

# Report of the Oviatt Library Advisory Working Group



**REPORT OF THE OVIATT LIBRARY ADVISORY GROUP**  
**California State University, Northridge**  
**September 11, 2020**

**Background**

The January 23-24, 1973, minutes of the Committee on Gifts and Public Affairs record the following:

Naming of Building- California State University, Northridge

RESOLVED, By the Board of Trustees of The California State University and Colleges, that the new Library Building at California State University, Northridge, be designated Delmar T. Oviatt Library

For over 47 years the California State University, Northridge (CSUN) main library has carried the name Delmar T. Oviatt as approved by the Board of Trustees of the California State University (CSU). Then, as now, the BOT retains authority for the naming of major campus buildings. Almost since its inception, the Oviatt Library has been one of the most used buildings/facilities on the entire CSUN campus. During 2018-19, the Library hosted 3,451,824 total patrons, including 1,342,082 visitors and 2,109,742 transactions on line. Few would disagree that the Library has long been viewed as the signature and iconic physical representation of CSUN. It is a sure stop for touring visitors, especially middle and high school students. Further, its adjoining Oviatt lawn is the site of major student gatherings from New Student Convocation to Commencement and Honors Convocation, and it is often the site for expressions of free speech and assembly, including rallies and demonstrations. It is simply the heart of our university.

Until recently, the Library's name had (to our knowledge) gone unchallenged, benefiting from a common presumption that it would only have been named for someone whose background and public record would stand the test of time. A person free of actions that might be deemed unacceptable in the eyes of the campus community and beyond. That changed when, during Spring 2019, members of the Students of Color Coalition (SCC; an umbrella organization representing various activist student groups) presented a series of demands to the University administration. One of the demands called for the Library to be renamed based on their belief that Oviatt was a "racist and oppressive figure" who was "...a persistent opponent to the creation and existence of cultural studies during the period of his tenure as President." Although startling, on today's college campus, such accusations about a former high-level campus administrator do not go without serious review. During her 2019 Welcome Back Address delivered on August 16,

2019, President Dianne Harrison announced her intention to commission a group comprised of the broader CSUN community to review the allegations and make recommendations, as appropriate. Members of the Oviatt Library Advisory Working Group were appointed in September 2019 and they were provided with a written charge to guide their work (See Appendix A).

### **The Oviatt Library Working Group and its Charge**

The members of the Advisory Working Group (AWG) were drawn from key segments of the campus community and include the following individuals:

1. William Watkins, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students - President's designee and chair of the working group
2. Matthew Cahn, Interim Vice Provost - Provost's designee
3. Kelly DeLeon, Students of Color Coalition
4. Emily Rivera-Murillo - Students of Color Coalition
5. Ellen Jarosz, Faculty, Head of Special Collections and Archives - Appointed by Faculty President
6. Paul Wilson, Faculty, Department of Biology- Appointed by Faculty President\*
7. Rose Merida, President, Associated Students\*\*
8. Natalie Mason-Kinsey, Co-Chair Commission on Equity and Diversity
9. Xochitl Flores-Marcial, Faculty, Department of Chicano/a Studies - Designee, Commission on Equity and Diversity
10. Cindy Chernow, President, Alumni Association
11. Carlos Fuentes, Alumnus
12. Irene Tovar, Alumna

\*On July 7, 2020 the AWG Chair received an email from Paul Wilson stating he was taking an unexpected leave of absence and would be resigning from the AWG. It is noted that Prof. Wilson was an active member and his perspectives on the issues to be addressed were well known to the AWG and documented.

\*\*Diana Vicente, Associated Students President for AY 2019-20, served diligently on the AWG through the end of her term. She was then replaced by current AS President Rose Merida.

California State University Northridge does not have a procedure for the reconsideration of the appropriateness of a building named for an individual against whom serious negative allegations have been made. Thus, the AWG was given the following charge:

- Review, analyze and participate in the discovery and documentation of information that illuminates relevant aspects of Delmar T. Oviatt's past as a member and leader within the university community.
- Contribute to our campus community's understanding of how history and our current perspective on social justice may inform and shape the current state of the University.
- Develop opportunities for open and informed discussion across campus regarding the development of CSUN's ethnic/cultural studies programs and the role of campus administrators, including Delmar Oviatt, in the initiation of those programs. This will include interviewing individuals with direct knowledge of events at that time.
- Provide recommendation(s) about the use of the Oviatt name in association with the University Library based on a critical, informed judgment that examines historical information within our contemporary context and university values.

## Methods

The AWG early established the following areas of inquiry:

1. Processes and deliberations associated with naming the Library for Delmar T. Oviatt
2. Review how former naming procedures and criteria align with current university procedures
3. Understanding Oviatt's administrative role and accomplishments
4. Oviatt's opinions, views, actions, and policies as they related to diversity, inclusion, and social justice
5. Oviatt's opinions, views, actions and policies regarding ethnic studies departments as well as the admission of a diverse student body (e.g. Educational Opportunities Program)
6. Campus context and perspectives during time when Oviatt was a campus leader as well as when the library was named

Our first task was to search the CSUN University Archives. A very large number of documents were reviewed by members Ellen Jarosz and Xochitl Flores-Marcial and a group of students enrolled in one of Professor Flores-Marcial's classes. Relevant documents were assembled in the Library's Special Collections area for the rest of the AWG to study. The most relevant materials were also placed online for the AWG's review and study (See Appendix B Digital Documents Reviewed). Interviews with Oviatt done in 1971 give his view of the early years, though not much about his time as Acting President.<sup>1</sup> Interviews with William (Bill) Burwell<sup>2</sup> and Stanley

