

# Interview With Graduate Dean Patricia Calarco

*Ed.'s note: After serving as interim dean of the Graduate Division, Patricia Calarco was named the permanent dean earlier this school year. She has graciously taken the time to respond to these questions from Synapse and the Graduation Students' Association.*

## **What are your goals as Grad Dean?**

As Dean, my long-term objective is to provide the leadership to help UCSF maintain its position as a world leader in graduate education, postdoctoral training and research. I would not be able to do this without the professional and dedicated staff that I have; they are truly fantastic. As a point of information, the Graduate Division has administrative authority over 1500 UCSF graduate students, but many people do not realize that the Graduate Division also has administrative authority over all 1100 UCSF postdoctoral scholars. In the near term I have focused on the following goals:

To establish campus interactions that include regular meetings with constituencies, such as graduate program directors, administrators, GSA leadership, PSA leadership in order to identify issues, discuss options and explore solutions. I also collaborate with the professional School Deans on common goals.

To continue and expand Graduate Division diversity efforts. The Graduate Division brings to UCSF a little over \$2 million a year from State, Federal and industry sources devoted to our diversity efforts in the sum-

mer undergraduate research program, in graduate student education and in postdoctoral training. I will continue to be proactive in this regard and work to create a more diverse community.

To improve funding for students and postdoctoral scholars. Currently the Graduate Division provides only 12% of the total funding needed for graduate education. My efforts to increase this include writing new grants to foundations, continued efforts to see that graduate students receive need-based aid, development efforts and partnering with faculty to explore new funding opportunities at the NSF, DOE and the Dept. of Education.

Improve services to the campus. The Graduate Division has instituted an on-line application and admissions system that handled ALL graduate admissions for the 2008 season, including credit card payments and direct GRE downloads. Thanks to the skill of our Jon Johnson and with help from Joe De Risi, this provides a long-needed service to the campus. Our efficiency also has been greatly increased with online forms, scanned records and a nearly paper-free system.

We are also beginning to build an archival record and database with information that will aid training grant applications and alumni contacts. As well, this database will allow one to get information on academic degree progression, time-to-degree, placement studies, etc. and will allow comparisons to national norms.

## **What would your dream program look like?**

UCSF has the best graduate programs in the country right now, although the current crisis in student support could diminish this. My dream scenario would be stable funding and modest growth both in competitive programs and in hot new areas. I would also like to see the climate for students and postdocs be as good as the academic training.

## **This is a time of great budget crisis in the state of California. Can you tell us how the Grad Division will be coping if the governor's proposed cuts go through?**

The fellowship money that we receive from the State is likely to decline 7% for 2008-9 and that means less money for the Graduate Division to allocate to the graduate programs. As well, UC student fees may increase by 7%. This is a depressing scenario for higher education in California, but California is mirroring a national trend. Until the national budget deficit is dealt with and science returns to a national priority for the nation, I believe we are in for hard times.

## **What was it like to be a woman scientist when you were getting started (as a grad student)?**

My father was a PhD scientist and I was very good at academics, so initially it just seemed a natural progression to be in graduate school. It took quite a while to raise my consciousness on these issues because I believed if you did your best, everything would be all right. It wasn't until after I defended my dissertation and one of my committee members asked about my plans, that he said with some astonishment, "You mean you actually think you will have the same opportunities as men in pursuing an academic career?" Well, that let me know things might be different! But I went on to a great postdoc at the University of Washington and came to UCSF sponsored by Charles Epstein and the Anatomy Department as an Assistant Professor. During my career, I made some work and career decisions that were different from those made by the men around me; first, as a new mother and, eventually, as a single mother of three children. Although I left the rose-colored glasses behind some time ago, science has always fas-

cinated me and I have had a very interesting career.

**Inevitably, conflicts come up between students and faculty. How do you plan to go about reconciling these conflicts?**

This is always a sensitive issue, but I believe strongly that students need to have someone neutral like myself or my Assistant Deans Karen Nelson and Chris Des Jarlais, who can serve as ombudspersons if there are problems. We always encourage the student to talk first with their P.I. or their Graduate Program Director, but sometimes that is not possible because the power differential is so great and the student worries this could ruin their career. Students need to know they have a non-judgmental opportunity to discuss things with one of us and explore their options. Almost always these issues are resolved amicably, but we are also the office that handles grievances for both students and postdoctoral scholars.

**What would you like us to know about you?**

I have two sons and a daughter who are three of my best friends and I have four delightful grandchildren. I have a wonderful husband, with whom I garden and practice gourmet dining.

**What book are you reading?**

Most recently it was *The Good Husband of Zebra Drive*, one of the series about Precious Ramotswe and her No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency.

**Science has traditionally been a strength in the United States, but now it seems to be increasingly under duress, from budget cutbacks to the NIH to battles in the classroom over evolution. As a prominent scientist, tell us what you think about the general future of science in this country?**

I think science is the most fascinating topic in the world. Using logical approaches to find answers to scientific questions and mankind's problems is a noble calling. Science is the most useful approach to solving critical problems from dark matter to pandemics, to the problems of an aging population. Thus, it is crucial that students, postdocs and faculty tell the wider community what we do and why it is important to them. If we do that well, then there will be a bright future.