

Reflections on the Merage School's First Years

by

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Introduction

I attended the School between 1967 and 1972 as a member of the second Masters class in the School's history, and as its second Ph.D grantee. I may be its oldest living graduate. Much has changed at UCI since then. What follows is an impressionistic baseline against which to appreciate these changes.

First Contact

I first encountered UCI on June 20th of 1964. I was still an undergraduate at California State College at Fullerton but was thinking of graduate school. Hearing that President Lyndon Johnson would be dedicating a new branch of the University of California on a plot of land near Newport Beach, several of us undergraduates drove down out of curiosity. At this point, the southern half of Orange County was still largely vacant apart from the beach cities. The City of Irvine existed only on drawing boards. UCI's roughly 1,500 acres were largely raw grassland.

President Johnson arrived from the Marine Air base at El Toro in the usual three helicopter fleet for the dedication. Before about 15,000 people, including Dr. Clark Kerr, the President of the University of California system, Chancellor Daniel Aldrich, and other dignitaries, Johnson spoke of California's love of education, his belief in its fundamental importance to the country, and the bright future UCI would have. Behind him, a building or two was taking shape. I immediately decided to come to UCI. It almost felt like a Presidential mandate.

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Glimpses of the School's First Years

The Graduate School of Administration, precursor to the Merage School, was one of the three original elements of the UCI Master Plan (the others were the College of Arts, Letters, and Science, and the School of Engineering). Though the name "Graduate School of Administration" might suggest a place where you'd learn more than you wanted to know about crafting inter-office memos, or filling out forms in triplicate, it was an exciting place with a fresh perspective on managing organizations.

Size

The School's first Masters class had five students and there were seven faculty members. I was in the School's second class (1967-69). There were three of us. The entire School, faculty, staff and students, initially occupied the top floor of the Social Sciences Tower.

Team teaching prevailed, so many of our seminars benefitted from the presence of several faculty members at once. This was a marvelous educational opportunity to be sure. But when several of the professors were vigorously debating an important idea, getting a word in edgewise for us students could be a challenge.

Information technology had a touching simplicity. There were no laptop computers, no desktop computers, no cell phones, no voicemail, no email connections, no wireless connections, no Internet, no local area networks, no cable TV, no Facebook, no twittering. Nor did their supporting industries exist. Instead, there was a single mainframe and rooms where you key punched "IBM cards" before submitting them to the Computer Center for overnight processing. Fortran was the dominant computer language. The computer was largely viewed as a promising way to perform an organization's housekeeping functions. Bill Gates was still in Junior High School, contemplating his meager allowance, and dreaming of better things.

On the other hand, much what we studied then would be familiar today such as the following:

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- Forecasting relevant aspects of the future environment.
- Assessing an organization's opportunities.
- Defining its goals.
- Developing its strategies.
- Assessing available alternatives using formal methods (e.g., operations analysis, simulation).
- Estimating their costs and benefits.
- Identifying and attracting the right people.
- Establishing a pleasant, effective working environment.
- Measuring results against goals.

Undoubtedly, these subjects have been important throughout the School's history. I'd love to say I was good at all of the above, but I was a partial success (at best) in at least one of them. As part of a planning class in 1968, we were assigned to "forecast what the City of Irvine would look like in 2000". My paper on this topic imagined a mature city of 20,000 people. Missing the actual size by a factor of 10, my paper confirmed a famous old saying: "forecasting is hard, especially about the future."

Was the School small in those days? Sure. Just getting up on its rickety legs? Of course. But already there was an air of great expectations. We all felt the excitement of writing on a blank slate.

Glimpses of The UCI Campus During This Period

When I arrived, there were nine finished buildings around Central (later Aldrich) Park, all done in the California Brutalist style. Beyond this perimeter were open fields. UCI as a whole had already graduated its first class in 1966, conferring degrees on 14 students. Student housing was planned but not yet built. Tuition was \$200 per quarter.

UCI's first Chancellor, Daniel Aldrich had been a prime mover in UCI's creation and was quite accessible. He was tall, good looking, and athletic. He occasionally played tennis on campus during lunch hours and had a terrific serve. I happen to

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know because one day I came over to the courts to look for a pick-up game. The Chancellor was there looking for a fourth for doubles. He was the Chancellor; I couldn't say no. The other thing I couldn't do was return any of his serves.

It was the 1960s, so long hair and beards were common for male students, but shampoo was optional. Mini-skirts were common for women, but bras were optional. Both sexes tended to dress as if leaving for Cuba after class to help with the sugar cane harvest.

The birth control pill, introduced just a few years earlier, was already in wide use, increasing still further the enthusiasm with which men and women on campus regarded one another.

Temporary trailers used as offices for faculty, student assistants, and University staff seemed to be everywhere.

The San Diego Chargers held summer training camp on the athletic field adjoining Crawford Hall. You could walk over, stand on the sidelines and watch them go through drills for free.

UCI's first appearance in a national movie occurred in 1971. It was auspicious. Over a three day period, a film crew shot scenes for a classic Planet of the Apes movie, called *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*. These scenes featured intelligent apes wearing jump suits. Since it took a while to set up each shot, the minor characters often had time on their hands. As a result, more than one passing coed found herself being chatted up by an ape in orange coveralls.

