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**Making an Impact: A look at Santa Barbara's active role in the environmental movement and the influence of the Environmental Studies Department on its 30th anniversary.**

*By Eric Simmons, Staff Writer*

On Jan. 28, 1969, history Associate Professor Rod Nash stood at the beach with his children and watched a black tide creep in, witnessing one of the worst environmental disasters of the century.

Wave after wave of oil crashed on the Santa Barbara coast, staining sand and water, and perfuming the air with the smell of tar. Watching over 3.5 million gallons of crude oil spilling out of Union Oil Platform A and into the channel, Nash and 20 other faculty members committed themselves to preventing such an environmental disaster from occurring again.

Their creation- an interdisciplinary program of environmental education called environmental studies- celebrates its 30th anniversary today and Saturday.

"The first waves broke, and the beaches were black and all the birds were covered," Nash said. "So, we wandered down there, and we got to thinking, what is it about my profession that I can do to make things better here- to prevent catastrophes like that and to solve environmental problems?"

The faculty group called itself Friends of the Human Habitat, and included professors and researchers from different fields and disciplines such as geology, biology, chemistry, and history. Their efforts culminated in the creation of an Environmental Studies Program starting in fall of 1970, with Nash as chair.

Nash started by running the Environmental Studies Program "out of his daypack," but the demand quickly proved to be overwhelming. He took his case to Chancellor Vernon Cheadle to request money and office space for the burgeoning program, but was met with skepticism. However, Nash came prepared with a trump card- a letter to the parents of the environmental studies majors, explaining to them that the university could no longer afford a program in "this vital field," and that their children would not be able to take work in the field. Cheadle asked for time to think.

Several days later, Cheadle granted the Environmental Studies program office support and space. Nash switched from full-time history professor to environmental studies and history, and "off we went," he said. The program blossomed in the 1970s. Almost 160 students joined the major in the first year and over 1,000 students enrolled in the ES courses.

"We had huge enrollments right from the beginning, because there was a lot of pent-up demand for that kind of thing," Nash said. "People for the first time were concerned about human impact on the earth, about the impact of population. There was a clientele out there ready for what we put forward."

Thirty years later, over 3,500 students have graduated from the Environmental Studies program and close to 200 will graduate this year. In 1995, Science Watch magazine ranked UCSB the #1 college in the country for the study of the environment/ecology.

“I think a lot of us on that faculty had the feeling of trying to be relevant,” Nash said. “We have a big university here and we have a lot of intellectual firepower, but are we really talking about the problems society is concerned about? The ‘60s was a time of great unrest in this country...people looked to the universities to stand a little taller on these kinds of issues.”

The interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies was unique, and did not always meet with approval. In 1985, Gregory Holmes wrote a senior thesis examining the history of the program, in which he wrote of the objections of UCSB faculty- particularly from members of the Biological Sciences Dept. Holmes reported a personal communication between biology Professor Jim Case and Chancellor Cheadle, in which Case extolled the virtues of the more science-driven system at Princeton University.

“The biologists there seem to feel that there is no intellectual content in environmental programs- that the fact and theories are well in hand and that all that remains is in the realm of the practical,” Case wrote. Holmes added, “Case and the organizers of the Princeton program echoed the sentiments of many at the university, namely that a program such as that at UCSB was not academically rigorous enough to warrant its existence and that the environment was simply a fad that should not have enough influence to restructure the university.”

However, its creators and proponents argued that the intent of the ES program was to incorporate different disciplines, not attack other fields. “The program was founded 30 years ago on providing a balanced education on environmental issues,” ES Chair Jo-Ann Shelton said. “My goal is to make sure we maintain that balance, so we have students who understand that environmental issues are very complicated and require examination from many points of view. We can use scientific data, but we have to understand that people make decisions based on their values.”

Nash chaired the program until 1975, and taught ES 11 until his retirement in 1994. He was succeeded as chair by Barry Schuyler, who reworked the lower division requirements, increased the unit requirements for the major and started an internship program. Schuyler also reversed the tack of the program, focusing more on science and less on humanities. The trend was continued into the 1980s, with biologist Daniel Botkin as chair.

After the rapid expansion in the 1970s, the 1980s saw a precipitous drop in the number of majors in the program, and witnessed an all-time low of 159 in 1987. Despite increased popularity in the 1990s- the number of majors peaked at 637 in 1993- the program lost support among faculty and was nearly shut down.

On April 9, 1993, a Daily Nexus headline read “Environmental Studies Program on the Ropes,” and a series of articles throughout April revealed a struggle by Nash, who was once again serving as chair, along with several concerned ES majors, to keep the program running. Nash said then that he was tired of fighting the university for funding, and that the program did not have enough money to operate effectively.

“The student demand was always there, but there was a certain loss of faculty support. I think, also, we began to see in the ‘90s and in the ‘80s a certain downturn in some of the idealism in America that we had seen in the ‘60s,” Nash said. “This was the era of Ronald Reagan, of course, this was the era where people started to make a lot of money- ‘as long as I had a lot of money, I didn’t need to worry about the earth.”

The program does not currently receive the funding acquired by full departments. The program status allows ES to draw from different disciplines, but professors stay in their own areas of research. “I think what’s attractive about our program is the balance among the disciplines and the balance between academic information and practical information,” Shelton said. “I think we all face the same issues- how do you provide students with a really rigorous program where they acquire a depth of skills and balance that out with the breadth that is also important? I think we’re doing a really good job.”

Over 120 students are placed in academic internships each year through the ES program, continuing Nash’s emphasis on practicality. “We’re training the next generation of leaders, and it is crucial that students have the opportunity to learn about the environment and humans’ role in protecting it, not only for our own well-being, but for every animal on the planet,” junior ES major Hannah Eckberg said. Eckberg is also a member of Get Oil Out! – a Santa Barbara organization created immediately after the oil spill to fight the continued oil drilling in the channel.

“I’m proud to be a UCSB student because of our ES program, not only because it is one of the first but because it is one of the best in the country,” she added.

The program will celebrate with a reception Friday at 4p.m. at the UCSB faculty club. Saturday, there will be guest speakers, including a keynote address from UCSB alumna Deb Callahan, who is the current president of the League of Conservation Voters. The events will continue throughout the day, ending in a closing reception at the UCSB greenhouse from 3:30-6 p.m. For more information, contact the Environmental Studies Dept. at 893-2968.