

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Kristin Luciani

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Campus Celebrates Roger Revelle's Birthday



Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

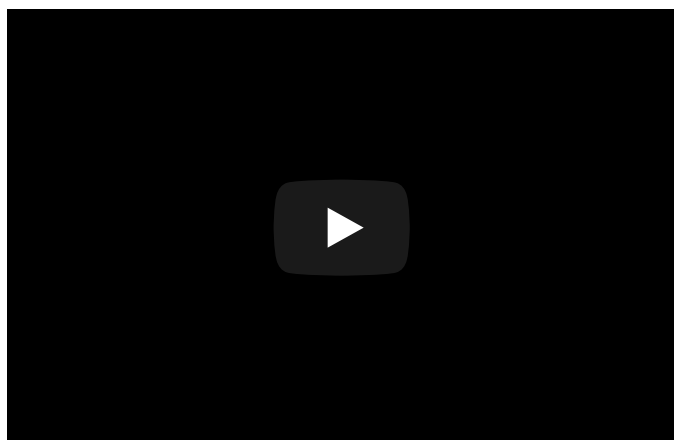
Members of the UC San Diego Revelle College community filled Galbraith Hall last Friday for a tribute to the college's namesake and UC San Diego founder, Roger Revelle. The celebration took place just a few days after what would have been Revelle's 106th birthday and included a conversation with some of the campus's first faculty members about the renowned oceanographer's life and legacy.

The event was held as part of Revelle College's 50th anniversary, a yearlong commemoration of the college's history and achievements as told through the stories of students, staff, alumni, faculty and friends, including members of the charter class of 1968.



Founded in 1964, Revelle College was the first of UC San Diego's undergraduate colleges to be established. The institution's unique college system was inspired by universities in England, such as Cambridge, and was designed to provide students with the advantages of a small liberal arts college and the resources of a large research university. Revelle believed that this design would counteract the impersonality of campuses like Berkeley and UCLA, and for faculty in particular, would help prevent the departmental rigidities of academia.

"It's nice to be in this room for a reason other than chemistry," said Soren Neslon, president of Revelle College Council, who graduated this quarter. Nelson, along with Revelle College Provost Paul Yu and Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief Alumni Officer Armin Afsahi, welcomed guests to the celebration. "In Roger Revelle's dedication speech to the college, he noted that humans are inherently curious creatures," added Nelson. "That comment spoke to me because I think he really captured that here at Revelle College."



The program kicked off with a video presentation that included clips of Revelle and footage of the campus in the 1960s. On screen, campus members talked about the rigorous curriculum, unique college system, and pioneering faculty and students while in the audience, guests nodded their heads and murmured words of agreement.

Afterward, former Revelle College provosts Tom Bond and Don Wayne; founding UC San Diego faculty members Walter Munk, Charles Perrin and Mel Green; and current Scripps

Institution of Oceanography researcher Sarah Gille took their places for the panel discussion. Afsahi, a 1990 graduate of Revelle College, served as moderator.

“I think he would be tremendously pleased,” said Walter Munk, when asked what Roger would think of the campus today. “The college of intellectual achievement he intended has certainly been successful.”

Munk received his doctorate in oceanography in 1947 from Scripps, where he went on to spend his entire academic career and got to know Revelle well. Munk was among the Scripps researchers who participated in the Capricorn Expedition, led by Revelle, which helped lay the groundwork for studying plate tectonics.

“Whatever he did received his complete attention,” explained Munk. Revelle’s gift for recruiting exceptional faculty to the new campus was rooted in his ability to genuinely connect with researchers and their goals. “He totally, thoroughly engaged people. Sometimes he knew people’s hopes more than they themselves did,” Munk added.

The panelists also talked about Revelle’s scientific contributions, including his pioneering work in the study of climate change, a field that UC San Diego researchers continue to lead. Bond also pointed out his impact in public policy.

“Let’s not forget the contributions that he made in helping to deal with the problem of world poverty and starvation,” said Bond.



From left: Walter Munk, Charles Perrin, Sarah Gille, Tom Bond, Don Wayne and Mel Green.

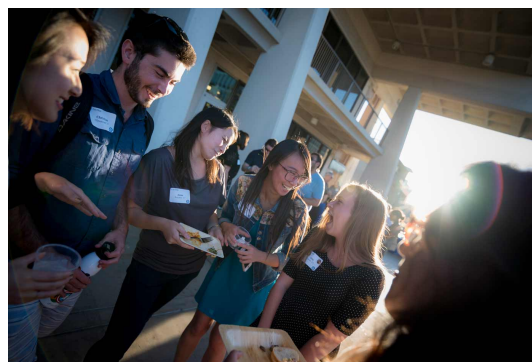
As the first science advisor to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Revelle was involved with a broad set of resource problems that are still relevant today, including questions of increasing populations and diminishing water and food resources. When he returned to UC San Diego in 1976, he served as professor of science and public policy and initiated a series of seminars in marine policy and resource management.

Bond recalled talking with Revelle about his work to bring scientific research into agriculture. On one occasion, Revelle told him about a recent trip to sub-Saharan Africa. Revelle was interested in the idea of agricultural extension—that is, applying scientific research

to agricultural practices through education of farmers—and how that could be implemented outside of the U.S. According to Bond, Revelle said that the region he visited had one big problem: all of the farmers were women and all of the extension agents (the individuals facilitating the education) were men. Revelle told him that he knew the men wouldn't start working in the fields, so he proposed they hire more women to serve as extension agents. "That was a mark of the man I knew," said Bond.

Today, through initiatives such as the Center for Food and Fuel for the 21st Century and UC Global Food Initiative, UC San Diego researchers continue to look for solutions to support a growing world population in a sustainable way.

Revelle's own approach to research, education and service transcended traditional disciplinary boundaries, a philosophy that helped shape the general education requirements of Revelle College. All Revelle students are required to take courses in humanities, calculus, natural sciences, social sciences, fine arts and language as part of the college's mission to educate "Renaissance men and women."



Now ranked among the top universities in the world, UC San Diego stands as an embodiment of Revelle's vision for how great universities are created and sustained: recruit the finest scholars and students; use the world as your laboratory; and above all, do what is important.

Revelle College's 50th anniversary celebration will continue through June, with special events for Alumni Weekend and commencement. To learn more about Roger Revelle and the college's 50th anniversary, visit revelle.ucsd.edu.