Glimpses of The Times Nationally

Nationally, a new car cost about \$2,750, a gallon of gasoline was about 33 cents, a new house around \$24,250, and an average annual salary was roughly \$9,300. The Dow Jones average stood at about 900.

Five major social currents were at work. No campus in the country, including UCI, was untouched by their effects.

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The Boomer Bulge. Between 1946 and 1960, something like 76 million babies were born in America. By the late 1960s, this “youth quake” started showing up on college campuses in record numbers. Indeed, UCI was built to help accommodate this deluge. Time magazine named us Boomers collectively “Man of the Year” in 1967. None of us doubted we deserved the honor. We were skeptical of our elders, experimental, suspicious of the “establishment”, self-righteous, and cocksure we had better answers to life’s questions. The voting age dropped from 21 to 18 in 1970, partly in an effort to capture the political energy embodied in this huge demographic cohort.

The Viet Nam War. This Southeast Asian conflict dominated the period. Since the draft was still in effect, every male student knew his draft number and status. As casualties mounted, protests against the war were increasingly common. In May of 1970, the UCI Administration Building was occupied for several days by a student protest group called the Praxis Axis Action Faction. The immediate cause was the National Guard firing on students at Kent State University protest rally and the U.S. military incursion into Cambodia. But continuing frustration with a military conflict in Viet Nam that the U.S. could neither win nor end was the underlying cause.

The Civil Rights Movement. The role of racial minorities began to change rapidly during this period. Among African Americans (then called Negroes), several versions of this movement vied for national support. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated peaceful resistance to racial discrimination, and highlighted the moral dimensions of the struggle. Shirley Chisholm, the first Afro-American elected to Congress (1968), and a presidential candidate (1972), advocated change within the system. Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X recommended angrier approaches to racial change. While each group of advocates had its adherents, people of all ages and colors were nervous about where the country was going.

The Women's Liberation Movement. Women began to demand redefinition of their roles in society during this period. They were spurred on by such things as the creation of the National Organization for Women (1966), the pursuit of the Equal Rights Amendment, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

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When Friedan died in 1985, the New York Times said her book "...ignited the contemporary movement and permanently transformed the social fabric of the U.S...." The accepted roles of women in home and family, in the workplace, and in the broader society began to change rapidly and irreversibly during this period.

The Environmental Movement. Books like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Paul Erlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968), the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* drew attention to the deteriorating environment and the need to begin protecting it. The first Earth Day took place in 1970. Federal, state, and private sector organizations intended to protect the environment began to appear as the Nation demanded a cleaner environment.

Any one of these social currents would have presented challenges. Taken together, they roiled the country as perhaps never before. Consider the first half of 1968 alone:

- January 31st: The Tet Offensive in Viet Nam showed there was no light ahead in the tunnel despite the presence of 525,000 U.S. troops, giving greater credence to those opposing the war.
- March 29th: Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, sparking angry, disruptive outbursts in many American cities.
- March 31st: President Johnson announced he wouldn't run again for President despite winning in a landslide just three years earlier, throwing the political balance of power in the country into disarray.
- June 5th: Anti-war democrat Bobby Kennedy, brother of slain President John F. Kennedy, was himself assassinated in Los Angeles the night he had won the California primary. Though he had seemed destined to be the Democratic Party's nominee in the November Presidential election that evening, he too was suddenly gone.

These convulsions encouraged the rise of the New Left on college campuses across the nation. Groups like the Students for Democratic Society, the Black Panthers,

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and the Weathermen advocated a Marxist view of US society and the path it should take forward. Some saw the need for a revolution. Like most other campuses across the U.S., UCI experienced considerable student unrest.

The Times Expressed in Music

Woodstock has gotten much attention recently due to the 40th anniversary of this counter cultural happening in upstate New York. But another musical expression of the times may be even more evocative. In April of 1968, a "tribal rock opera" named "Hair" opened in New York. Running for 1,750 performances, "Hair" had great music (e.g., "Good Morning Star Shine", "Aquarius", and "Let the Sun Shine In") that celebrated the counter culture flourishing on campuses. An instant sensation, "Hair" managed to be anti-war, pro-civil rights, pro-women's liberation, pro-environment, pro-sexual freedom, pro-recreational drugs, and (in one scene) pro-nudity, all in two acts.

For many, "Hair" expressed the Great Generational Divide between the older generation and its disaffected progeny. Most college students applauded "Hair". Most anxious parents were appalled by it. Each side of the Generational Divide thought "Hair" expressed the worst about those on the other side. Few doubted that it captured the spirit of the times.

In Closing

So UCI and the School emerged in challenging times. As one who saw it all first hand, I can attest that they were something to behold. Of course, UCI has seen enormous changes since I was an eager student here. Since all of us are shaped by the times in which we've lived, as alumni we have our generational differences. Still, I suspect there are things we all share:

- Appreciation for the skill and talent of the School's faculty including the generosity with which they gave their time, the intellectual challenges they posed young minds, and the encouragement they provided.

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- Gratitude for the University staff and their cheerful , patient way of helping us along the way. All were unfailingly gracious in performing these often thankless tasks.
- A sense of awe concerning this magnificent institution in this wonderful place. There can't be many better venues in the world to sharpen the mind in pursuit of one's dreams.
- Wonderful memories of our years at UCI. For many of us, they are among our most treasured memories. I know they are for me.