

## **In Memory of Dr. Alain Cohen (1943–2026)**

Few of us on the UC San Diego faculty realize that Dr. Alain Cohen arrived on campus before there was a Che Café (1980). Alain did not precede Roger Revelle, but they were contemporaries—and each was instrumental in shaping the intellectual culture of UC San Diego. By any measure, Alain broke records for teaching longevity in the annals of the university. He was approaching his sixtieth year of full-time teaching. He once remarked that he was “born in a country that does not exist anymore.” Dr. Cohen was referring to the former French Tunisia—or perhaps a meta-reality of his multi-faceted horizons.

I first met Alain in the late 1980s, when I began my teaching career at UC San Diego. We met at a small faculty gathering off campus and immediately found ourselves talking about politics, Freud, and cinema. We shared a love of films—both domestic and global. I’m not sure we loved Sigmund Freud equally. Over the years and decades, our conversations ranged across art, philosophy, psychotherapy, and provocative theories about how to structure the perfect Jewish joke—with two paradoxical punch lines. Alain loved paradoxes.

More importantly, Alain invited me to serve on several committees he chaired: doctoral committees and undergraduate honors projects. He nurtured undergraduates and graduate students with unbridled passion and energy. A lifelong student himself, Alain was a psychoanalyst-in-training at the San Diego Psychoanalytic Society and Institute.

Dr. Pat Ledden—a leading mathematician and long-serving Provost of Muir College, who loved cinema and the fiction of James Joyce—formed a steering committee in 2002 to launch a Film Studies minor anchored at Muir College. The committee included Professors Susan Smith and Leslie Stern (both from Visual Arts), Alain Cohen, and me.

It is with deep sadness, and also with deep honor, that I acknowledge that Pat, Susan, Leslie, and now Alain have all passed on. Alain was a steadfast advocate for Film Studies—year after year, decade after decade. He lobbied tirelessly for the Film Studies minor to become a major. He did live to see the creation of the Cinematic Arts and Film Studies Program, now home to both a major and a minor, a center, and a building: the Suraj Israni Center for Cinematic Arts, just five minutes from the Faculty Club.

The Faculty Club, in fact, was Alain’s second home. He was an affiliated faculty member of Jewish Studies for several decades, attending our annual luncheons with warmth and solidarity.

Few of us know that Alain curated more than thirty-five art exhibitions at the UC San Diego Faculty Club gallery, including *Aesthetics of Science* in 2003. When I served as Provost of Marshall College more than a decade ago, Alain knew Marshall housed rare, historic photographs of Black jazz artists, which he borrowed for one of the Faculty Club exhibitions.

Just as the campus was shutting down during COVID, Alain and I collaborated on a special film evening celebrating French theatre and film director Ariane Mnouchkine, who had been scheduled to visit UC San

Diego that spring as part of her Kyoto Prize tour. Alain lectured with characteristic clarity and wisdom on three of her most significant films.

Few may also know that Alain made a documentary film and produced several television programs on cinema—on Godard, Kubrick, Woody Allen, war cinema, painting in cinema, and photography in cinema.

Few of us on the faculty ever glance at the anonymous website we all dread: *Rate My Professor*. Today, I did—specifically to read what students wrote about Professor Alain Cohen. One comment reads:

“The Woody Allen of theory profs. He can be hard to understand, and he'll quote stuff you've never heard, but not in arrogance but rather in treating students as equals. His courses are the best way to learn how films are ‘built’ within the frame, and you learn to respect quality films even if you don't like them. He's a rare gem of a prof to find.”

Rest in peace, dear Alain.

*Repose en paix, mon ami.*

*Adapted from remarks by Jewish Faculty Director, Dr. Allan Havis, delivered at the UC San Diego Faculty Club memorial, March 6, 2026. Posted by the Jewish Studies Program through September 2026.*