history archives, we’ve edited this book as an extended conversation that draws the reader along in real time, providing opportunities to fall in love with some characters and disagree passionately with others. By using the popular voices-in-conversation style of oral history—much in the vein of the stories featured on the covers of *Vanity Fair* or published in book form as the oral history of punk rock or 9/11 or *Star Trek*—we wanted to emphasize the high stakes and narrative drama of UCSC’s history. This is a story in multiple acts, complete with recurring characters, plot twists, and unlikely endings, featuring multiple perspectives on the same event or even the same day. History can be as compelling and immediate as a live concert or street theater; this oral history book, and the RHP archive it’s based on, brings that into sharp focus.

This is also a story that needed telling now. The wave of commemorative events for the 50th anniversary in 2015 provided one catalyst. Another was the sad reality that each year we

lose more early leaders of our campus community. By 2020, the significant majority of the founding faculty and staff has passed away. The members of the pioneering class are in their seventies. Soon it will no longer be possible to publish a book that can reach both a current undergraduate student and some of the educators who helped found the campus. While we were editing, George Blumenthal, who joined the campus in 1972 during the tenure of the first chancellor and later served as the tenth chancellor for thirteen years, retired. Institutional memory is sweeping onward and leaving our early decades behind.

The narrators you will encounter here are subjective characters entangled in the story itself, not outside commentators. The multivocal nature of oral history necessarily gives rise to a story that is not seamless, but sometimes ragged, with loose threads that may catch you by surprise. This is not a yearbook or an academic monograph. There are no comprehensive micro-histories of colleges or departments. And the cast of characters sitting at our conversational roundtable shifts dramatically over the years. This book is a chronicle, through the lens of one rather unusual college campus, of the social movements and historical changes that have swept through the United States and the world over the past several decades. Our narratives place UCSC in that historical context: the Vietnam War; the civil rights movement, feminist and queer movements, recessions, elections, and more. We aimed to create a book with anecdotes in and of the time—accounts that keep you in what writer John Gardner in *The Art of Fiction* called “a vivid and continuous dream.” So we chose excerpts that we hope will inspire and provoke, complemented by images that illustrate a few key scenes, moments, and individuals in campus history and also portray

some of the diverse species of flora and fauna that inhabit UCSC's unique mix of habitats—redwood forest, mixed chaparral, open grasslands. Giant salamanders, Ohlone tiger beetles, coyotes, golden eagles, and myriad other creatures are also characters in the tale.

The idea for the *Seeds of Something Different* originated with longtime Regional History Project director Irene Reti, just the third person to hold that job in fifty-seven years. Reti enlisted the collaboration of Cameron Vanderscoff and Sarah Rabkin, two oral historians with extensive experience as interviewers and editors at RHP. We are part of this community and students of its history. We, like the speakers in this book, are passionate about the UCSC story. We have varying and deep connections to the campus as alum (undergraduate and graduate), staff, and lecturers.

A staff member since 1986, Reti attended UCSC as an environmental studies major (Kresge College, 1982) and earned an MA in history in 2002. In addition to working for the past thirty years with the Regional History Project as an editor and now the director, Reti has worked for the Office of the Registrar as an academic editor, as a tutor for the writing program, and as a board assistant for women's studies.

Rabkin first attended UCSC in 1978 as a summer-school student; she later completed the graduate program in Science Communication (1983), served as a residential preceptor at Crown College, and taught from 1985 to 2007 as a lecturer in the campus writing, journalism, and science communication programs and environmental studies department. As a contract oral historian for the Regional History Project, she has conducted interviews with UCSC faculty members and also with many of the narrators included in *Cultivating a Movement*, RHP's history of

organic farming and sustainable agriculture in California's Central Coast region.

Vanderscoff was an undergraduate literature and history major from 2007 to 2011 (Cowell College), and has worked as a contractor with the Regional History Project ever since. He completed an MA in oral history at Columbia University, and runs his own oral history practice, working on projects about everything from Okinawa, to Robert Rauschenberg, to a Harlem American Legion Post, to Tina Brown's *New Yorker*. While Reti and Rabkin remain in Santa Cruz, Vanderscoff is now based in New York, and thus brought a complementary geographical outsider's perspective to the project.

