a good article.

Sorry about the dates for your trip to the orient - conflict with what time I had planned for my mother's visit. (hast week in March) take care + say Hi to hois for me tyour daughter

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students talking Vietnam

The war is hot topic on campuses again

By Annie Nakao OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

Some say you can hear a pin drop when Religious Studies 165 meets in UC-Santa Barbara's Campbell Hall.

"A 1,000-person amphitheater goes silent when a vet gets up to talk," said Jennifer Priestley, a junior. "It's unbelievable.

Priestley, 20, and 925 UC-Santa Barbara students are enrolled in Professor Walter Capps' course, "Impact of Vietnam War on American Culture.'

It's the largest of more than 400 such courses — 159 of them created in the last year alone taught on the nation's campuses, according to the Center for the Study of the Vietnam Generation, based in Washington, D.C.

About 1,400 students enrolled in Capps' class this quarter, almost half again as many as could be accommodated.

"If we advertised, we would have easily gotten 2,000 students,' said Capps, whose class visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in

Washington, D.C. Student interest in Vietnam is

high for the same reasons the recently released film "Platoon" is a blockbuster, Capps said.

"It's in the air right now," he said. "Both the class and the movie are reflections of what is happening in our society. It takes about 10 years for the impact of the war to

be felt.

Sandie Fauriol, executive director of the center - a non-profit clearinghouse for research on the war era - says the memorial's opening in Washington in 1982 and the 10th anniversary of the 1975 fall of Saigon are fueling the interest in Vietnam.

"What you're finding is that attitudes are changing about veterans and the war in general," she said. "More books have been written, and now those books are being used in courses."

Clark Smith, a lecturer at the University of San Francisco, said there has always been a "subterranean" interest in the war. The recent upsurge, he said, is the result of a slowly developing complex social phenomenon.

"I don't think any one thing the memorial or 'Platoon' - does

It Smith said. "They're steppingstones along the way to open people's minds again."

Fauriol said although college courses have gained popularity. high schools still need to bring the war into their classrooms: "There are a lot of college courses, but these professors are getting freshman-who don't know who won the war or which side Charlie was on." The general ignorance of today's college generation is hardly surprising, given that they were "either prenatal or preliterate" while the war-was being fought, said Barton Bernstein, history professor at Stanford University.

They know there was a war, they know there was brutality, they know there was upheaval at home." Bernstein said. "But the Vietnam War is no closer to them than World War II."

Jay William Gibson, professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas - who has taught Vietnam War courses at Yale, UCLA and UCIrvine - said the reason is simple math: "If you're 20 years old in 1987, you were 8 in 1975. Is an 8wear-old going to remember the fall of Saigon? Not likely."

Still, Capps and others said many students today have personal links to the war.

Many have had fathers or uncles who fought in the war or were lost in the war, or had parents who were protesters," Capps said.

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"The war was something that was kind of swept under the covers for us."

Some older students, with their own vivid memories of the war era,

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"But looking at it objectively this time made me realize that we sos members) were in fact right."

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Capps has invited veterans, Army nurses and Vietnamese refugees to talk to his class. This quarter it's being co-taught by Bob Kerrey, former Nebraska governor and Vietnam veteran.

One key reason for the upsurge in courses is the evolution of War scars people indelibly: what it Vietnam-era literature, experts

Douglas Pike, director of UC-Berkeley's Indochina Studies program, estimated that the number of books published on Vietnam has roughly doubled every year since

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"Many people teaching in this the hardest thing was coming back. area themselves may have been young adults in the Vietnam years," Bernstein said. There has been a 12 hours later, you're on the streets sense of unsureness of what to use, what to teach."

Academia's interest in the war has not always been warm.

"Vietnam never found a comfortable place in academia," said fessor who was active in the antiwar movement.

"It's an academic conservatism 1 think that part of the world has been overlooked. It came to the fore rather suddenly for academia and never really found its niche"

Gibson, the SMU professor, said Vietnam "was almost taboo up until the mid-1980s - it was just too

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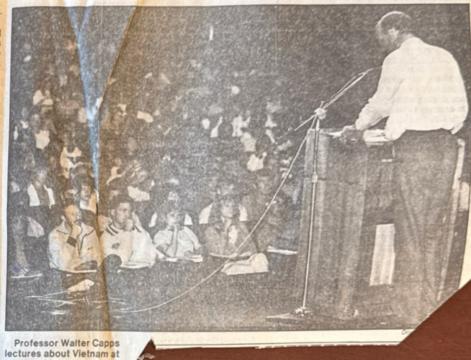
Some scholars, like Pike, who manages UC-Berkeley's Vietnam archives, said progress is still slow. He called it a "scandal" that Berkeley offers no regular course on Vietnam, although he blamed department politics and the lack of money more than institutional bias.

UC-Berkeley history department Chairman Sheldon Rothblatt said the department offers no such course because faculty positions are very tight at UC.

"We don't even have enough positions in Asian history in general," he said.

Most scholars, though, hope the trend will continue. "It's not a fad." said USF's Smith.

"The Vietnam War took up pretty much a whole generation of people. It covered 10 years or more of American policy and American interest. People will continue to be interested in its history and its veterans, who will have their own impact on society.



UC-Santa Barbara

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