

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

November 7, 2000

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Robert S. Michaelsen, Retired UCSB Professor and Administrator, Dies in Santa Barbara at 81 After Long Illness

Robert S. Michaelsen, an emeritus professor of religious studies and former Vice Chancellor of the University of California, Santa Barbara, died Monday night at Cottage Hospital here after what family members described as a long illness. A resident of Santa Barbara, he was 81.

A native of Iowa, Michaelsen moved to Santa Barbara in 1965 to join the UCSB faculty as a professor of religious studies and chair of the department. Earlier he had served as director of the School of Religion at the University of Iowa for 11 years. A distinguished scholar and former president of the American Academy of Religion, he was the author of four books, including

The American Search for Soul.

He also served in a variety of top administrative roles at the university, including terms as Acting Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and as The Vice Chancellor of UCSB under three Chancellors: Robert Huttenback, Daniel Aldrich, and Barbara Uehling. He retired from the university in 1989.

In addition to being a scholar of the first rank, Bob Michaelsen was a wise statesman of UCSB who served and led our institution brilliantly in numerous ways. We prosper on the foundation he laid before us, said Henry T. Yang, Chancellor of UCSB. He was a man of tremendous integrity, vision, and wisdom whose love for our institution was legendary. We will miss him, but his legacy will be everlasting.

Among his many roles, Michaelsen served as Divisional Chair of the Academic Senate at UCSB from 1975 to 1978. The current Divisional Chair of the senate, Richard Watts, a professor of chemistry, recalled the leadership Michaelsen provided during his terms of service as Vice Chancellor. He was instrumental in setting directions for UCSB that have led to the phenomenal growth of our academic programs and to their increased stature, said Watts.

Michaelsen always maintained his position as a professor of religious studies, and retired as a professor emeritus in 1989. He is credited with helping to build what has become a nationally recognized department. UCSB is the only campus in the UC system that offers a Ph.D. in religious studies.

He came to UCSB in 1965, to what at the time was little more than a program in religious studies, and under his leadership a full-fledged department was established, said Wade Clark Roof, the J.F. Rowny Professor of Religion and Society and chair of the department. Not only was Bob a visionary leader, he was a wonderful person - warm, compassionate, and always supportive of his colleagues. We shall miss him dearly.

Michaelsen was the first scholar named to the Rowny chair at UCSB. Michaelsen and his wife of 58 years, the former Florence Braden, who survives him, recently established an endowment at UCSB to support a visiting scholars program in religious studies.

In addition to his widow, Michaelsen is survived by three sons: Joel C. Michaelsen, a professor of geography at UCSB; Peter W. Michaelsen, of Seattle; and Jonathan R. Michaelsen, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and five grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Saturday (Nov. 11) at 2 p.m. at the First Congregational Church in Santa Barbara, 2101 State St.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that contributions be made to either the Santa Barbara Visiting Nurse Association, 222 E. Canon Perdido St., Santa Barbara 93101; or to the Michaelsen Endowed Visiting Scholars Fund, c/o the UCSB Foundation,

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.