

Robert Williams Reynolds (1927 – 2008)

When Bob Reynolds was hired by a newly-fledged department of psychology at UC Santa Barbara in 1957, the four members of the department were housed in World War II barracks on the edge of campus. The 33 years that Bob served the department were years of complete transformation, and when Bob passed away in late February this year after 18 years as Professor Emeritus, he had made his mark on both department and discipline.

One of Bob's first responsibilities was to help design what is now known affectionately as "the old building." You know, the one with windows only to the north. Since researchers wanting to control their test environments just covered lab windows up, Bob saw no sense in putting windows in. Reynolds also claimed credit for the postage stamp sized offices faculty enjoyed in the old building. According to Bob, if the offices had been any bigger, the administration would have crammed two people in per office, and no one wanted that.

Reynolds was also responsible for creating the Bio-Psychology (now Neuroscience & Behavior) area, cutting through the red tape necessary to establish an undergraduate degree-granting major. UCSB's degree in Physiological Psychology was the first of its kind in the UC system, and its emphasis on lab courses reflected Bob's conviction that hands-on experience was crucial to undergraduate education.

Reynolds was born in Buffalo, NY, and soon distinguished himself academically, graduating top of his high school class and earning an academic scholarship to Cornell. After graduating with a degree in Chemistry, he earned Masters Degrees in Philosophy and Psychology and worked for the DuPont Company as a research chemist before receiving his Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Buffalo in 1956.

In work that would have garnered considerable attention even today, Bob's early research focused on brain control mechanisms for food intake. One idea prominent at the time was that the ventromedial hypothalamus area of the brain controlled food intake, since its destruction caused overeating and subsequent obesity. Bob's work attracted considerable attention because he suggested that the overeating was a by-product of the electrolytic lesions used to destroy the region (his so-called irritative hypothesis).

His later research interests, also presciently modern, investigated hormonal response to stress. Bob and his students were able to demonstrate the pulsatile nature of the release of corticosterone by the adrenal gland by perfecting assays that measured its appearance in the bloodstream following a stressful event.

"Bob was one of the smartest people on the psychology faculty during my tour of duty," recalls colleague Jerry Jacobs, "and one of the most down-to-earth. Bob could be counted on to quote long passages from Monty Python as the occasion demanded, especially in the service of deflating academic pretense." A staunch supporter of UCSB basketball, Bob could be seen courtside at Gaucho games for many years.

Bob is survived by his children Blake, Kirk, and Tracy, daughters-in-law Karen and Teri, grandchildren Nathan, Sarah, Gracie, and Reese, as well as past and present members of the psychology department and generations of students who remember, appreciate, and admire his many contributions.