

Scholastic Society Helping Wards of Court Succeed

PAGE AND ELOISE SMITH SCHOLASTIC SOCIETY

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Women's/Queer Desk Writer

Scott Page grew up living in vans, cars, homeless shelters, and, occasionally, run-down apartments all over Santa Cruz County, never knowing where his next meal would come from. If he was lucky enough to be living in an apartment, he never knew how long it would be before his family would be kicked out for not paying rent.

Yet Page is just like any other UC Santa Cruz student. He spends time with friends, attends class, and studies. A fourth-year straight-A student, Page is a collegiate fellow of the Page and Eloise Smith Scholastic Society. Many of its students came from extremely difficult childhoods living in foster and group homes, trying to survive as runaways or living as homeless children. Others were fortunate enough to live with relatives when they could not live with their parents. All members of the society have one thing in common—their great persistence and determination to succeed. “I worked hard in school so I would not be poor all my life and so I could help people less fortunate than I am,” Page told *City on a Hill Press* (CHP) with a big warm smile.

Helping the less fortunate seems to be a common theme among many people who grew up in hard situations but succeeded in the end. Bill Dickinson, a soft-spoken yet determined man, graduated from UC Santa Cruz in 1968 after attending the University for two years. He struggled more than most

children in the first two decades of his life. At age six, Dickinson was made a ward of the court and shuffled from foster home to foster home until he was 15 years old.

When he finally reached UCSC in 1965, the year the campus opened, Dickinson found the family and the community he lacked as a child, fostered in great part by the first provost of Cowell College, Page Smith, and his wife, Eloise Smith. Thirty-four years later in 1999, Dickinson, now a successful professional writer, decided to give back to the UCSC community and honor his mentors, Page and Eloise Smith.

Dickinson gave a \$4,000 scholarship in their name to three students who had been orphaned or lived in the foster care system.

He was joined the following year by many other alumni from UCSC's early years and was able to increase the scholarship to include eight students who each received a scholarship to help pay for their tuition and fees to the University.

However, Dickinson was not satisfied with giving scholarships to only a few students. His dream was to turn the purely financial aspect of a scholarship into a society that would provide students with a community and family that would support them through their tough times. “I wanted to give the students the kind of personal support I experienced in the early years at Cowell: a caring community of intelligent friends who knew and supported each other as they tried to discover their truth,”

Dickinson told *CHP*. Dickinson pledged to give \$100,000 to the Smith Society over his lifetime and has received donations from many other supporters, especially from early alumni who experienced Santa Cruz with Page and Eloise Smith.

Dickinson's dream became reality in 2001 when 30 students (called collegiate fellows) each received a \$1,000 scholarship. Possible collegiate fellows are identified when they apply for financial aid and state that they are wards of the court. All eligible students are sent a letter inviting them to join the Smith Society and are subsequently awarded the \$1,000 scholarship. The only requirement is that they attend three Smith Society meetings a year.

Every collegiate fellow, when

joining the society, has the option to be assigned a mentor as an advocate and friend. Mentors are usually faculty or staff who expressed interest in being mentors, and are matched up with a collegiate fellow by the Smith Society.

Dr. Gary Miles, professor emeritus of ancient history at UCSC and Scott Page's (a fourth-year-student and collegiate fellow) mentor is one such personal cheerleader.

Miles is a retired professor who, at age 62, still swims in the ocean with his wife every day at six a.m. Page goes swimming with Miles often and is learning how to surf with the help of his mentor. Miles and other mentors spend a few hours a month with their collegiate fellow to give guidance, support and encouragement to mentees in pursuing their goals. He described collegiate fellows with a look of pride in his eyes. “[They are] self-sufficient, determined, unusually outgoing, and intelligent people who don't have the full range of support that parents would provide.”

Determined, intelligent and self-sufficient are very accurate adjectives to describe Amber*, a young woman who could easily have not succeeded. A high school dropout, who spent her childhood with many different relatives and in several group homes, Amber could have been lost in the system.

Instead, Amber is a graduate of UCSC with a degree in Molecular, Cellular and Developmental biology and has a job at Diadexus, a DNA sequencing company in Silicon Valley.

Amber was one of the two student leaders in the Smith



BILL DICKINSON, FOUNDER OF THE SCHOLASTIC SOCIETY MET WITH STUDENT LEADER KENNY BUCKLEY TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY, AT THE MEETING IN OCTOBER.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Society's first year, and is now helping to take the lead in reaching out to others in the community "The Smith Society has something more to offer than just pity. Bill's vision was not just to give poor foster children money, he also wanted to provide a family, provide a society of friends," Amber said.

She hopes to give back to the community by continuing her outreach efforts and providing support to children who are wards of the court and need the guidance of someone who has been in their situation and succeeded.

