

Ten years ago, I was invited to give a talk in the School of Social Ecology about my research. I remember knowing in less than two hours on campus that I wanted to be part of this place. The interdisciplinary nature of the School mirrored my own work, the big thinking of the faculty impressed me, the diversity of the students was all too rare in academe, the relevance and influence of the work were essential, and the natural beauty and weather were hard to miss. I wanted in. It didn’t hurt that there was an In and Out Burger across the street.

So, to say that I’m exhilarated to be here hardly does my feelings justice. This has been my dream school of some time, and I’m excited by what we can do together.

Tonight, over the next few minutes, I want to introduce myself to you and share my hopes for the School. I also want to ask for your help. Help from our faculty and staff, help from our colleagues across UCI, and help from our alumni and friends in the community. We are at a moment of urgency for the School. There are so many social problems that demand our attention, and as a public institution in California we have an obligation to lead the way. So, tonight, I’m asking you to be our partner.

First, there are some things you should know about me. I was raised a Midwesterner but spent about half of my life on the East Coast. So, yes, I believe in being kind and well-mannered, but I'm really impatient that more of us don't do it more often.

I'm a third generation American, raised by parents born during the depression and with a keen awareness of how fortunate our family was to have escaped Tsars and Nazis. Social justice and social responsibility were central topics of our dinner conversations many nights, so it is no surprise that I spent several years working in human rights. I've seen the highs – working in rural South Africa to train paralegals and then watching along in amazement when the country safely held its first all-race elections post-Apartheid. I've also seen the worst – visiting the mass open air morgue in Bosnia when people were killed simply because of their ethnicity or religion.

I am well aware of the opportunities I've had and the easier path I have enjoyed that many others – including my own relatives – were denied. No one has discounted my voice, refused me transportation or denied me employment because of my color or outward appearance, where I came from, the sex to which I was born, or who I love. I am profoundly thankful for the chances I have had, and it is this appreciation, this sense of obligation, that commits me to “paying it forward,”

if you will, so that others will have access to similar opportunities and will be fully vested as members of the academy and society.

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in the intersection of research, policy and practice. I value theoretically driven research, *and* I want to put it into the hands of those who can implement those findings. I also want to draw the line back from policy and practice to the university so the research and teaching we're doing take account of conditions on the ground and can help answer needed questions.

All of these parts of my background bring me to Social Ecology and inform my hopes and expectations for the School. We are the only School of Social Ecology in the country because we are hard to imitate.

First, we're not just interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary; our work also crosses disciplines. We believe in an integrative approach to solving social problems.

It is not enough, for example to ask about the condition of an individual – about a child's psychological development, about a person's anxiety or depression, or about their healthy aging – without asking also about the health of their community.

- What are the levels and kinds of crime to which people are exposed?
- How is social cohesion in the community?

- What about food and housing security?
- Is there economic opportunity?
- Do people have access to transportation?
- What about the competence of governments?

And, if we ask about the health of the community, we need to interrogate the health of the environment: Is there clean air and water? What the effects of cataclysmic weather events? Is there access to natural resources that are sustainable?

This mindset, which is baked into the School's DNA, necessitates that we be relevant. We are called to engage with governments, NGOs, even industry to solve problems. As we say, we not only research social problems, we seek to solve them. And, we seek to train and connect our students so that they can fulfill their interests in being changemakers. National publications call UCI the #1 school for advancing the American dream. That not only means educating students and preparing them for successful careers, it also means helping them to acquire the skills and experiences they need to go into their communities and give back.

As I listen to myself recite our mission, I realize it may sound exhausting. And, if there were ever a time in which many of us would be exhausted, it is now. It has become commonplace to say that the pandemic has taken a lot out of us. But, let's stop for a minute and acknowledge what we have endured and how our

community has been resilient over the last two years. We have turned our homes into offices, schools, day care centers, even sick wards. We have pivoted to online instruction, back to in-person, then to hybrid, and now back to in-person, trying to accommodate students' needs while ensuring continuity and quality. We've had faculty hired more than a year ago who only this quarter are experiencing a relatively "normal" term. We have tried to maintain our research agendas even when many research sites were closed. And, we have tried to keep our own anxiety and depression at bay – or seek remote care while trying to fulfill all of our other obligations.

I know you're tired. I know you're worn down by the last two years.

And yet, I know the members of this school joined academe because they want to make a difference. Because excellent scholarship and teaching are the gateway to improving the world. We believe in social justice. Justice in how the state's penal power is used. Justice in how children are raised and how behavioral health is apportioned. Environmental justice in access to clean air and water and sustainable resources.

When I was younger, there was a bumper sticker that said, "If you're not outraged you're not paying attention." Today, it might say, "If you're not worried, you're not paying attention." Worried about the prospects of a world war, worried

about a pandemic/endemic, worried about threats to democracy, the right to privacy and racial justice. Worried about climate change.

That's where we come in. We have a role in helping to tackle society's so-called sticky problems. Our research offers insights, opens possibilities, and raises questions. We can translate our findings, consult with outside partners, and train policymakers and practitioners. And, of course, our teaching and mentoring can help to produce the next wave of changemakers who, having lived through these perilous times, tell me they are itching to act on the world rather than having it simply act on them.

We owe it to them -- our students, this next generation of changemakers -- to rise up out of our weariness, and that's what I am asking you to do by joining in partnership. Whether you're a faculty or staff member in our School, a colleague across campus, one of our alumni, or a supporter in the community, we have a great, wonderful task at hand – to strength the School of Social Ecology. We have existing programs to fine tune and new ones to build. We need to expand our sphere of influence and impact. And, we must generate new and deeper resources for the School.

As I said when I started tonight, I've wanted to be at Social Ecology for more than a decade now. But, I didn't come here to be comfortable. I came

because we can make a difference, and I look forward to working with all of you to do just that.