A Marvel Inside A Miracle

A Visual History of the University of California, San Diego
UC San Diego was always about the sea. From its humble origins in a meager turn-of-the-century boathouse to its present-day search for medicines from marine life, the institution has stayed its oceanic course.

William E. Ritter launched the early journey from California’s coast to the world stage. As chair of the University of California’s new zoology department in the Berkeley hills, he envisioned a year-round marine biological laboratory “to study the teeming life of the great ocean on whose margin the University is located.” Beginning in 1892, Ritter and his band of colleagues and students hopscotched the California coastline in search of the perfect spot from which to explore the ocean and all its life.

The quest ended in San Diego, where a group of influential citizens embraced Ritter’s vision with enthusiasm and hard cash. The Marine Biological Association of San Diego was chartered in 1903 to survey the Southern California waters, create a public aquarium and affiliate with UC. Initially housed in the Hotel del Coronado boathouse, the marine station eventually moved from Coronado in 1905 to La Jolla Shores where newspaper tycoon Edward W. Scripps and his sister, Ellen Browning Scripps, provided land and a building. The Scripps Institution for Biological Research was deeded to UC in 1912 for the unprincely sum of $10, and renamed Scripps Institution of Oceanography in 1925. Researchers would later include Charles David Keeling, a geochemist who would become the father of modern climate science, and Walter H. Munk, a geophysicist now considered by many as the world’s greatest living oceanographer who helped forecast surf conditions for the Normandy invasion and other Allied landings during World War II.

The Scripps family’s UC saga continued with the 1931 marriage of Ellen Clark to a lanky young geologist. She was the grandniece of Ellen Browning Scripps. He was Roger Revelle, the future steward of Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the founding father of UC San Diego.

As Scripps director from 1951-64, Revelle drove the transformation of La Jolla’s local field station into a premier oceanographic institution with multidisciplinary research projects and vessels to launch the era of sea-going science for Scripps. But Revelle wanted something bigger. His students needed grounding
First College—soon-to-be Revelle College—welcomed UC San Diego’s first undergraduates in 1964. Mostly male, science majors and white, these 185 pioneering students tended to hit the books hard. The dusty start-up school was dominated by Quonset huts and wooden barracks, relics of the former Marine Corps training facility. In 1968, Revelle College moved to its permanent location, and a second college, named for environmentalist John Muir, took over the makeshift space.

When historian John S. Galbraith was hired as the second chancellor in 1964, he began to expand UCSD from its lone School of Science and Engineering to a multidisciplinary university with a full academic library. Artists and humanists lured to the La Jolla campus included Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse and contemporary art pioneers Newton Harrison and David Antin. Marcuse’s arrival coincided with, and helped escalate, an upsurge in anti-Vietnam War student activism. Revelle Plaza became a gathering place where angry students exercised their free-speech rights. As the war dragged on, the volume of student protests soared, reaching a crescendo in 1970 when third-year student George Winne, Jr. doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire in the Plaza.

Third College, now Thurgood Marshall College, was born in these troubled times as a vanguard of educational opportunity for minority students. Its controversial shared governance plan gave students and University administrators an equal voice in hiring faculty. When the college opened in 1970, two-thirds of its 168 students were either Black or Chicano. Joe Watson, a young African-American chemistry instructor, reluctantly signed on as provost—a politically fraught assignment that lasted 11 years.

Psychologist William J. McGill arrived in 1968 as UCSD’s third chancellor. He oversaw a building boom, and like Galbraith, he mostly succeeded in holding the middle ground between campus radicals and conservative city and state leaders. McGill’s conflict management skills upheld academic freedom at
Niki de Saint Phalle’s *Sun God*, the first work commissioned for the Stuart Collection, was installed in 1983.
As UC San Diego neared its half-century mark, the campus became more digital, more globally connected and more student-friendly. It also became a major player in science-tech advancement. In 2000, UCSD was chosen by the Council on Competitiveness to host 150 top U.S. decision-makers at the second National Innovation Summit.

UCSD’s sixth chancellor, physicist Robert C. Dynes, took the helm in 1996, just six years after joining the faculty. As a former Bell Labs inventor, he was determined that UCSD would lead a new era of what he called “R, D & D”: research, development and delivery of innovations to end users. As a first-generation college graduate, he was committed to increasing educational opportunity to underserved students, especially after the passage of Proposition 209 scrapped affirmative action efforts to admit more minority applicants.

New campus ventures in the late 1990s fostered academic-industry partnerships, multidisciplinary excellence and diversity in education. The California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2) was one of four “new millennium” UC-centered state innovation hubs. An undergraduate Sixth College championed 21st-century education at the crossroads of culture and technology. The Preuss School UCSD, a college prep program for low-income students, quickly became a national model for grades 6-12 education reform.

UCSD Health Sciences gained national prominence with the opening of the Moores Cancer Center, designated by the National Cancer Institute as a Comprehensive Cancer Center, and the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Another new professional school, the Rady School of Management, won early acclaim for its focus on educating leaders for the new innovation economy.

Opposite page: In 2000, the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology, or Calit2, launched a new millennial model of connecting art and technology to spur innovation. The StarCAVE is a five-sided virtual reality room where scientific models and animations are projected in stereo on 360-degree screens surrounding the viewer. Pictured are alumnus research scientist Albert Lin (center) and the graduate students working with him to find the tomb of Genghis Khan. The group is viewing a 3-D reconstruction of an archaeological site in Mongolia.

Left: In 2003, Mark Thiemens, dean of the Division of Physical Sciences, led a team to the South Pole and braved temperatures of minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit to drill three tons of ice samples to study in labs at UC San Diego. Their analyses of the composition of oxygen and sulfur isotopes deposited in the ice have yielded important insights about ozone formation, as well as the impacts of volcanic eruptions on global climate.
From its origins in a small marine lab on the coast of Coronado and in Quonset huts clustered on a La Jolla bluff, UC San Diego has ascended over 50 remarkable years to the world ranks of premier research universities. The storied trajectory of this University of California prodigy was driven by restless visionaries and fueled by a region hard-wired for innovation. Led by Roger Revelle, UCSD’s intrepid founders pulled off a miracle when they opened the campus in 1960. In the ensuing half-century, UCSD became a marvel of scientific discovery, cultural vibrancy, economic development and academic strength. This 128-page journey in archival pictures brings to life the inspiring leaders, legendary scholars, bold launches, big dreams fulfilled and luminous paths forward—all the elements of the “marvel inside a miracle” that is the University of California, San Diego.