

The Events Leading up to the University of Santa Clara's Name Change to Santa Clara University
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On the 24th October, 1983, Eugene (Gene) F. Gerwe, Vice President for University Relations, sent an intra-campus memorandum to the president of the University of Santa Clara, Fr. William J. Rewak, S.J., proposing “a new committee to advise on a broad range of matters relative to the University communications”. The committee was made up primarily of faculty, alumni association, and the admissions office. In a letter addressed to the University Community on the 25th May, 1984, Tim Healy, newly appointed chairman of the Committee for University Communications, outlined three distinct goals that they had: (1) agreeing on a single name, (2) enforcing the use of this single name through strict guidelines, and (3) making the single name Santa Clara University, and using the abbreviations Santa Clara and SCU. At the time, the university referred to itself as the “University of Santa Clara”, “Santa Clara University”, and simply “Santa Clara”. In addition, they used the abbreviations USC, SCU, and SC. Staff cited instances of people confusing Santa Clara with other institutions, such as University of Southern California and the University of Santa Cruz. They did not realize that Santa Clara was a private institution, but believed it to be part of one state system or the other. The committee felt that this name inconsistency needed to be resolved in order to communicate to outside constituencies the growing prestige of the university.

In the same letter to the Campus Community, Tim Healy requested responses from the community and received forty-seven. He conveyed these responses back to the President in an intra-campus memorandum sent on the 18th June, 1984. Thirty-two respondents approved of the name, while twelve were in favor of maintaining University of Santa Clara as the official name and three were neutral. The approval that was received regarding a change in the name was primarily brief and concise, agreeing that the similarity in abbreviation to other schools was confusing, and that a unity in what the university was called would encourage a greater reputation. Jeff Zorn, a professor in the English department, enthusiastically endorsed the change, “never [wanting] to be mistaken for a man who teaches Trojans.”

The dissent, however, was more passionate. Among the variety of concerns, three stood out as highly shared opinions: first, there was some distress among the alumni and older faculty that this was an abrupt rupture with the long history of the school. Even after the change took

place, former students sent letters asking for the old name to be restored. Second, it seemed to be almost universally held that the name “Santa Clara University” did not have the same level of dignity and class as “University of Santa Clara”, an opinion that was voiced even among two of those who approved of the name change. Finally, there was opposition to a break with the traditional format of university names. Several professors pointed out that when an institution was named after an individual, the name went first followed by “University”, but when it was named after a geographical location, the title of university went first, followed by the name of the place. It is interesting to point out that this argument works, ironically, against their position despite being logically consistent. While the university is in the city of Santa Clara, the name of the institution came from the mission that stood here before, named after the saint, Santa Clara de Assisi. Thus, concerns for format consistency were solved, not aggravated, with the name change.

The following year, Fr. Rewak, S.J., president of the university, sent a letter on the 1st May, 1985 to the Board of Trustees endorsing a change of the name. Despite some later opposition and minor dissent among faculty and alumni, the board approved the name change with eleven votes in favor and six against, on the 15th May, 1985.

3DB26 -- Papers of William J. Rewak, S.J. (1967-1988) Box 3, F. Name Change/Logo/Stationary