Dickinson wants to expand his dream beyond the Page and Eloise Scholastic Society. He hopes to next go out into the community with interested collegiate fellows to help and encourage children who are wards of the court to work hard in school, so that they too can attend a college or university. When Dickinson told the collegiate fellows of his dream to help younger children, he said he wanted to "help them see that they can dare to dream." The Smith Society is already putting Dickinson's dream into action by bringing groups of foster children to the campus to experience university life for a day so they can envision themselves going to college.

Many children who grow up in situations similar to Page's often do not succeed. Scott Page sees this every time he goes back to the neighborhoods in Santa Cruz County where he spent his childhood. Every time he sees people were not as fortunate. Many of his friends from high school are addicted to drugs, involved in gangs and in trouble with the law. Page was one of the lucky ones because he succeeded.

Recently Page won the very prestigious Alfred P. Hahn award given to students from Santa Cruz County who grew up in challenging situations and have the desire to pursue higher education. He will graduate from UCSC debt-free because of the Hahn scholarship. Page told *CHP* that his greatest dream is to help people. "I want to help younger children go to college. I wish I could have

had someone tell me about the possibilities of attending college when I was in sixth grade," he said. Page's dreams echo those of other collegiate fellows, many of whom expressed a desire to help other wards of the court succeed in their education and eventually go to college.

The Page and Eloise Smith

Society is organized by alumni, people from the community, students, faculty and staff, and is continually expanding. Kenny Buckler, a third-year student originally from Santa Cruz, is one of the student leaders. Buckler and eight other people on the leadership team plan events, work on individual proj-

ects and help pilot the Smith Society toward its goals. One of the current projects is a video that will be shown when the collegiate members go into the community to explain the functions of the Smith Society. Another project is looking at current mentoring services for foster and group home youth in the commu-

nity and finding ways to supplement these services.

Many services are offered to collegiate fellows to help them succeed at UCSC. According to Buckler, "Someone from almost every facet of the University administration assists collegiate fellows to help with housing, financial aid and other issues."

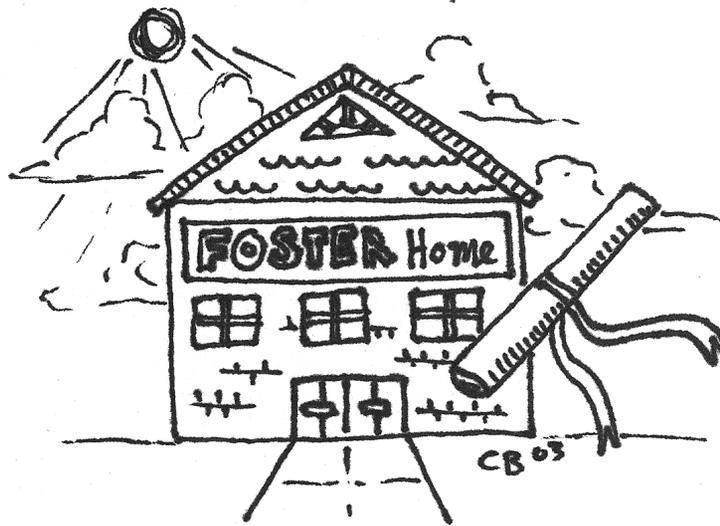
The Smith Society receives between \$25,000 and \$35,000 a year in donations from many different sources including alumni, parents of current or past students, past administrators and the Dickinson's family and friends. The University assists with the Smith Society's overhead costs, and many administrators, including Chancellor Greenwood, support the society in a variety of ways. Dickinson hopes to eventually create an endowment that will increase the Smith Society's budget to \$50,000 a year.

Dickinson's gift has expanded beyond anything he could have imagined. The Page and Eloise Smith Scholastic Society began as a place where students could have a close-knit community and receive guidance and support during their college years. Now the Smith Society has grander dreams. Buckler, one of the student leaders, said, "It's very hard to acknowledge the possibility of going to college, when you are being shuffled from foster home to foster home. We want to support high school and junior college youth and show them that they can go to college and that there are people available to help them."

Dickinson has two mottos that define his desires for the Smith Society. The first is the motto of Cowell College, Pursuit of Truth in the Company of Friends and the second is Lifting as We Climb. Dickinson's goal is for everyone to climb higher and higher on the mountain of their own noblest aspirations.

*Last name has been withheld to protect source

For more information about the Page and Eloise Smith Scholastic Society, please contact Kenny Buckler at kennyb@ucsc.edu or Bill Dickinson at WCD-CAMB@aol.com.



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—Amber



THE PAGE AND ELOISE SMITH SCHOLASTIC SOCIETY GATHERED IN OCTOBER FOR THEIR FIRST MEETING OF THE YEAR.

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