

New book by Nancy Scott Anderson traces history and development of UCSD

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NEW BOOK TRACES HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

An Improbable Venture, the first comprehensive history of the University of California, San Diego, has just been published by UCSD Press.

The 328-page volume was written by Nancy Scott Anderson, the author of *The Generals: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee* (Knopf, 1988; Vintage, 1989), and a former columnist for the San Diego Tribune and editor of the La Jolla Light.

The book, which refers to UCSD as "the best institution of higher education established in the United States since World War II," traces the development of the university from its very earliest days as a marine research station (Scripps Institution of Oceanography). Most of the book focuses on the last 30 years, starting with the official approval and funding of the UCSD campus by the Regents of the University of California in 1959.

Anderson's history is based on extensive interviews with those who participated in and shaped UCSD's evolution, as well as on archival research conducted at the university since December 1988, when she signed the contract to undertake the project.

Although Anderson acknowledges that the book is not an "official history," other than receiving criticism and advice from various readers, she went about completing the project with little interference, least of all from UCSD's chancellor.

"I had much help with the book, but except for free access to the files, none from Chancellor Richard C. Atkinson," she wrote in the preface. "He frustrated me beyond words by refusing even to look at completed chapters. It was what he wanted. And though this initially kept me off my balance, it allowed me, after I found my own feet, to tell the story that I saw."

According to Anderson, UCSD's internationally recognized academic success, achieved in such a relatively short time span, can best be understood in the context of its unique roots. UCSD was founded on a vision and plan derived from the experience of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO). Because SIO, which became a part of the University of California system in 1912, lacked the conventional disciplines, it was built instead around the particular excellences of the individuals who worked there.

Those who founded UCSD continued the SIO practice of building on individual excellence rather than on traditional departments, and sought to hire the most distinguished faculty in the world with the intention of giving them free rein in the development of the new university.

Those faculty members who were willing to risk coming to the vacant campus in La Jolla, according to Anderson, were people with strong views about their disciplines who had often found themselves stymied at the

institutions in which they had previously taught. They were unconventional thinkers and self confident adventurers who, at UCSD, would have the freedom from the constraints of older, more traditional campuses.

"The university survived its angst-ridden beginnings and came of age in a dramatic and often difficult era in

California education," wrote Anderson. "Founded as a privileged institution for research during the Cold War science boom, it has matured into a well-rounded campus where fine arts, humanities, and health and social sciences flourish. The transformation was not easy. But in the struggle to become itself, UCSD became a unique center of higher education. And despite its youth, or perhaps because of it, with its prize-winning faculty and grant- rich budget it illustrates better than most why the American research university is emulated around the world and both celebrated and criticized at home."

An Improbable Venture, A History of the University of California, San Diego, is currently available in paperback at the UCSD Bookstore for \$7.95. Orders may be placed by calling (619)534-3149.

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