

**SBSG Open House:
From Time-Honored Ceremonies to a Genie in the Bottle
Valerie Jenness, Dean
School of Social Ecology
University of California, Irvine
October 26, 2010**

Good afternoon and welcome. I'm pleased to be here and speak on behalf of the School of Social Ecology because ceremonies like this are time-honored rituals that publicly mark our achievements and provide us with an opportunity to look both backward and forward. Looking backward takes us immediately to all the people, talent, and what my mother would call "staywithedness" that made this new building and the two schools it houses possible.

To all of the people Dean Doshier already acknowledged, I want to add my thanks. There are so many other people to add to the list, but because my time is limited, I will add just a few more who are particularly central to Social Ecology's history and proud traditions. This year marks Social Ecology's 40th anniversary, and with that in mind I want to thank all of those who have made the School of Social Ecology a reality over the years and continue to do so, especially:

- The founder of the Program in Social Ecology, Arnold Binder;
- Dan Stokols, who served as Dean of the School for a decade, during which time he provided the leadership that enabled the program to

become a school, departments to be envisioned and institutionalized, and degree programs to proliferate;

- Ron Huff, who also served as the Dean for a decade, during which time he lead us into the 21st century with a continuing commitment to growth, excellence, and maturation, adding 10 research centers to the School along the way. And, as Dean Doshier already mentioned, Ron played a leadership role in envisioning this building and ensuring it came to fruition. Of course, when I mention Ron, I must mention Michele Miller, our most immediate past Assistant Dean. As Ron said to me, “she spent the most time on the building and was involved in every detail.” Thank you, Michele. Welcome back to your work and a place you helped make come into being.
- Finally, of course, I want to thank the many, many faculty, staff, students, alumni, and donors who, I’m sure Arnie, Dan, and Ron would agree, make the School what it is—as both a historic achievement and current reality.

This reality is a special feature of UCI:

- The School of Social Ecology continues to be dedicated to interdisciplinary, problem-driven scholarship, teaching, and outreach in the public’s interest.

- Our trademark is discipline and boundary crossing research and teaching that is inspired by pressing social problems and directed toward the betterment of society.
- As a School, Social Ecology's motivations are as scholarly as they are pragmatic. We recognize that understanding and addressing the most persistent ills of society requires resisting an exclusive focus on unidisciplinary research that fails to fully account for the environmental and social context in which problems emerge, take shape, and impact our lives.
 - I, like so many of you, was captivated earlier this month as I watched the Chilean miners rescued. I must confess: I played hooky and stayed home all day to watch the miners come up. From beneath the earth. One by one—all of them. Like clock work. I was mesmerized. Among other things, it reminded me of the complexity of our problems, the value of an interdisciplinary approach (from the physics and geology of it all to the psychology and international relations of it all!), and the value of planning and simply pulling together—without regard for turf or credit—as a primary weapon in understanding and responding

to a common human problem. It was a marvel to watch.

Inspiring, actually.

[Pause]

- Social Ecology's unique focus and expertise has made it a national leader in applying basic theory and empirical research to address complex societal problems. We are extremely proud of this School precisely because it is home to nine exceptional baccalaureate and graduate programs, over 60 faculty and 250 graduate students who do cutting edge scientific research that addresses some of the most pressing problems of our day, and a large alumni base with almost 19,000 names in it!
- Seen in these terms, it is not surprising that every week Social Ecology faculty are being interviewed by print and broadcast media and being invited to comment on timely issues of local, national, and international importance. For example,
 - Professor Boarnet's work with the National Research Council on the relationship between development patterns, vehicle miles traveled and energy consumption was cited recently cited in outlets as diverse as *USA Today*, *MIT Technology Review*, and *Planning Magazine*;

- Earlier this Fall, Professor Pontell gave testimony to the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission in Miami on the workings of mortgage fraud.
- And, just last week, Wendy Goldberg's and JoAnn Prause's research on the effects of maternal employment on child development has marshaled international attention, including in the U.S., Chile, Ghana, and Great Britain.

Like the faculty, Social Ecology students are often recognized for their excellence.

