

A Marvel Inside A Miracle

25th Anniversary, University of California, San Diego
November 18, 1985
Clark Kerr

Chancellor Atkinson, President Gardner, Ladies and Gentlemen, including some long-time and highly valued friends and colleagues.

Twenty-five years ago today on November 18, 1960, the Board of Regents of the University of California adopted a resolution which, as the then President of the University, I had placed before it, creating the "University of California, San Diego."

The resulting effort, in developing this campus, was undertaken with great expectations. Seldom in the more than eight centuries of the modern history of higher education around the world have such great expectations been so nearly realized in such a short period of time to the benefit of so many people. Academic institutions normally advance slowly, if at all, in their academic standings--but not San Diego.

Last April I visited the University of Tsukuba in Japan as the guest of President Fukuda. Tsukuba is a new university already taking its place alongside the great "imperial" universities, led by Tokyo and Kyoto, established after the Meiji restoration essentially on the German model. President Fukuda, a physicist and former professor at the University of Chicago, told me how he, as founder, had surveyed the world for a model and had found this time an American one: the University of California at San Diego. Then he told me of the academic plan and showed me the physical facilities, and the resemblances to this campus were clear. President Fukuda is very proud that he heads what he considers, and rightly so, the second greatest of the new research universities in the world founded in the past quarter century, and that he chose the model he did.

Twenty-five years after its founding UCSD stands number six in the nation in receipt of federal grants for research achieved in intense competition. The recent survey by the American Council of Learned Societies placed San Diego in the top twenty among the research universities of the United States. Only one other of the top twenty was founded in the twentieth century: the University of California at Los Angeles, dates from 1919 as a unit within the University of California. It awarded its first Ph.D. in 1938. Today it ranks number one in the award of federal research funds.

The advance of this campus to a peak position among the 3,200 institutions of higher education in the United States is one of the few academic marvels of all history. So I should like to sketch briefly, on this occasion celebrating this remarkable history, some of the ingredients, as I saw them, which made possible this marvel. The miracle behind the marvel is that these ingredients all came together at the right time and, as it turned out, the one and only right time. Ten years, or even five years, later would have been too late; and earlier would equally not have been possible. Thus we shall be looking at a marvel inside a miracle.

In the beginning, there was the University of California at Berkeley. Berkeley was then in 1960, rising fast from the emotional fires and the devastation of morale of the oath controversy during the "witch hunt" days of Senator Joe McCarthy. It was shortly, in 1964, to be identified, in a careful national survey, as the most distinguished center for research and graduate study in the United States, and, thus, almost certainly, in the world. On the day the results of this survey were announced, I sent to my friend, the President of Harvard, an Avis button with the implied message inviting Harvard to "try harder." Berkeley proved two things--clear now but in doubt then: that a university on the far West Coast could challenge the best in the East; and that a public university, for the first time, could claim a place along with the most famous private institutions. UCLA was then accelerating its pace in following the Berkeley precedent and it now ranks in the top ten.

Also, among the ingredients, there was the community of San Diego with the third largest population concentration in the state, a fantastic geographic location and a well planned urban structure, and the offer by the City of San Diego of Pueblo land beautifully situated--later supplemented by land and property once held by the

U.S. Marine Corps and delivered to the University in the excellent condition that one would expect from the U.S. Marines.

Also, there was the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, dating from 1912, and a world center in its field.

Additionally, there was essential advocacy from local political leaders, from Berkeley alumni in the area, from other influential citizens in the community, and from local leaders of higher education--and here I note, in particular, Malcolm Love, President of San Diego State, who lent his very considerable support to a potential competitor. Among the Berkeley alumni who were active from the start on behalf of this campus was Pat Hyndman who is now serving, quite appropriately, as Co-chair of the 25th Anniversary Executive Committee.

And the times were auspicious. Sputnik was just behind us and it had already led to a new emphasis on scientific research. The tidal wave of students was just ahead of us, doubling and then tripling and then quadrupling students in American higher education. The nation was confident of itself. The State of California was euphoric about its future. The "New Frontier" seemed limitless.

Another ingredient was the Master Plan for Higher Education in California which, earlier in that year of 1960, had reserved for the University of California, within the total state-financed system of higher education, the research and graduate training role at the highest levels, and this made it possible for the University to plan confidently within that context.

It also took a vision. Plans had earlier been made to establish here a graduate School of Science and Engineering which welcomed its first faculty appointment in 1957. These existing plans seemed inadequate, however, as a new university administration looked at the possible future; inadequate to the opportunities that were open to do something here on a larger scale and of greater potential significance; inadequate to a higher destiny that was waiting to be fulfilled. And so came about the sudden shift, to the conservation of some in this then tiny academic community, from a small School of Science and Engineering to the concept of a large general research university, and, of all things, with undergraduate students.

It also took money and encouragement. Fortunately, the then Governor of the State, "Pat" Brown, supported the necessary appropriations and gave helpful encouragement to the University of California as a whole. Fortunately we have such a governor once again, as has been traditional in the history of the state, after two interludes. In his support, Governor Brown was matched by legislative leaders, particularly Sheridan Hegland representing this area, and by Alan Post, the Legislative Analyst. Fortunately, also, the nation and the state were in the longest period of fast economic growth in history. And, the University, over a crucial eight-year period, never had its budget request cut by than insignificant amounts. One year we were given more than we requested. I refused to spend this added amount on the grounds that it infringed on our autonomy.

It thus became possible to build three new campuses, here and at Irvine and at Santa Cruz, to advance Berkeley, UCLA and San Francisco at a rapid pace academically, to give new missions to Davis, Santa Barbara and Riverside--all at once. No major American university has ever grown so remarkably both in quantity and in quality at the same time, and in so short a time.

Within this money available to the University, it took special consideration for San Diego by the university administration. This meant many more new overscale professorial appointments than anywhere else, a far faster rate of rise in appropriations for the library, more funds to expand research activity. Every other campus felt, as one Chancellor of a southern campus vehemently asserted, "all that money for San Diego came right out of my budget." These favorable decisions for San Diego were very unpopular elsewhere in the University but they were merited by the special opportunities here. The costs elsewhere, in criticism and in opposition, of this series of decisions were heavy to bear but they were dwarfed subsequently by the results achieved here.

Finally, and without it all of the best could not possibly have had such spectacular results, it took inspiration and leadership of this emerging campus. This inspiration was supplied by Roger Revelle. I asked for the special privilege and pleasure of marching in the academic procession today side-by-side with Roger, as we once marched together into many controversies when this campus was being founded--controversies over location,

over name, over breaking the powerfully supported exclusionary clauses that then governed sale of property in the vicinity, over the noise generated by the Naval Air Station, and numerous other items. Roger had the great dreams of how this campus might be organized academically; the fantastic energy to travel the nation and the world in search of talent; the exquisite judgment in the choosing and the ultimate in persuasive powers in attracting the original faculty that set this campus on its course. Within this original and highly distinguished faculty I mention only Harold Urey who took such great interest in this campus as a whole and in the wider university and in such a personally friendly way, shared by his wife, Frieda, who is here today. Roger told me once how, for a long moonlit evening, he had sat on this then barren site envisioning what might one day rise here--the great campus that surrounds all of us here today. In the three hundred and fifty years since the founding of Harvard, only five universities have, almost from their inception, entered the foremost ranks: Cornell under the leadership of Andrew Dickson White, Johns Hopkins under Daniel Coit Gilman, Stanford under David Starr Jordan, Chicago under William Rainey Harper--all now recognized as giants in the groves of academe--and the University of California, San Diego, under Roger Revelle.