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<sup>1</sup> Delmar Oviatt, interview with Del Stelck, October 12, 1971. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Stelck-int/id/0/rec/1>

<sup>2</sup> William Burwell, Jr., interview with John Broesamle, March 21, 1990. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Broesamle-int/id/8/rec/2>

Charnofsky<sup>3</sup> done in 1990 in preparation for the book *Suddenly a Giant* helped establish a context for our review. In addition, the *Daily Sundial* was an informative source as it included extensive coverage.<sup>4</sup> A few available writings of Oviatt seemed relevant, most notably his state of emergency declaration on January 9, 1969<sup>5</sup> and two memos explaining his rationale.<sup>6</sup> We invited recollections from a number of people who had first-hand experience with Oviatt or with the protests in 1968 and 1969. We heard oral comments from and questioned John Clendenning, Stanley Charnofsky and Everto Ruiz. We received written comments from Rudy Acuna, and Leslie Aguirre, Scott Allen, Don Cameron, Maria Elena de las Carreras, Laurie Cartwright, John Clendenning, Jeff Craig, Jim Dole, Nathan Durdella, Martha Escobar, Michelle Erickson, Daniel Furgatch, Shadi Ganjavi, George Garcia, Kimberly Garcia, Michael Hoggin, Richard Hurtado, Marie Jackson, Sandra Jardin, Jennifer Keysor, Michael Kidd, Ryan Klein, Jorge Leal, Aaron Levy, Chuck Lindahl, Barbara Lopez, Lionel Mares, Erin McGuire, Joseph Martinez, Renee Martinez, Jason Math, “Meatloaf”, Michael Meneses, Mary Pardo, Jennifer Quinonez-Skinner, Joseph Ramirez, Jessica Reyes, Adrienne Sacks, C. Lee, Scott, Constance Semponis, Jin -Ju Seo, Josh Sides, Houston Siracusa, Wyn Tiatco, and Gabriela Torres.

Regarding the thinking of those who supported naming the Library after Oviatt in 1973, we examined formal minutes of the Faculty Senate<sup>7</sup> and the Board of Trustees.<sup>8</sup> We also found information from the Library dedication, though this does not tell us much more about the thinking of the Faculty Senate.

We called for comment from the larger CSUN community. Originally set for March 13, 2020 but postponed due to COVID-19 adjustments, comments were received via a Zoom web conference on June 24, 2020 and/or via email to a dedicated address. A strong showing of 143 individuals logged into the webinar and we heard from 27 people who shared their perspectives. Meanwhile, a subcommittee was formed to work on a framework for decision-making. We read a few reports from other universities, most notably on John Boalt whose name was taken off the Law School Building at U.C. Berkeley, on a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century university administrators whose names were removed from buildings and other units at the University of Minnesota, and

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Charnofsky, interview with John Broesamle, February 21, 1990. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Broesamle-int/id/5/rec/1>

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Sundial* Digital Collection: <https://digital-library.csun.edu/sundial>

<sup>5</sup> State of emergency declared by Delmar T. Oviatt, January 9, 1969. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/71/rec/2>

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum to faculty, staff and students from Delmar T. Oviatt, January 10, 1969. <https://cdm17169.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/486>; Memorandum to faculty, students and staff from Delmar T. Oviatt, January 13, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Faculty Senate meeting minutes consulted: <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/search/searchterm/Faculty%20Senate%20Records/field/rep/osi/mode/exact/conn/and>

<sup>8</sup> CSU Board of Trustees records, Gerth Archives & Special Collections, California State University Dominguez Hills

on John Calhoun whose name was retired from a building at Yale University.<sup>9</sup> From these examples and our own discussions, “guiding principles” were established to assist in the evaluation of findings and framing of recommendations.

The AWG dedicated ample time to discussion of the Charge and what our evidence told us about Oviatt’s character as a leader of our campus. We considered the evolution of his roles on campus and the ways in which his decisions affected the campus community at large. We based our recommendations on a careful study of the diverse sets of evidence we were able to gather throughout the process. We note, however, that with the closing of the Library in mid-March to avoid the spread of COVID-19, the AWG lost the opportunity for continued review of the substantial body of archival material assembled in the University Archives under the direction of members Ellen Jarosz and Xochitl Flores-Marcial.

## **Investigation and findings**

### **Oviatt’s Contributions to the Campus & Posthumous Association with the Library**

A native of Canada, Oviatt received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Alberta in 1939. He earned a master’s degree in 1942 and a doctorate degree in 1949, both from Stanford University. Before entering higher education, Oviatt was a teacher and administrator at the junior high and high school levels in Canada. He also taught at Washington State College and the University of Utah before moving to Los Angeles.

Oviatt was named dean of the proposed Valley campus of Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences in 1955 by President Howard McDonald. Previously, Oviatt had served as chair of the division of education at what would later be known as California State University, Los Angeles.

