

PRESS RELEASE
Native American Studies
Department
(916) 752-3237

HART HALL CONFERENCE ROOM NAMED FOR
DAVID RISLING
NATIVE AMERICAN ACADEMIC

The primary conference room serving Hart and Kerr Halls on the U.C. Davis campus, Hart Hall 3201, has been named the David Risling Room. After review by a campus committee on campus names and approval by the council of vice chancellors and deans, Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef recently announced the decision to name the conference room for long-time academic leader David Risling.

Risling was nominated for the honor by the faculty in Native American Studies. The nomination was supported by all academic units occupying space in Hart and Kerr Halls.

Risling, a Hoopa-Karuk and Yurok Indian born and raised on the Hoopa Reservation, served as coordinator of the Native American Studies program from 1970 through 1989. He retired in 1992 after more than three decades of teaching at Modesto Junior College and U.C. Davis. A person with tremendous energy and dedication, Risling was a star athlete at Hoopa High School and a Golden Gloves boxing champion. He served in the U.S. Navy in World War II.

Since "retiring" Dave Risling has returned to U.C. Davis to teach one of his popular courses without pay and has also assumed the responsibilities of Acting President of D-Q University. He is also very active nationally with the Association on American Indian Affairs and other groups.

Because of his phenomenal record of service, Risling was awarded the U.C. Davis Distinguished Public Service Award for his many contributions to the University and to the community.

In 1967 he organized the first statewide conference on Indian education at Stanislaus State College. He then became the chair and key founder of the Ad Hoc Committee on California Indian Education. The Ad Hoc Committee held grassroots meetings, all moderated by Dave, at Santa Rosa, Hoopa, and elsewhere and then, in October 1967, held the first all-Indian statewide conference in North Fork, California. The North Fork Conference was the first Indian-controlled conference on education in the United States. It led to the founding of the California Indian Education Association (CIEA), the first such

organization in the country, for which Dave served as charter president. The CIEA served as the prototype for the National Indian Education Association, which Dave also helped found.

In 1968, Risling helped found the California Indian Legal Services, a non-profit Indian-controlled public agency. He served as the first chairperson and guided its life during the first crucial years. Subsequently, he helped establish the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), a national Indian-controlled legal defense agency. Dave served for many years as a board member of NARF. During the early 1970s, Dave conducted numerous national meetings and was appointed by three U.S. presidents to terms on the federal government's National Advisory Commission on Indian Education (NACIE). NACIE was created because of legislation which Dave helped to develop. Dave played a key role in the initiation of the Indian Education Act and the Indian Tribal Community College Act, two laws which have had a profound impact upon Indian life. Today, some 27 Indian community colleges and countless K-12 Indian education centers benefit from those acts.

At the local level CIEA, which Dave led for two terms, helped stimulate the development of Native American Studies programs at U.C. Davis, U.C. Berkeley, Long Beach State College, Cal State Sacramento and elsewhere. CIEA also spearheaded the planning for D-Q University, the Indian-controlled community college, where Risling has served as chairperson of the Board of Trustees for almost 20 years. The founding of D-QU contributed directly to the establishment of many other Indian colleges, and Risling has played a key role in the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) since it was founded by the new Indian colleges collectively.

Risling, in the last decade, shifted his attention to tribal traditions and national Indian affairs. He has been a board member of the Association on American Indian Affairs, a leading national organization, since the 1970s. He has also visited hundreds of reservations and communities, meeting with and advising tribal officials, community elders, etc.

Because of Dave Risling's pre-eminence as an Indian leader, he was invited to New Zealand by the Maori people. There he was a guest of the leading Maoris in over 40 different ceremonial centers over a period of a month and a half. He was, deservedly, treated with the same honor, respect and ceremony shown Queen Elizabeth II and the King of Tonga on the occasion of their earlier visits. In February 1990, Dave conducted a significant meeting

of Indian elders and Maori visitors in southern California, all of this part of an ongoing effort to strengthen Indian ceremonies and culture and to develop ties with other indigenous peoples.

The organizations which Dave has created or led have been, and still are, of fundamental significance in the lives of Native American people. The Native American Rights Fund has been the pre-eminent (and at times almost only) line of defense for Native American legal rights. The California Indian Legal Service has been the major legal-aid organization for the native Indians of California. And in the education field, the work of the CIEA has been of major significance.

The naming of the Risling Room reflects the fact that Dave Risling's efforts have had crucial impact upon the lives of countless Indian young people who have been given an opportunity to break the cycle of oppression and poverty because of the existence of D-Q University. Similarly, Dave's other efforts have affected people's lives in educational, cultural, and spiritually- enriching ways. Recently, the Risling Intertribal Award was established in his honor to aid students financially at U.C. Davis. This award has reached its initial \$10,000 endowment goal.

When Indian people across the United States think of U.C. Davis, they are likely to think first of Dave Risling. He has carried the U.C. Davis and DQU flags to the far corners of the country, including Alaska, Ecuador and New Zealand. He has exemplified the highest type of unselfish public service for Native Americans for two decades.

David Risling has also excelled as an administrator, adviser, and teacher. In 1990, he was nominated for a Distinguished Teaching Award by students and faculty. He is regarded as an exemplary educator and a humanitarian who has been meeting the challenge of diversity on the U.C. Davis campus for more than twenty years. In effect, he has been a peacemaker as well as an educator, helping his students to understand, in a healing and harmonious manner, the sensitive issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class and age.

In his courses, Risling was said to be a dedicated instructor who truly taught his students the meaning of praxis, demonstrating to them the need for combining critical/analytical skills with the practical, "real world" application of the concepts they learned in his classes. He treats students with the respect they deserve as adults and he lets them know he sees them as

potential, concerned and involved citizens of this society, who might one day be in positions of influence where their informed voice on Indian issues could help the Native American community. Some students take Native American Studies courses thinking they are easy, that Native Americans are all dead, that the course will focus only on Indians of the past. Other students come to the classes ready to sympathize and empathize, many with quite romantic notions about Indian people. Dave's classes quickly dispel any false ideas that students might have; they learn instead to investigate, to analyze, to come to terms with Indian history, and perhaps most important not to be afraid of the "other." In facing the "other"--the Indians of this society--they come to face themselves, and Dave helps them to do this in a good way. His enthusiasm for teaching comes from his love for his community and for humanity.

According to colleagues: "Dave Risling is a person who has lived Native American Studies every day of the past twenty years. He has been "Mr. Native American" on the campus and in the community, always teaching, always supporting, always available for counsel and assistance, always with wisdom and compassion to share. He has had a tremendous impact upon all of us. He has served as our elder, and as our role model as the rest of us have tried to follow in his pedagogical footsteps."

Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef has written to Risling that: "This naming is in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the University of California and your long and distinguished career as teacher, adviser, and administrator in the field of Native American Studies. Your work has had an important impact on the lives of your students and has helped them, as well as the campus, understand the sensitive issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age."

Your past and continued dedication to the campus are deeply appreciated. I am pleased to join your friends and colleagues in expressing appreciation and congratulations."

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