

Georges Van Den Abbeele,
UCSC's new dean of humanities

JIM MACKENZIE

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The changing face of the Humanities

A new dean, a new building, a new direction—the humanities at UC Santa Cruz are poised to meet the challenges of a global future.

By Scott Rappaport

THE NEW HUMANITIES building lies within a few feet of Founders Glen at Cowell College—where the campus first opened in 1965, with nearly half of the original faculty consisting of humanists. The significance of the location is not lost on newly appointed dean Georges Van Den Abbeele, who points out that the building reconnects the campus with a tradition in the humanities that is truly impressive, but often overlooked.

"This campus has long been at the forefront of interdisciplinary and collaborative research efforts in the humanities—in fact, UCSC has been a real model for humanities development around the nation," notes Van Den Abbeele. "In 1985, for example, this campus founded the first

major research center specifically dedicated to humanistic inquiry, the Center for Cultural Studies. It served as a prototype for hundreds of humanities centers that have sprung up on other campuses. The very idea of a humanities research center was invented here."

Housing all faculty, departmental, and administrative offices for the division, the new six-story Humanities 1 Building has plenty to offer students. It sits within a \$29.3 million complex that includes a 300-seat Humanities Lecture Hall, a landscaped courtyard with redwood benches, and a four-story adjacent structure that provides



The new Humanities complex includes a 300-seat lecture hall, courtyard, classrooms, meeting rooms, computer labs, and faculty offices for the division.

additional classroom space and computer labs for both the Humanities and Social Sciences Divisions. The new facilities now give the humanities a tangible presence on campus—not only centralizing its faculty,

staff, and students, but also making events and programs more visible and accessible to other campus community members and the general public.

While humanities scholarship at UCSC and elsewhere is often overshadowed by high-profile research in science and technology, Van Den Abbeele notes that it is essential for modern society to understand scientific achievements from a human perspective. Humanities research, he strongly emphasizes, is more relevant than ever to how we view the world.

“Today—given our amazing success with technology and the high pace of development—there is a critical need to look at our involvement with technologies and the resulting societies that we are creating,” Van Den Abbeele says.

“As we are propelled into a world dominated by financial exigencies and technological development, it’s an important necessity as a species to examine the written record and the cultural achievements of humanity.”

The study of humanities, Van Den Abbeele contends, gives us the possibility of understanding how to live without fundamentalism, intolerance, and racism in highly advanced technological societies. While religion and spirituality have often become the response to cope with a changing world, he believes that the humanities can help us understand everything from extreme religious fundamentalism to new-age secularism. And he stresses that effective social policies are supported by basic humanities research.

“There’s a tendency in American policies to foist the opinion that different cultures can’t live together in places where there is civil strife—such as Yugoslavia, Rwanda, or Iraq,” observes Van Den Abbeele. “People will say that Shiite and Sunni Muslims have been at war for hundreds of years, so they can never coexist peacefully. But that’s just not true—and the study of history reveals that. At UCSC, we have humanities professors



Dean Van Den Abbeele stops to talk to students in the Humanities courtyard.

like Brian Catlos who are teaching courses and doing research on cultures in Spain where Muslims, Christians, and Jews have traditionally lived together peacefully for long periods of time in the past.”

VAN DEN ABBELEE’S appointment as dean last July actually marked a return to his academic roots. Beginning his career at UCSC as a visiting assistant professor of literature in 1981, he spent five years on the Santa Cruz campus. His career path led him to a 15-year stint at UC Davis, where he was a professor of French and Italian, as well as director of the Davis Humanities Institute and the Pacific Regional Humanities Center. Since 1999, he has also served as president of the Western Humanities Alliance, a growing consortium of 23 West Coast universities—that was founded at UCSC.

In accepting UCSC’s offer to return to the campus, Van Den Abbeele says he took note of how much the Humanities Division had developed in his absence, and considered how much more was possible. The division already has many areas of renown:

Van Den Abbeele cites the Feminist Studies Department’s exploration of women’s issues around the globe, and the American Studies Department’s worldwide focus on how American culture is perceived.

“World consciousness was an early idea here at UCSC, and the work currently being done in the various departments has become quite noteworthy,” says Van Den Abbeele. “Our History Department, for example, is a leader in developing the concept of ‘world’ history. Generally, U.S. history is taught as if it has nothing to do with the rest of the world. But professor and UC Presidential Chair Terry Burke and his graduate students have recently created a new model curriculum for teaching

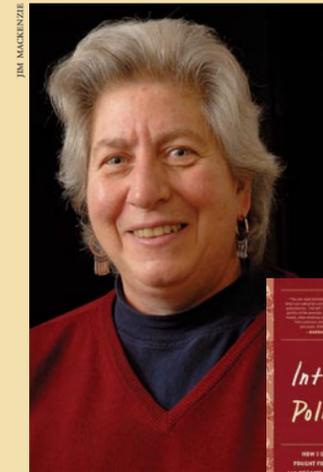
college-level courses in U.S. history that encompass an international perspective.”