In the process for selecting the campus president of San Fernando Valley State College, Oviatt was passed over in favor of Ralph Prator, who began serving on July 1, 1958. Oviatt became Dean of Instruction of the new campus in 1958, and was named Vice President for Academic

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<sup>9</sup> Report of the Committee on the Use of the Boalt Name. [https://chancellor.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/boalt\\_hall\\_building\\_name\\_review\\_committee\\_proposal.pdf](https://chancellor.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/boalt_hall_building_name_review_committee_proposal.pdf) ; Report of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History. [https://university-history.dl.umn.edu/sites/university-history.dl.umn.edu/files/report\\_of\\_the\\_task\\_force\\_on\\_building\\_names\\_and\\_institutional\\_history.pdf](https://university-history.dl.umn.edu/sites/university-history.dl.umn.edu/files/report_of_the_task_force_on_building_names_and_institutional_history.pdf) ; Report of the Presidential Advisory Group on Renaming Calhoun College. [https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Presidential%20Advisory%20Group%20-%20Calhoun%2001\\_13\\_17.pdf](https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Presidential%20Advisory%20Group%20-%20Calhoun%2001_13_17.pdf)

Affairs in 1962. After Prator's abrupt resignation in 1968, Oviatt was briefly appointed acting interim president in January 1969, during a time of intense campus protest.<sup>10</sup>

Given the passage of time, few individuals were available to meet with the AWG or share written comments about Oviatt. A letter from Don Cameron, former Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs, states, "Most of us who were at San Fernando Valley State College in the 1960s remember Del Oviatt and the vital role he played in the formative years of the campus. Although Ralph Prator was President, almost everyone knew that Del Oviatt exerted the primary leadership role on campus. He was widely admired, for his listening skills, his wide range of knowledge and his fairness in dealing with issues."

"Del Oviatt was one of the most decent, thoughtful, considerate, respectful, capable, and dedicated individuals I have known. During my over 8 years observing and working with him, I never sensed any bias, bigotry, or discrimination against racial minorities or anyone else. He was the #2 administrator during the tumultuous time of the late 1960s when the campus was in turmoil. The police were on campus a number of times, sometimes with the acquiescence of the administration and other times when they defied the campus wishes and came on campus on their own volition.... So, the gradual adoption of that idea (i.e., Ethnic Studies) and eventual establishment of such programs was not delayed or thwarted by Del Oviatt or the president; it was more a matter of acceptance by members of the faculty. Del Oviatt was not an obstacle or opponent to those ideas, but rather an impartial, objective participant and facilitator during those deliberations," stated Charles Lindahl, former Director of Admission and Records.

In addition to meeting with the AWG, John Clendenning, Emeritus Professor of English, wrote, "As I explained to the committee at an earlier meeting, this is what I know. In 1967 a number of faculty members wanted to find ways to recruit minority students. The Faculty Senate and the College Administration asked me to chair an ad hoc committee to explore this concern. Maurice Colwell and Dolores Litsinger joined me on the committee. We recommended that the administration apply to the federal government for an EOP grant to bring minority students to the campus. This was done with the approval of Dean Delmar Oviatt and President Ralph Prator. They were probably not proactive in this movement, but they could have prevented it."

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<sup>10</sup> Curriculum vitae of Delmar T. Oviatt, 1971. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/469/rec/1>

Oviatt passed away from a heart attack in his home on December 24, 1971 at the age of 60. The January 4, 1972 issue of *The Daily Sundial* succinctly covered his career history, with no mention of the history of ethnic tensions on the campus during his tenure.<sup>11</sup>

The AWG was not able to locate formal procedures active in 1973 for considering and recommending that a building be named after an individual. *The Daily Sundial* reported that the Faculty Senate convened an ad hoc committee to “recommend a fitting honor for the late administrator... [t]he committee unanimously recommended a resolution to name the Library after Oviatt.”<sup>12</sup> In a letter to CSU Chancellor Glenn S. Dumke, then-President James Cleary recommended that the new library be named the Delmar T. Oviatt Library as recommended by the Faculty Senate and the Campus Planning Board.<sup>13</sup> Chancellor Glenn Dumke supported the campus recommendation, and it was later ratified by the CSU Board of Trustees.<sup>14</sup>

In October 1973 the new Library building at CSUN was named after Oviatt to honor him as “a man who contributed greatly and uniquely to the life” of the university.<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Sundial* quoted CSU Chancellor Glenn Dumke as follows: “It is most appropriate that this building be named for Dr. Oviatt, whose guiding insistence on academic excellence long stimulated the intellectual life of the Northridge community.”<sup>16</sup>

Following his death, the December 26, 1971 edition of Valley Green Sheet described Oviatt as a “Prominent...Civic Leader,” and provided details of Oviatt’s administrative career as well as his community engagement, including service on the Northridge Hospital Board, Northridge Chamber of Commerce and his selection to receive the Fernando Award, which is bestowed by the combined chambers of commerce throughout the Valley.<sup>17</sup>

Other characterizations of Oviatt include the oral presentations of people who were students and faculty during his tenure as interim president and president. In these presentations, former students discussed the experiences of students of color under his leadership. The characterizations offer new perspectives that shed light on the exclusion and outright rejection of

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<sup>11</sup> "Dr. Delmar Oviatt Dies of Heart Attack," *Daily Sundial* January 4, 1972, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/3589/rec/1>

<sup>12</sup> "Library Named for Dr. Delmar Oviatt," *Daily Sundial* February 14, 1973, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/10944/rec/1>; Minutes for Faculty Senate meeting, September 28, 1972. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/482/rec/4>

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Chancellor Glenn S. Dumke from James W. Cleary, November 16, 1972.

<https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/496/rec/1>

<sup>14</sup> California State University and Colleges Board of Trustees News Release, January 24, 1973.

<https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/501/rec/1>

<sup>15</sup> Minutes for Faculty Senate Meeting, September 28, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> "Library Named for Dr. Delmar Oviatt," *Daily Sundial* February 14, 1973, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> "Funeral Services Slated for Dr. Delmar T. Oviatt," Valley Green Sheet December 26, 1971. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/494/rec/1>



students of Mexican American and African American background on the college campus and in the community at large. These characterizations amplify sentiments of students of color and faculty of color that are present in the documentary film and in the published narratives provided by people who were eye witnesses to Oviatt's attitudes towards people of color.