But of course our backgrounds also bring limitations. Throughout the process of working on this book, we have been acutely aware of lacunae in our collective view of UCSC history—gaps imposed by our personal histories as well as by the limits of our intersectional identities. For example, while we have sought to highlight voices that are too often marginalized or spoken over in historical accounts, at the end of the day we, as three white people, cannot know or speak for the experiences of people of color on this campus. One of the strengths of oral history is its capacity to make space for a diversity of voices, and also to reveal the ways in which one voice can connect to intersecting identities. Our hope is that by amplifying such voices, this book can advocate for a more public and more radical conversation about who this institution is for.

The founders of the early campus were overwhelmingly white, male, and of middle and upper-class backgrounds. The college system was initially designed to teach a classical vision of the sciences, the social sciences, and the Western humanistic canon. But as early as the late sixties and early seventies, that classically conservative collegiate model became an unanticipated vehicle

for demographic and intellectual change. Merrill and Oakes Colleges became powerful organizing and learning spaces for communities of color, focusing on what was then called “the third world” and the explicit study of race and ethnicity in this country. UCSC also became a pioneering center and space for the queer and feminist community. But these stories of radical UCSC—from a leading feminist studies program to intersections with the Black Panthers—come along with stories of institutional and cultural backlash against affirmative action, diversity, and gender equity. The narrative here is at times frustrating and at times inspiring; in this book, we seek to understand it in the urgency of its historical moment, and narrate the unfinished and ongoing work of social justice on this campus.

The selection of oral histories available to us as we shaped this story posed limitations as well. For one thing, the stories in this book are almost entirely of those with longtime UCSC affiliations—in other words, people who chose to stay here. If we were able to put together a story using the narratives of staffers who quit UCSC and never looked back, or faculty who were denied tenure, or students who dropped out, we would have a very different and equally true story.

More generally, for all of the range of RHP’s archive, the interviews collected there represent only a tiny percentage of the individuals who have experienced and influenced the campus. Countless significant events, programs, perspectives, and insights remain to be documented. Despite the heft of this two-volume account, some readers will inevitably search the book in vain for accounts of moments, themes, or phenomena they consider paramount in the story of UCSC. Toward the creation of a more complete narrative, we therefore invite the reader to submit

recollections that will be curated on an ongoing basis for the book’s companion website.<sup>1</sup>

In editing the book, we also wrestled with structural choices. The first step in what became a five-year project was to identify essential topics, themes, and periods in the campus’s history that might form the basis of book chapters. In the summer of 2015 we turned for assistance to several astute participant-observers with long histories on the campus. These colleagues, whom we’ve named in the acknowledgments, generously provided invaluable insights. Then our bicoastal troika took turns selecting, culling, and juxtaposing oral history excerpts. We confined ourselves primarily to the RHP transcripts, though we supplemented our sources with interviews conducted by UCSC students in classes at Oakes and Cowell Colleges, as well as primary source documents such as newspaper and journal articles. We conferred periodically via teleconference and met in person when possible, and we repeatedly reviewed each other’s work. Our goal was to impose as unobtrusive an editorial hand as possible and to relate events in such a way so as to allow you as reader to discern various thematic threads and make your own interpretations. We recognized that we were inevitably—simply by selecting and ordering the excerpts—imposing our own interpretations on the material, and we did our best to make these choices consciously and thoughtfully.<sup>2</sup>

We debated between two organizing structures for the book: thematic or chronological. We ultimately decided that readers need a chronological framework, with some thematic divisions, to guide them through this multidimensional history that needed to be divided into two volumes to make it a manageable size to read. To enhance the sense of a story unfolding, we identified pressure points in campus history toward which we could appropriately build

suspense. We divided the book into four sections. "Part I: Where This Dream Begins" sets the stage for the founding and planning of the campus in the small seaside town of Santa Cruz, California. "Part II: An Educational Dream Reborn in a Changing America" focuses on the campus's heady early years, as well as the social movements that shaped its first decade. This section presented specific editorial challenges. We found ourselves reflecting on the impact of including excerpts from early shapers of the campus such as Dean McHenry and Page Smith that, when read from a 21st-century perspective, can reveal starkly patronizing attitudes, unconscious entitlement, and stereotyping. Yet some of the same narrators also demonstrate an uncommon degree of forward thinking with regard to matters of social justice and sociocultural inclusiveness. In choosing and juxtaposing such passages, we weren't interested in creating damning portraits—or, for that matter, in lionizing anyone. Rather, we endeavored to highlight the complexity of these individuals' outlooks and the shifting zeitgeist they illuminate. Oral history, like good drama, points us away from absolute heroes and villains and towards a complex cast of characters who need to be understood in context.