This is how the humanities will be taught in the 21st century—“preparing young people to be citizens in globalized cultures and economies,” adds Van Den Abbeele. “It’s that kind of thinking that will be a hallmark of the humanities in the future.”

With his expertise in leading humanities programs and directing local and regional interdisciplinary research centers, the new dean plans to take advantage of the division’s considerable talent and resources. Although he notes that the current faculty almost organically do interdisciplinary work, he plans to make that collaborative process easier by breaking down administrative barriers to cross-divisional research with the arts and sciences.

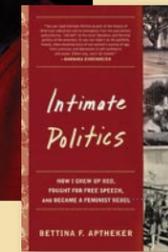
“We already have brilliant and creative faculty who are engaged in innovative projects, as well as an unusually large number of different research centers,” says Van Den Abbeele. “My role is not to invent new programs, but rather to look at the ground level, see what people are doing, and help build upon that solid foundation.”

Critically acclaimed books from UCSC’s humanities faculty



Bettina Aptheker

DESCRIBED AS “a stunning new memoir” by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, feminist studies professor Bettina Aptheker’s *Intimate Politics* traces her role in major historical and political events—ranging from her coleadership of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, the movement



against the war in Vietnam, and the trial of Angela Davis, to the building of the Women’s Studies Department at UCSC. Aptheker also tells a parallel story of shocking childhood sexual abuse, depression, and violence amid the backdrop of events that made up a key chapter in our nation’s history.

A scholar of history with a national reputation as a talented and engaging instructor, Aptheker has

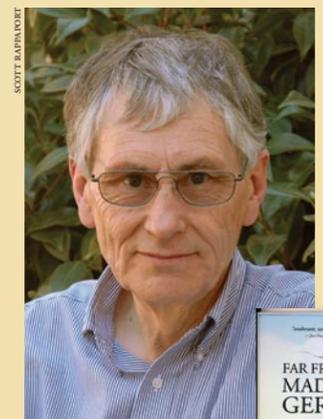
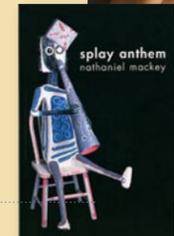
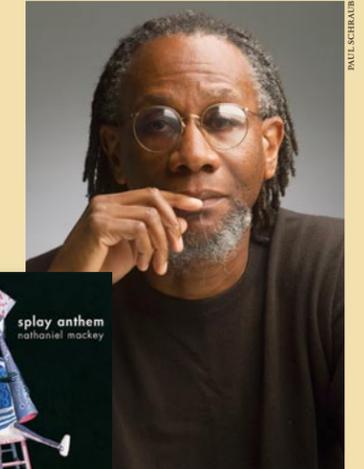
been teaching one of the country’s largest and most influential introductory feminist studies courses for more than 25 years at UCSC. Starting out in 1980 as the sole lecturer in UCSC’s Women’s Studies Department, she became the department’s first ladder-rank faculty member in 1987. Aptheker was honored with the UCSC Alumni Association’s Distinguished Teaching Award in 2001.

Nathaniel Mackey

LITERATURE PROFESSOR Nathaniel Mackey received the 2006 National Book Award in the poetry category for his latest book, *Splay Anthem*. As a poet, literary critic, fiction writer, and journal editor, Mackey has produced a wide variety of work over the past 30 years that has earned him national and international

recognition. He is the author of nine books of poetry, including *Four for Trane*, *Septet for the End of Time*, *Outlantish*, and *Song of the Andoumboulou*, which are widely regarded as among the most innovative examples of contemporary American experimental writing. Mackey’s 1985 poetry book, *Eroding Witness*, was selected for publication in the National Poetry Series. He received a Whiting

Writer’s Award in 1993 and was elected to the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets in 2001, one of the highest honors in the field of poetry. He was also selected by faculty members to deliver the 39th annual Faculty Research Lecture in 2006 at UCSC in recognition of his “extraordinary accomplishments in many fields of scholarly and creative activity.”



Geoffrey Pullum

Far from the *Madding Gerund*—coauthored by UCSC linguistics professor Geoffrey Pullum with Mark Liberman of the University of Pennsylvania—has garnered rave reviews from the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, and National Public Radio. It features the best posts



from the popular blog *Language Log*, begun in 2003 by Pullum, Liberman, and a team of other linguists across the country.

Elected as a member of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003, Pullum has published a dozen books and nearly 200 articles on the scientific study of language. He is coauthor of *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*

(2002), the first definitive grammar reference book of standard international English in more than 20 years. One of his best-known books is *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax*, a highly entertaining collection of satirical essays about the field of linguistics. Pullum was chosen by his fellow faculty members to give the 40th annual UCSC Faculty Research Lecture in February.

The books featured here may be purchased online from UCSC’s Bay Tree Bookstore at slugstore.ucsc.edu.