The AWG could find no evidence that the processes of reviewing Oviatt's background included input from groups or individuals beyond the faculty senate and campus administration, or that faculty and administrators who moved his name forward considered his actions and their consequences during the period of campus unrest. The AWG notes that the university's current procedures for building naming are likewise absent any requirement that a candidate's total record of service be considered to determine whether it aligns with the university's stated values.

### **Oviatt's Record & Current Perspectives on Social justice**

Arguably, the Students of Color Coalition's demand that the university examine Oviatt's complete record to assess alleged racist and oppressive behavior presaged current social moments that assert the need to confront systemic racism, bias and injustice. While none of these imperatives were at the center of public and CSUN discourse when the SCC advanced its demands, current events have brought them to the forefront of our national and individual consciousness. CSUN is one of the most diverse universities in the nation, and it has many structures and processes that facilitate access and inclusion for all. In Fall 2019, our enrollment totaled 38,391 students of which 52.8% (20,267) were Latino, 9.9 % (3,814) Asian American and 4.7% (1,810) were African American.<sup>18</sup> However, this was not always the case. Despite the civil rights movement and other advocacy for access and integration, of CSUN's 15,600 students in September 1966, only ~24 were black and ~12 Latino.<sup>19</sup> Narratives on campus unrest in the late 1960s often describe the conflicts that arose as primarily Black and Brown students organized and demonstrated for access, appropriate financial and academic support, a curriculum that included their histories, their stories, and faculty of color. In 1967, the Black Student Union (BSU) was formed by students William (Bill) Burwell and Jerome Walker.<sup>20</sup> Through their organizing effort a small group of Black students began to press for greater Black student enrollment.

In pressing for increased enrollment, the BSU argued for alternate standards of admission that would not be based primarily on high school grade point average. Oviatt had been a rigorous advocate for high academic standards in order to enhance the university's reputation. Oviatt

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<sup>18</sup> CSUN Profiles. <https://www.csun.edu/counts/>

<sup>19</sup> Stanley Charnofsky, interview with John Broesamle, February 21, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> William Burwell, Jr., interview with John Broesamle, March 21, 1990.

professed a concern that students would be admitted to CSUN at a disadvantage of not having had the same academic requirements, and he feared for their ability to succeed as well as how it might reflect on the school's standing. In a February 2, 1969 *LA Times* article, Oviatt stated, "We thought they [the new minority students] might need a little academic coaching, but that otherwise they would be just the same as our white students... We failed to understand and often did not know the kind of social and psychological problems these students would have in our environment. Perhaps this illustrates how little whites understand the problems of blacks throughout our society."<sup>21</sup>

Further, even after tensions had cooled, Oviatt seems to have clung to his views. In an interview conducted by Dr. Del Stelck in 1971, Oviatt repeatedly referred to students of color and their leaders during the November 4<sup>th</sup> Incident and its aftermath as "militant."<sup>22</sup>

He used racist and inflammatory language when communicating with faculty about events calling it the "invasion" of the administration building.<sup>23</sup>

### **Oviatt's Record in the Development of Ethnic Studies**

As the founding campus administrator and, eventually, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Oviatt exerted considerable influence on the development of the university's curriculum and the hiring of the faculty who developed the university's academic programs. As Black and Chicano students began to arrive at SFVSC they saw themselves as change agents seeking an education that would equip them to return and empower marginalized and oppressed communities. This led to requests and then demands for courses in Black and Mexican American studies. While the Educational Policies Committee convened a committee to investigate the idea in May 1968,<sup>24</sup> little if any progress was made. Students and some faculty felt the faculty at large did not understand and was not friendly towards such programs.<sup>25</sup>

The Educational Policies Committee sought to meet the need through a multidisciplinary approach that connected a few existing courses into a multidisciplinary focus on each of the

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard Greenwood, "How Valley State Moved to 'New Kind of Education,'" *LA Times* February 2, 1969, p. b4. <https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/156086583?accountid=7285>

<sup>22</sup> Delmar Oviatt, interview with Del Stelck, October 12, 1971. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Stelck-int/id/2>

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum to faculty, students and staff from Delmar T. Oviatt, January 13, 1969. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/477/rec/1>

<sup>24</sup> Agenda and minutes for Educational Policies Committee meeting, May 22, 1968. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/487/rec/1>

<sup>25</sup> William Burwell, Jr., interview with John Broesamle, March 21, 1990.; Stanley Charnofsky, interview with John Broesamle, February 21, 1990.; Unrest .... founding of the Cal State Northridge Chicana/a Studies Department. <https://youtu.be/erf3j3UOmWE>

groups.<sup>26</sup> Faculty efforts to meet these student needs were slow even by academic standards, indicating a failure on the part of faculty to take seriously the urgent demands of the Black students.