- I was exceptionally pleased when Elizabeth Landeros, a Criminology, Law and Society major, received the UCI Legacy Award for leadership in civic engagement last year.
- More recently, Lori Sexton, an advanced graduate student in Criminology, Law and Society, was awarded the Fletcher Jones Fellowship. This award is given annually to one UCI graduate student based on past accomplishments, enthusiasm for excellence, vitality, ingenuity and leadership potential.
- And just last week, I was informed that Victoria Lowerson, a graduate student in the Department of Planning, Policy, and Design, was selected by UCI's new Institute for Clinical and

Translational Science's Community Engagement Unit to receive the Promising Student Award for Commitment to Community Participation in Research.

Time constraints today make it impossible to detail all the activity in the school and all the recognition bestowed upon this activity; and as a fairly new dean I've already learned the hard way that it is dicey to mention some specific accomplishments and not others! So, let me just sa—using the language of an undergraduate with whom I work—[quote] “Soc. Eco. has got it going on all over” [end quote]. As you tour our building, you'll see posters that reveal our work and meet faculty, staff, and students who are central to our accomplishments.

As home to the School of Social Ecology and the School of Social Sciences, this building is, of course, more than a mere functional physical structure and an impressive architectural accomplishment.

What we acknowledge today is the promise of a seamless connection between the university mission, this new building, and what I call the three ps: people, place and purpose. Both the School of Social Ecology and the School of Social Sciences are committed to using this building to continue to manifest excellence in research, teaching, and service, and we will do so in distinct and collaborative ways. I emphasize continue because today

Dean Doshier and I would like to use the occasion of this Open House to announce that we have launched our new Master of Public Policy Program and will welcome our inaugural class next fall. This is a collaborative venture being undertaken by both Schools and, as such, reflects expertise, vision, and labor from each.

[Pause]

The star today, however, is the building itself, and the occasion an open house. As I was thinking just about this physical structure I thought of the other intellectual places in which I have lived. Such buildings can feel like prisons or living rooms—and, trust me, I know both. [Sidebar: For those who don't know me, I'm not announcing that I've served time in a prison—not that there's anything wrong with that! Those who know me know I'm referencing that fact that I do “in prison” research.] Prisons are places no one wants to be and when they have to be there they try to make the best of it, usually by trying to make it feel like something else. Living rooms, in contrast, are the centers of the places we call “home” —places that set the stage for meaningful intellectual engagement, lasting memories, a sense of belonging, and, in the best cases “family.” Dean Doshier and I are very much in agreement that this building—this house with many living rooms—will embody the best of what UCI has to offer.

And this talk of “home” reminds me of my favorite “genie in a bottle” joke: Three men have been stranded on a desert island for over 20 years, alone and miserable, when one of them comes across a genie in a bottle. With great glee, he lunges towards it, grabs it, and pops the cork. Sure enough, out comes a genie. With equally great glee, she thanks him for setting her free and offers all three men the fulfillment of any wish. The man who released her immediately says “I just want to go home, I’ve been here way too long, please let me go home. I miss home.” With the blink of the Genie’s eye, he’s gone. Upon seeing this, the second guy experiences a rush of excitement and says “me, too, me too. I just want to go home. It’s home I want.” With another blink of the Genie’s eye, he too is gone. Amazed, the final guy is convinced that his wish will be granted, but wants to be thoughtful about it. So, as he contemplates his options, he also realizes he is now alone as he makes this big decision. Hesitantly, he says “Geez, that was impressive. I’m really going to miss those guys, I sure wish they were here. This just isn’t home without them.” And in yet another blink of the Genie’s eye....

My point: Dean Doshier and I want to welcome you into our beautiful new home, which really means we want to welcome you to our intellectual and educational commitments and activities as well as our community. Indeed, it is

our wish that this new building be seen, in the first instance, a locale for excellence that makes a difference in the lives of our students and the conditions of our world. It is also our wish that this building is a locale for the development and maintenance of community—both within and beyond the walls of academe. And, we don't need to find a Genie in a bottle to make these wishes come true!

So, on behalf of all of us, I invite you inside—come in, have something to eat and drink, and take a look at our home and attendant gateway. Welcome to our community.
