



For immediate release:  
October 25, 2023

## NEWS RELEASE

# Celebrating the Legacy of Walter H. Capps: Professor, Humanist, Public Servant

The Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life at the University of California, Santa Barbara, presents a special two-day series of events on **November 10 & 11, 2023**, to celebrate and commemorate the legacy of Walter H. Capps in scholarship, teaching, the humanities, and public service. All events held at UCSB and live-streamed are free and open to the public.

Speakers include Sen. Bob Kerrey, Rep. Lois Capps, Laura Capps, Lou Cannon, Shad Meshad, Tim Kring, Phoebe Stein, James Quay, Edward Linenthal, Tomoko Masuzawa, Chancellor Henry Yang, prominent leaders of humanities organizations, renowned scholars of religion and history, former students and guest speakers, and more.

For our full program, see here: <https://www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu/celebration>

### **Friday, November 10 (events held in McCune Conference Room, HSSB 6020)**

10:00am - 12:00pm

#### [The Value of the Humanities](#)

*A panel on Walter Capps' contributions to the humanities and the value of the humanities today, featuring prominent leaders of humanities organizations*

David Marshall, Executive Vice Chancellor, UCSB

James Quay, former Executive Director, California Council for the Humanities

Ralph Lewin, Executive Director, Peter E. Haas Jr. Family Fund

Phoebe Stein, President, Federation of State Humanities Councils

1:00pm - 3:45pm

#### [Walter Capps and the Study of Religion](#)

*A panel on Walter Capps' scholarly contributions and the study of religion today, featuring renowned scholars of religion who were Walter's graduate students*

Edward Linenthal, Professor Emeritus of History, Indiana University Bloomington

Wendy M. Wright, Professor Emerita of Theology, Creighton University

Tomoko Masuzawa, Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature and History, University of Michigan



Julie Ingersoll, Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Florida  
Sarah McFarland Taylor, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Northwestern University

**Saturday, November 11 (events held in Campbell Hall)**

9:00am - 10:30am

[Remembering the Vietnam War Class](#)

*A panel on Walter Capps' famous course on the Vietnam War and its impacts, featuring former instructors and guest speakers for the course*

Bob Kerrey, former U.S. Senator and Governor (Nebraska)  
Shad Meshad, Founder and President, National Veterans Foundation  
Richard Hecht, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, UCSB

10:45am - 12:00pm

[Teaching Ethics and Civic Values](#)

*A panel on Walter Capps' teaching of ethics and civic values in the classroom and beyond, featuring former students*

Katya Armistead, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Dean of Student Life, UCSB  
Tim Kring, Screenwriter/Showrunner (*Heroes*, *Crossing Jordan*)  
J. Shawn Landres, Civic Strategist and Municipal Commissioner

12:00pm - 12:30pm

Public Remarks

*An opportunity for members of the public to share memories of Walter Capps*

12:00pm - 2:00pm

Lunch available for purchase by [Chiltepin Mexican Grill](#), a local food truck, outside Campbell Hall

2:00pm - 2:30pm

Democracy is Born in Conversation

*A video presentation on Walter Capps' 1996 congressional campaign, featuring archival footage*  
Alessandro Duranti, Distinguished Research Professor of Anthropology, UCLA

2:45pm - 4:15pm

[The Value of Public Service](#)

*A conversation about Walter Capps' political career and the ongoing value of public service*

Henry T. Yang, Chancellor, UCSB  
Bob Kerrey, former U.S. Senator and Governor (Nebraska)  
Lois Capps, former U.S. Representative  
Laura Capps, Santa Barbara County Supervisor  
Todd Capps  
Lou Cannon, journalist, author, biographer



**Walter H. Capps** (1934-1997) was a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara from 1964-1996. In 1996, he was elected as a Democrat to the United States House of Representatives, where he served from January 1997 until his untimely death in October of that year.

As a scholar, Walter helped define the field of Religious Studies. He was one of the first hires in the new Department of Religious Studies at UCSB, and his pathbreaking scholarship articulated the interdisciplinary range of the field. He wrote or edited fourteen books and numerous articles. His interests included the theology of hope, mysticism and monasticism, ethics and aesthetics, psychology of religion, the history of religious studies, the Vietnam War, and religion and politics.

Over the course of his career, his teaching and research steadily moved in the direction of the role of ethics in contemporary American public life. In 1978, Walter initiated his celebrated course on "The Impact of the Vietnam War on American Religion and Culture," popularly known as "Religion and the Impact of Vietnam," which regularly drew 850 undergraduate students, filling Campbell Hall, UCSB's largest lecture hall. It was featured on CBS's "60 Minutes" program in a segment called "Vietnam 101." He was a beloved professor who taught tens of thousands of students. Walter's sustained contributions to the humanities in California and nationally earned him praise as one of our nation's most distinguished humanists. He was president of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils, chairman of the California Council for the Humanities, president of the Council for the Study of Religion, and director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. He led summer institutes, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, for high school and college teachers on issues related to religion and society.

Walter often said, "Democracy is born in conversation." He believed that dialogue is vital in a diverse society, and that realizing our common humanity can help forge shared values. He taught the community, but just as importantly, he learned from the community. Walter Capps personified the highest ideals of the humanities and of public service.

Walter's wife, Lois Capps, succeeded her husband in Congress, serving as a U.S. Representative from 1998-2017, representing Santa Barbara and the Central Coast.

For more information about our events, please visit:  
<https://www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu/celebration>.

For more information about Walter Capps, please visit:  
<https://www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu/about/walter-capps>.

For more information or color images, email Dusty Hoesly, Associate Director of the Walter H. Capps Center, at [hoesly@ucsb.edu](mailto:hoesly@ucsb.edu) or call 805-893-2317.