As with enrollment access, the demand for Black and Mexican American Studies was a key demand during the November 4th incident. Black students occupied the President's Office on the 5th floor of the administration building and refused to leave until agreement was reached on a list of demands that were signed by then Acting President Paul Blomgren.<sup>27</sup> Oviatt was a part of the campus administrators with whom the students negotiated. He refused to sign the agreement and was described by Stan Charnofsky as not helpful.<sup>28</sup> Blomgren signed the agreement on November 4, but renounced it on November 5 stating his signature was given under duress. He further announced that students involved in the incident would be arrested, prosecuted and suspended from the CSUN campus.<sup>29</sup>

The November 4<sup>th</sup> takeover of the administration building resulted in the arrest of 24 students. The students were released from custody and resumed their calls for change. In a letter to the editor on December 13, 1968 Archie Chapman, BSU President, renewed the call for, among other things, Black and Mexican American studies.<sup>30</sup>

Oviatt was not accustomed to meeting with and negotiating academic matters with students, and especially not minority students. In an *LA Times* article, he characterized students as "not easy to get along with," "vulgar," and "disrespectful."<sup>31</sup> It was not until after the events of January 8 and 9, when faced with the prospect of continuing discord, that Acting President Oviatt finally agreed to meet and discuss student demands. A Process Committee was established and facilitated by Herbert Carter, Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission (who went on to eventually become the CSU Executive Vice Chancellor as well as President of CSU Dominguez Hills). According to a member of the AWG, the services of the Commission are typically utilized when a crisis has reached a level of dangerous stand still.

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<sup>26</sup> Agenda and minutes for Educational Policies Committee meeting, December 4, 1968.

<https://cdm17169.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/481/rec/8>

<sup>27</sup> San Fernando Valley State College Black Student Union's List of Demands, November 4, 1968. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/408/rec/1>

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Charnofsky, interview with John Broesamle, February 21, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> "Black Amnesty Denied," *Daily Sundial* November 6, 1968, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/84413/rec/2>

<sup>30</sup> "BSU Repeats Demands, Program in New Paper," *Daily Sundial* December 13, 1968, p.3. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85234/rec/21>

<sup>31</sup> Greenwood, "How Valley State Moved to 'New Kind of Education,'" p. b4.

During the Process Committee meetings Oviatt argued for the growth of ethnic courses within existing established departments, and this approach was rejected by students who insisted on the creation of separate ethnic studies departments with their own faculty. While the group engaged in lengthy discussions over several days, and consensus was reached in favor of establishing the Black and Mexican American Studies departments,<sup>32</sup> the committee's work came to an acrimonious end the day after the Alumni Association's representative read an LAPD report given to him by Oviatt at a press conference. The report contained information many considered inflammatory and unsubstantiated, and had been used by Oviatt as rationale for his emergency declaration on January 9.

Believing the press conference to have been a "breach in good faith," members of the Black Student Union, United Mexican American Students, Students for a Democratic Society, and the November 4th Committee pulled out of the negotiations until the Alumni Association's representative and Oviatt apologized. In a show of solidarity, other committee members from the surrounding community and campus pulled out, as well.<sup>33</sup>

The committee's final meeting, on January 14, 1969, concluded with only a handful of administrators and others present to hear a statement from a member of Associated Students. The student expressed his personal disillusionment with Oviatt, who he had previously "trusted very much." He admonished Oviatt in particular for his lack of honesty in communicating with the campus community over the previous week.<sup>34</sup> While Oviatt immediately apologized to him, he made no apologies to students who had walked out earlier in the day.

### **Oviatt's Leadership in a time of Crisis**

It is probably safe to say that there was not a decision of consequence at SFVSC that Oviatt was not a part of from his days as the Executive Dean through his brief service as Acting President. The period of the late sixties was an exceedingly difficult period for university administrators, most of whom were trained in a very traditional and officious manner of leading, one that saw little voice for students and, on predominately white campuses, no voice for students of color.

As students of SFVSC became activists around the Vietnam War and the inclusion of students of color, the administration's reaction was to clamp down on dissent, often calling the LAPD to

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<sup>32</sup> College Information Bulletin Supplemental Issue, January 13, 1969. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/470/rec/1>

<sup>33</sup> Recording 07, Campus Unrest Process Committee Recordings. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/462>

<sup>34</sup> Recording 08, Campus Unrest Process Committee Recordings. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/464>

campus to arrest demonstrators, including some faculty members who showed their support for students by joining the demonstrations. When Acting President Blomgren was hospitalized in early January 1969, Oviatt accepted the call to serve as Acting President.

With demonstrations starting up again after the holiday break, Oviatt found himself the focus of student demands for change. On January 7, 100 members of the San Fernando Valley Coalition of the Democratic and Peace and Freedom Parties marched to the 5th floor of the Administration Building where Oviatt told them their visit “was a little presumptuous.” Though 28 plainclothes police officers were on campus that day, no arrests were made.<sup>35</sup> January 8, several hundred students and community members who had gathered in front of the Administration building and in the Free Speech area were dispersed by LAPD officers in riot gear, who arrested ~17 people, including 14 students. A group of faculty members made plans to join demonstrators and stand between students and police if violence occurred the following day.<sup>36</sup>

Early in the morning on January 9, Oviatt received a report from undercover LAPD detectives about impending violence at demonstrations planned for that day. He also received verbal reports from students and faculty that LAPD’s characterization of the next day’s demonstration was unsubstantiated and false. He deferred to LAPD’s assessment, and declared a state of emergency for that day. Students and others who came to campus later that morning to participate in a peaceful demonstration encountered what the *Sundial* described as “a force of approximately 100 uniformed police officers” who dispersed the crowd with enough violence to seriously injure student protesters, even causing one student to lose his eye. At Oviatt’s direction they arrested 275 students, faculty, and other demonstrators who chanted “We Shall Overcome” and sang “America the Beautiful.”<sup>37</sup>

Throughout this period, Oviatt resisted meeting with students, even against the advice of LAPD personnel,<sup>38</sup> behavior that frustrated demonstrators and the editors of the *Daily Sundial*.<sup>39</sup> The campus was occupied by uniformed and plainclothes Los Angeles Police Department officers