Volume I ends with a dramatic crisis in the late 1970s, as UCSC is experiencing falling enrollments and a crisis of leadership after the departure of Founding Chancellor Dean McHenry. This provides a natural breaking place between the two books. Volume II picks up with "Part III: Reorganization and Redefinition," as Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer responds to that crisis with the controversial and sometimes painful reorganization of the college system. This section then dives into controversies over affirmative action, diversity, and campus growth. The budgetary crises of the 1990s also mark the beginning of a marked divestment of support for public higher education.

The chronicle becomes more challenging to present as a unified narrative after what might be called "Season 1." As campus stories fan out over broader territory with time, the challenge to UCSC's continuing self-definition also becomes an editorial challenge: how to see a coherent story without succumbing to oversimplification or pat generalization.

Finally, "Part IV: A Research University with Experimental Roots" explores the tensions and cross-fertilizations between UCSC's past and its present as a growing and sometimes cutting-edge research university. This section also documents more recent student activism, as well as equity issues facing staff and lecturers. We end with a Coda, "For Times We Can't Imagine," which juxtaposes voices from across generations in conversation about the big picture meaning of what has happened here, and what matters now as we look towards the future.

We invite you to enter a time machine: to listen in at a virtual roundtable, where the characters converse with each other across the years—not always in agreement, but certainly in dialogue. The conversation's tone is by turns celebratory, passionate, humorous, ecstatic; sometimes anguished, angry, elegiac. Our characters are full of both dreams and doubts. For while this collection celebrates many extraordinary achievements, it is also a candid, multi-authored letter to a beloved and sometimes frustrating institution.

UCSC history, like all history, is layered, and one layer can bleed through to another. Some of the most powerful excerpts in this book, particularly those found in the Coda, diffract across eras. The past haunts the present—in the recorded memories of lime workers munching potatoes on the porches of wooden cabins on the historic Cowell Ranch; in the spindly redwoods that sprout in rings around the ghostly stumps of old-growth trees; in the names of buildings like

McHenry Library and Kerr Hall; in the very architecture that both inspires and constrains academic planners as the current campus wrestles with the meanings of its beginnings.

In 2020, the questions that were asked by UCSC's founders press us once again. Many of the problems and failures they saw in higher education, such as the alienation students experience, persist. What's more, the campus came of age in the turmoil of the sixties; today, hard questions are again being asked about the role of higher education in this new era of renewed political upheaval. Within universities, student activism again is on the rise. Outside of universities, the fundamental value of public higher education—and the very idea that such public universities should change to serve a diversifying society—is being questioned at the highest levels of the federal government.

Closer to home, new questions are being asked on campus about our history and what we value. In June 2019, a mission bell was removed from campus with the leadership of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, who called it a painful symbol of a violent history of genocide. The mission bell is just one artifact, but it's part of a larger reckoning with institutional and regional history, as different voices rise up and change the conversation about what is honored and what is remembered.

In the end, the story of UCSC is the story of a dream, the significance of having a dream, and the importance of understanding that dreams change. Our hope as editors is that this book can become a resource, not just for knowing UCSC's past, but for considering its future and the future of public higher education in this country. Just as the life of a narrator continues after the recorder switches off, UC Santa Cruz remains an ongoing creation even as we go to

press. This is a breathing point: a place to pause and reflect, to imagine what might come next.

—*Irene Reti*  
*Cameron Vanderscoff*  
*Sarah Rabkin*  
*Winter 2020*

## Endnotes

1. See <https://exhibits.library.ucsc.edu/exhibits/show/seeds>.
2. A word about the oral history excerpts themselves: For the sake of readability, we edited the original interview transcripts. Usually this entailed minor manipulations—for example, removing less-relevant material from the middle of an otherwise pertinent passage. In a few cases, we interceded more actively, e.g. by grafting a topic sentence onto an excerpt from elsewhere in a transcript for the sake of clarity. We took pains to avoid the ethically questionable practice of heavily editing or rearranging material from the original transcripts, all of which have been approved by the narrators in a collaborative editing process with the Regional History Project.