In 2003, Scripps Institution of Oceanography will celebrate its first century of oceanographic exploration, research, and discovery. This feature is the ninth in a continuing series of articles that will present special features about the history of Scripps Institution and the science, people, ideas, and technology that have played major roles in its century of leadership.

Scripps director Harald U. Sverdrup (left) and protege Walter Munk on the occasion of Munk’s graduation in 1946.
IN THE BEGINNING, in a little green laboratory in the village of La Jolla, a handful of zoology students helped sort and classify marine organisms collected from the richly diverse Pacific Ocean only a few feet away. They were the first students at what was then the Marine Biological Association of San Diego.

Today, a century later, some of the most sophisticated scientific laboratories in the world dot the La Jolla coastline, at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Here students continue with biological studies, but they also pursue other highly intensive academic and research endeavors in a curriculum that has set the standard for ocean and earth sciences.

THE EARLY YEARS

The education of young scientists has always been an integral part of Scripps’s history. University of California Professor William E. Ritter, the institution’s founding director, worked tirelessly to secure funding, negotiate land deals, and “erect on this foundation a school or even a college of biological research.”

To study with Ritter at Scripps, potential students had to be enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, then seek Ritter’s permission to work with him in La Jolla during the summer months as a supplement to their studies.

APPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AT SCRIPPS

Applying isotope geochemistry to the exploration of environmental systems, including groundwater resources.

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS

The design, construction, and calibration of two mass spectrometer systems in the Fluids and Volatiles Laboratory at Scripps.

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Recently participated in an expedition in Indonesia to gather gas and fluid samples from active volcanoes. Spent several weeks with a team of hydrologists studying groundwater resources in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

“At Scripps I’ve learned about the processes driving the hydrological cycle. Following graduation, I hope to employ the analytical techniques I’ve learned here, and plan to focus on water policy issues facing communities in semiarid regions. Ultimately, I’d like to have the opportunity to share my knowledge and become an instructor for the next generation of scientists.”

HOME: Eugene, OR

GRADUATION YEAR: 2002

FIELD: Earth Sciences

Justin Kulongoski

Above, The early institution trained a number of women zoologists, including Myrtle Johnson (above), seated in La Jolla’s Little Green Laboratory, circa 1907.
IN HER OWN WORDS  "I think I spend half my time just talking and listening to people from many fields, searching for how it might all fit together. When something does fall into place, there is that mental explosion and the wondrous excitement. I think the human brain must love order."

CURRENTLY  Professor of Geophysics and Geology, University of California, Santa Barbara.

FIELD: Oceanography

HOME: Santa Barbara, CA

GRADUATION YEAR: 1972

AS A SCRIPPS STUDENT  In an era when women were routinely barred from going to sea, she participated in the first expedition to take a close-up look at a seafloor spreading center. This resulted in her first published paper, a lead article in the prestigious journal Science.

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS  Led Scripps’s first all-woman cruise, Aphrodite, in 1968. One of the first female scientists to contribute to the theory of plate tectonics.

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS  As a geoscience educator, helping students get to know, understand, and respect the planet. Currently experimenting with ways to use the power of electronic multimedia to enhance geologic visualization and understanding.

Tanya Atwater

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oceanography. He also formalized the admission process and developed prerequisites for the courses. There were three students at the institution at this time.

**THE SVERDRUP CURRICULUM**

Upon Vaughan’s retirement in 1936, Norwegian scientist Harald U. Sverdrup was recruited as the institution’s third director. Hired for his reputation as the world’s most accomplished physical oceanographer, Sverdrup recognized the shortcomings of the teaching program at Scripps. To raise the academic standards to be on par with other University of California departments, he assembled a group of faculty members to help redefine the curriculum, standardize the coursework, and develop classes.

Sverdrup required all students to complete core courses in physical oceanography, marine chemistry, biological oceanography, and marine geology before pursuing their specialized subdisciplines. This teaching format, the “Sverdrup curriculum,” became the model for graduate education in oceanography at many institutions in the United States and Europe.

“Although the concept of the interrelatedness of all science was introduced by Ritter,” recalled physical oceanographer and Scripps Professor Emeritus Douglas Wilmot, “I still needed more mollusks to complete critical experiments. Time was tight, and a ship and some free labor were needed. After a couple of calls and meetings, R/V Robert Gordon Sproul was secured for my expedition, and several fellow students generously volunteered to help me collect animals. Less than a week after my dilemma developed, I returned to Scripps with enough specimens to complete my research. While Scripps has high expectations for achievement, I found that the professors, students, and administration provided an environment where exciting and special things happened.”

David Bruce Wilmot

**CURRENTLY** Director, Ocean Wildlife Campaign, a coalition of six conservation organizations working to improve the conservation and management of giant ocean fish: sharks, tunas, and billfishes.

**AS A SCRIPPS STUDENT** Studied the symbiotic relationship between sulfur bacteria and their animal hosts. Participated in more than 20 research cruises including expeditions to hydrothermal vents and a dive in the deep-sea submersible Alvin. Along with fellow students Don Croll and Craig Cary, successfully instituted a ban on polystyrene foam in drinking cups at Scripps and UCSD.

**SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS** Learned to integrate science and ocean policy while working for the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. Testified before Congress on marine conservation issues. Worked with colleagues to achieve conservation goals for the ocean’s giant fishes. Returned to Scripps to complete his doctoral degree after an extended absence.

**NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS** Continues to work with the Ocean Wildlife Campaign as the director to promote conservation initiatives for giant ocean fishes. Teaches his family about the wonders of the sea and the need to protect it.
Inman, who was one of Sverdrup’s first students, “it was Sverdrup who pulled the modern discipline of oceanography together.”

While developing a syllabus with Scripps chemical oceanographer Richard H. Fleming and marine biologist Martin W. Johnson for a much-needed general oceanography class, Sverdrup began compiling a comprehensive book on ocean sciences. Published in 1942, *The Oceans: Their Physics, Chemistry, and General Biology* grew to more than 1,000 pages, although originally planned to be only 400 pages. Known as the bible of oceanography, it became an invaluable resource in marine science studies and was a major achievement for both Sverdrup and the institution. *The Oceans* was so exhaustive in its detail of the ocean environment that the U.S. Navy considered it classified information until the end of World War II.

**Oceanography Comes of Age**

As World War II gripped the nation, the entire institution dedicated itself to the war effort. Most of the faculty members and graduate students enlisted in the military or participated in subsurface warfare research in the laboratories at Point Loma, near Scripps. Despite the decrease in faculty and students, the campus was alive with activity. Researchers who remained at Scripps trained U.S. Navy and Army personnel in swell and surf forecasting. In turn, these military meteorologists predicted surf conditions in numerous theaters of war in Europe, the Pacific, and North Africa, thus helping to ensure the Allies’s victory and demonstrating the need for trained oceanographers. Oceanography, in effect, had come of age.

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**Marcia McNutt**

*Home:* Salinas, CA  
*Graduation Year:* 1978  
*Field:* Earth Sciences  

**Currently:** President and CEO, Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute.  
**As a Scripps Student:** Studied geophysics. Attended demolition school with U.S. Navy SEALs and used this training to help researchers obtain sound-refraction data in studies of marine seismology. Sailed the “seven seas” and survived an equator-crossing initiation with hair intact. Starred in the avant-garde motorcycle movie *Women on Wheels* and succeeded in destroying the only print.  

**Scientific Achievements:** Spent 15 years on the faculty at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Extensively studied the history of volcanism in French Polynesia using data she collected on nearly two dozen oceanographic expeditions. Won Macelwane Award from the American Geophysical Union.  

**Notable Accomplishments:** Currently president of the American Geophysical Union; elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Raised three daughters with husband Ian Young, a ship’s captain.  

**In Her Own Words:** “Scripps in general—and the Institute for Geophysics and Planetary Physics in particular—provided a friendly and inviting environment where the excitement of discovery was infectious and expectations for achievement were lofty. Scripps professors Robert Parker and Freeman Gilbert invested their time to build in me the confidence that a college kid from the Midwest could become a real scientist.”
Following the war, enrollment of graduate students increased substantially at Scripps. Forty-one students registered in 1947. Contributing to this growth, some of the military officers who had received wartime training at Scripps, as well as new students who were at sea during the war, came to the institution to study the emerging field of oceanography. New courses were developed, and expanded classrooms and laboratories were planned to accommodate this surge of students and increased research capabilities.

GROWING UP IN THE ’60S

The 1950s were a time of unprecedented growth at Scripps, and the University of California Board of Regents considered plans for a general university campus in San Diego. Roger Revelle, Scripps’s director at the time, vigorously pursued establishment of a San Diego campus for a variety of reasons.

First, some Scripps students were performing at unacceptable levels in basic science courses. He recognized that with access to physics, biology, and chemistry courses at the proposed university, Scripps students could improve their oceanographic studies at the institution. Second, Revelle conceded that in order for Scripps to reach its full potential as both a research and graduate education institution, it had to be more closely tied to a university campus. Third, Revelle realized that making Scripps a university graduate school, as opposed to simply a teaching department, would make it easier for students to submit doctoral paperwork, which at the time was processed through UCLA.

“Scripps was isolated because of its distance from UCLA,” recalled marine zoologist and Scripps Professor Emeritus Richard Rosenblatt. “I don’t know how much the institution would have grown, particularly in terms of biological and earth sciences, if it weren’t for the establishment of UCSD.”

In 1960, the regents established a San Diego campus of the University of California on the
north mesa of the Scripps property. That same year, university officials also approved creation of a La Jolla branch of the Institute of Geophysics at Scripps, later known as the Institute for Geophysics and Planetary Physics (IGPP). The establishment of IGPP was the result of the unrelenting efforts of Scripps geophysicist Walter Munk, who had also been one of Sverdrup’s students. As the study of rocketry grew, Munk recognized the impact that space exploration would have on geophysics and planetary physics and the need for a stimulating environment for graduate and postdoctoral research in these fields. He was joined in these efforts by the next director of Scripps, William A. Nierenberg.

At the end of the 1960s, earth sciences was added to the marine biology and oceanography degrees offered at Scripps. In turn, these three academic areas were orga-
nized as six curricular programs: biological oceanography, marine biology, marine chemistry, physical oceanography, marine geology, and geophysics. This curriculum change helped the institution meet the growing research needs of government and industry.

Despite this broadened range of research areas, students and faculty interested in the applied physics of the ocean were not supported by a curricular group. Nierenberg recognized the need for such a program and created the Applied Ocean Sciences curriculum, in cooperation with the Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering Sciences Department at UCSD. Instrument development is an important part of this research program.

**Commitment to Education**

Historically, Scripps directors have concerned themselves with improving the curriculum and the education of students, only after the research needs of the institution have been addressed. However, when Edward A. Frieman assumed the directorship in 1986, he aimed to strengthen the entire institution by making education and research of equal importance. In 1995, Frieman’s efforts to raise the educational bar were recognized when the National Research Council ranked Scripps first in faculty quality among all graduate oceanography programs in the United States.

Frieman also recognized that the needs of society and the envi-
continues to grow in other areas as well, including undergraduate education in the earth and environmental sciences through joint programs with UCSD departments, and increased emphasis on educational outreach to San Diego schools through the Birch Aquarium at Scripps.

As Scripps celebrates its centennial, today’s young scientists carry on the spirit of scientific inquiry that brought William Ritter and his zoology students to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, the same spirit that led to some of the most significant scientific achievements in the twentieth century.

For more information on graduate study at Scripps, visit www.siograddept.ucsd.edu.

Above, Biological oceanographer David Checkley on a student cruise in the late 1990s.