<sup>35</sup> "Oviatt Opposes BSU Talks," *Daily Sundial*, January 8, 1969, p.1,3. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85231/rec/1>

<sup>36</sup> "BSU, Oviatt Slate Talks on Wednesday's Violence," *Daily Sundial*, January 9, 1969, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85184/rec/2>

<sup>37</sup> In his rationale for declaring a state of emergency on campus, Oviatt states "in accordance with my previous order, arrests were made," Memorandum to faculty, students and staff from Delmar T. Oviatt, January 13, 1969, p.3. <https://cdm17169.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/477>; "'Illegal Assembly' Broken Up," *Daily Sundial* January 10, 1969, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85213/rec/3>

<sup>38</sup> "Day of Turmoil Began in Rally," *Daily Sundial*, January 9, 1969, p.3. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85178/rec/27>; ~7:20, William Burwell, Jr., interview with John Broesamle. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Broesamle-int/id/9>

<sup>39</sup> "Editorial: Communication," *Daily Sundial*, January 9, 1969, p.1. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/85176/rec/27>

and detectives who went so far as to establish a command post on campus with Oviatt's approval.

In audio recordings of the Process Committee's meeting on January 10, 1969, Oviatt can be heard declining to assist or advocate on behalf of students who had been arrested when asked to support amnesty efforts as demanded both by student activists and the Faculty Senate.<sup>40</sup> Later in the meeting, he indicates he himself filed charges against student and faculty protesters.<sup>41</sup> The consequences of his lack of action were far reaching. Of the students arrested between November 1968 and January 1969, 20 were convicted of felonies, with three sentenced to serve 1-25 years in state prison. Eight other students were placed on probation for five years, and sentenced to serve 1-12 months in county jail. Of the untold number of student protesters arrested on campuses across the US in the late 1960s, these CSUN students were the first for whom such harsh sentences were sought.<sup>42</sup>

### **Guiding Principles**

In reflecting on the information considered in this process, the AWG adopted the following Guiding Principles to assist in arriving at findings, conclusions and recommendations. Many of these principles are the offspring of a report written at Yale University dealing with the removal of an individual's name from a building. When the University reexamines an honor previously given:

1. It should consider changed mores, how the campus culture and values when the honor was bestowed compare to our current culture and values.
2. It should evaluate whether the legacy of the namesake and its lasting consequence is fundamentally at odds with our current values, and should review the namesake's whole record of public action and views.
3. It should consider whether the honor was bestowed for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with our current values and mission.
4. It should consider how and why the honor was bestowed in the first place, especially whether the original process was sufficiently deliberative and consultative.

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<sup>40</sup> ~20:45, Part I, Campus Unrest Process Committee recordings. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/UniversityArchives/id/450/rec/1>

<sup>41</sup> ~34:10, Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Students Imprisoned for Building Takeover," *Daily Sundial* February 10, 1970, p.2. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Sundial/id/87001>

5. It should consider the role and responsibilities of the individual when determining if he or she made appropriate decisions.
6. It bears a responsibility of transparency. Documents, interviews, and other relevant sources should be readily available for review in the future.

## **Conclusions**

In essence, the AWG has been asked to arrive at conclusions to the following questions.

1. Considering the historical information, input provided during this review, and considering our contemporary context, do we find that Oviatt was a racist as it related to student diversity and the development of ethnic studies?

On this question the views of the AWG were less than unanimous. While the primary focus of the AWG was upon the period preceding and during Oviatt's service as Acting President, it is relevant to consider the life experiences of Oviatt and how they framed his approach as a leader. Raised and educated in Canada, there is little evidence in what we know about Oviatt's education, professional, and civic experiences that reflected any meaningful exposure whatsoever to the emerging ethnic groups with which he was forced to deal as a campus executive. We could find no records reflecting his knowledge of and efforts to understand minority individuals and groups, that is, until this became necessary as students enrolled at the university pressed for inclusion. The AWG found unsettling the ways Oviatt described and referred to the social context of Black students.

While Oviatt received accolades for his community service, none of this service involved efforts to desegregate and/or use education as a context for social transformation. There is no evidence that Oviatt ever did outreach to the center of the Black and Mexican communities of the Northeast Valley, either by choice or negligence. Why did he fail to do so? In the middle of the November 4th crisis he was forced to attend a Black ministers meeting in Pacoima.

Before stepping in as Acting President, Oviatt was Vice President for Academic affairs and had, along with President Ralph Prator, been responsible for the hire of all the faculty at SFVSC. Was Oviatt's "go slow" approach and lack of effort, early on, to develop the ethnic studies a matter of academic custom or a belief that such programs had no resonance as a part of the curriculum? There is evidence of both possibilities. Oviatt in his various positions was empowered to develop a diverse curriculum for ethnic programs, hire a diverse faculty and establish policies and procedures that created an

inclusive student body before and after November 4th. It is obvious he did not do so, whether by choice or negligence.

Did Oviatt show any evidence of concern about the absence of enrolled minority students prior to their agitations for greater access? Did he use arguments about lack of financial resources to intentionally limit the number of students who would be enrolled?

Oviatt bore the brunt of student criticism, but he never questioned the justice in their cause. He agreed most with Bill Burwell and Archie Chatman. He was guilty of wrongfully fearing that the academic requirements he had worked so hard to establish for CSUN would be minimized for these new students of color who would come in under EOP and thus threaten the academic rigor of the CSUN student. He was afraid students like Chatman, Burwell, Michael Verdugo (President of UMAS), etc. did not understand the social and psychological problems EOP students would have. While he did not have a clear understanding of how diversity makes a University complete and great, there is no evidence he prevented students of color from attending CSUN. CSUN at the time had 18,500 white students and 550 all-white faculty. The minority students that would be admitted did not meet the standard academic and financial requirements of other students as they entered through the EOP doorway of opportunity. This was a threat to everything Oviatt had built and another example of his being out-of-touch with the times and the students.

Was his persistent unwillingness to meet with students an unwillingness to meet with Black and Brown students or was this behavior that reflected a lack of engagement, more generally, with students who had strong and different opinions?

Did Oviatt harbor impressions of Black student activists that made him subject to accepting reports suggesting that 2,000 Black students and others from the community were going to overtake the campus and do him personal harm on January 9, 1969?

Some felt that there was no evidence that he was overtly racist by his actions. When Everto Ruiz was interviewed he stated: “As someone who was among the protesters and had been the victim of plenty of racism said that the word “racist” was too strong a word to use for Oviatt.”<sup>43</sup> Jerome Richfield criticized Oviatt and boasted about his own involvement in helping the protesters when he said, “Well, Del was an ardent Mormon, and the Mormon church is not famous for its attitudes about blacks. But I don’t remember

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<sup>43</sup> Everto Ruiz, interview with Oviatt Library Advisory Group, February 28, 2020.



any evidence that he ever demonstrated that he had any personal feelings of hostility or discrimination. But see, he was so totally offended by the bad behavior of the students who acted out their resentments, the black students".<sup>44</sup>

In a published interview for the *LA Times*, Oviatt described the students' efforts to organize and speak out against Civil Rights violations. Oviatt declared that by putting Black students together in the dormitories they had recreated the "ghetto." Colleagues of Oviatt's that were interviewed, including Stan Charnofsky, argued that they did not believe that Oviatt was a racist, but that he was guilty of having myopic vision and lack of understanding common to his time of what was needed to support students of color moving ahead.

2. Considering the historical information, input provided during this review and considering our contemporary context, do we find that Oviatt was an oppressive figure as it related to student diversity and the development of ethnic studies?

Many of the questions and paradoxes expressed above apply to this assessment, but here the AWG was clear and unanimous. Our Leadership Principles for CSUN administrators state leaders should treat all with dignity, respect, and fairness; actively listen to others to incorporate new knowledge into thinking; bring diverse people and roles together; and hold themselves and their teams responsible for the consequences of their decisions. We think it's also worth noting that there were other white men in positions of privilege on campus (albeit lacking Oviatt's authority), who reacted quite differently as events unfolded, and who did possess the qualities we value in our leaders today, especially the ability to listen and engage in meaningful discussion with students.

Despite faculty recommendations, Oviatt relied heavily on the use of the Los Angeles Police Department to quell student dissent, often with horrible consequences. Oviatt's calling out the LAPD to campus undoubtedly demonstrated poor judgment and was an unwise decision. Systemic racism was pervasive especially among the LAPD at that time which Oviatt may or may not have been aware.<sup>45</sup> As an administrator, he had a responsibility to protect the faculty and students of CSUN. He was obviously not progressive enough nor the right person at that time for the job he was thrust into.

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<sup>44</sup> Jerome Richfield, interview with John Broesamle. <https://digital-collections.csun.edu/digital/collection/Broesamle-int/id/14/rec/1>

<sup>45</sup> Leonard Greenwood, "How Valley State Moved to 'New Kind of Education,'" *LA Times* February 2, 1969, p. b4. <https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/156086583?accountid=7285>

## Recommendations

1. At best, Oviatt acceded to student pressure and faculty support for the increase of minority student enrollment and the addition of two new ethnic studies departments. Along the way he made administrative decisions that resulted in the arrests of students and faculty, infliction of injury on students through the LAPD who, at the time, was populated by officers and a command structure well known for being racist and discriminatory towards people of color. Believing in unsubstantiated reports of intended harm, he closed the campus on January 9th declaring an emergency and abridging the right of peaceful protest. His decision led to the arrest of 286 individuals who peacefully cooperated with the arrest as protest against Oviatt's action. While Oviatt's contributions to the early planning and establishment of the campus are acknowledged, in the end, Oviatt's failure to provide leadership in a manner that aligns with the values and expectations of our campus community, and especially our students, reflect a tremendous failing that cannot be corrected and will ever serve as a blemish upon the legacy of CSUN leadership.

Apart from being a place that houses collections of books, periodicals, music, extensive reading materials, a place to listen, study, meet and collaborate, the Oviatt Library and the adjoining lawn serve as a focal point of CSUN's campus. After extensive research and deliberation, the Committee has concluded that Oviatt's actions were detrimental to the University and its students of color, especially given his position as Acting President. We deem Oviatt's actions oppressive, and recommend that the name Delmar T. Oviatt be removed from the Library and the adjoining lawn.

2. In addition to addressing the Oviatt name, the AWG feels compelled to comment on the university's current building and facilities naming policies, of which there are three. Of greatest concern is Policy 850-05, Permanent Naming of University Colleges, Schools & Other Academic Entities (See Appendix C). It is noted that the criteria and procedures are absent an expectation that the record and background of the recommended individual or organization align with the values of the University. That expectation should be included in existing policies along with a procedure for reconsidering the name of a building that has already been named.

Oviatt Library Advisory Working Group  
California State University, Northridge  
September 2019

**I. Background and Purpose**

Since its establishment in 1958, California State University, Northridge has continually endeavored to uphold its values in an ever-changing world. It is through this lens that the University administration takes all concerns in regard to justice and equitable treatment very seriously. In 1973, the new library building was named after the late Delmar T. Oviatt in recognition of his “insistence. on academic excellence” with a unanimous recommendation by the Faculty Senate and approval by the CSU Board of Trustees.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the Students of Color Coalition, a group of CSUN students representing various student organizations, brought forward concerns regarding the University Library being named in recognition of Delmar Oviatt. The students expressed a belief that Oviatt was a “racist and oppressive figure” who was “... a persistent opponent to the creation and existence of cultural studies during the period of his tenure as President” (Dean, College of Applied Arts and Sciences 1955; Vice President of Academic Affairs 1962; (acting Interim President 1969); Director of Special Projects 1969-1971 ), and, therefore, they question the appropriateness of his name on our library. In order to fully evaluate and review this issue, the Oviatt Library Advisory Working Group has been established by President Harrison. The Group will serve in an advisory capacity to the President of the University, investigating the history behind the naming of the Library; determining if the views and actions of Delmar Oviatt were inconsistent with the mission, vision and values of CSUN as it is today in our contemporary setting, a place of equity, inclusion, and diversity; and making recommendations based upon their findings.

**II. Advisory Working Group Charge**

Following are simplified principles to guide the working group.

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Sundial*, February 14, 1973

- Review, analyze and participate in the discovery and documentation of information that illuminates relevant aspects of Delmar T. Oviatt's past as a member and leader within the university community.
- Contribute to our campus community's understanding of how history and our current perspective on social justice may inform and shape the current state of the University.
- Develop opportunities for open and informed discussion across campus regarding the development of CSUN's ethnic/cultural studies programs and the role of campus administrators, including Delmar Oviatt, in the initiation of those programs. This will include interviewing individuals with direct knowledge of events at that time.
- Provide a recommendation(s) about the use of the Oviatt name in association with the University Library based on critical, informed judgement that examines historical information within our contemporary contexts and University values.

### **III. Advisory Working Group Composition and Leadership**

Broad engagement requires that the Working Group be comprised of dedicated, collaborative and knowledgeable individuals from a wide array of university constituencies, e.g. students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the broader community.

The President will appoint members of the Advisory Working Group to serve for one year, but it is expected to produce recommendations by the end of Fall 2019. William Watkins, Vice President of Student Affairs, serves as the chair of the Advisory Group on behalf of the President.

Membership:

- President's designee and chair
- Provost or designee
- Two students selected by the Students of Color Coalition
- Two faculty appointed by Faculty President
- AS President or designee
- Co-Chairs, Commission on Equity and Diversity or designee
- Three alumni

#### **IV. Procedures**

The Advisory Group shall meet as necessary to fulfill its responsibilities as described above and shall provide its recommendation(s) to the President by the conclusion of the Fall 2019 semester. In addition, the Vice President of Student Affairs shall provide to the President regular updates, including the activities and progress of the Advisory Group, and shall prepare a report of findings and recommendation(s) to be made available to the campus community.

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## **Permanent Naming of University Colleges, Schools, and Other Academic Entities**

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**Policy No.: 850-05**

Effective: 1/15/04

### **POLICY:**

This policy is intended to encourage private support through opportunities to name colleges, schools, programs, centers, and institutes. The Board of Trustees of the California State University retains authority for naming all CSU colleges, schools, programs, centers and institutes. There are a finite number of these naming opportunities on the campuses. Opportunities to name these programs are for fundraising purposes only.

This policy is designed to parallel the Trustees' policy for naming colleges, schools, programs, centers, and institutes. Therefore, any proposal for naming such an academic entity that is prepared and presented in accordance with these procedures and approved by the President will be ready for submission to the Trustees without additional action by the proposer.

This policy is intended (as is the Trustees' policy) to encourage private support through opportunities to name campus academic entities. Each proposal for naming a campus academic entity shall be considered on its own merits. No commitment for naming shall be made prior to University President and CSU Trustee approval of the proposed name.

### **Academic naming requests submitted for Trustee approval must meet the following criteria:**

1. It shall honor an individual or an organization.
2. It is desirable for the University to name colleges, schools, programs, centers, and institutes in honor of significant contributors of funds to the University.
3. The University President will take into consideration the significance and amount of the proposed current gift and future potential giving with regard to the academic prestige and recognition of the proposed college, school, program, center, or institute.

### **PROCEDURES:**

Faculty, administrative personnel, support staff, students, or members of the community, or groups of such persons, may submit requests to name an academic entity on the campus.

The following procedure will be observed when submitting a proposal for naming a Cal State Northridge college, school, program, center, or institute:

The request to name a specific college, school, program, center, or institute shall be submitted to the Vice President for University Advancement. Each naming request must:

1. Be submitted in a timely fashion to ensure that Board of Trustees policy timing requirements are met. Naming requests should be submitted to the Vice President for University Advancement ten weeks prior to the Board of Trustees meeting at which the request would be presented.

2. Demonstrate compliance with this policy.
3. Succinctly state reasons for the proposed name.
4. Name the constituent group(s) or individual(s) proposing the request. Name constituent group(s) or individual(s) recommending that the campus President approve the request.
5. Include complete biographical data about the individual or organization.
6. Ensure that all participants involved in this process remember that strict confidentiality is required.
7. Identify the "special circumstances" when requesting a waiver of policy, if any.

**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The Office of University Advancement is responsible for administering the policies and procedures contained herewith.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Vice President for University Advancement (818) 677-4400

**APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT**