IN MEMORIAM

LOUIS A. ZURCHER, JR.

Louis Anthony Zurcher, Jr. (1936-1987), a member of the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin from 1968 to 1987, was born May 13, 1936 in San Francisco, California to Louis Anthony Zurcher, Sr. and Kathleen Ursula Zurcher.

Professor Zurcher grew up in San Francisco, where he attended a Jesuit high school. Following high school he enlisted in the United States Navy, where he served for four years. He received a B.A. from the University of San Francisco in 1961, a M.A. in Psychology from the University of Arizona in 1963, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Arizona in 1965.

Following the completion of his Ph.D. Dr. Zurcher began his professional career as a research social psychologist at the William A. Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. In 1968 he was appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, The University of Texas at Austin. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1969 and Professor in 1973. He served as Acting Departmental Chairperson in the Department of Sociology, 1974-1975 and as Associate Dean, Office of Graduate Studies, 1976-1977. During 1978-1979 he served as Associate University Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. In 1979 he returned to The University of Texas at Austin as a Professor of Social Work and Sociology. As a member of the faculty at the School of Social Work he taught in the undergraduate and graduate professional degree and Ph.D. programs. He chaired seven dissertation committees. He also served as Acting Dean in 1980-1981.

Professor Zurcher was elected to membership in Alpha Kappa Delta (National Honor Society in Sociology), Psi Chi (National Honor Society in Psychology), Phi Beta Kappa, and Phi Kappa Phi. He was elected as a Fellow of the American Psychological Association in 1979 and Fellow of
the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues in 1980. In 1983 he was appointed as an Ashbel Smith Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin. He received the Lora Lee Pederson Teaching Excellence Award from the School of Social Work in 1985.


Professor Zurcher served as a Petty Officer in the United States Navy from 1955-1959. Following this tour of duty he joined the Medical Service Corps, United States Naval Reserve. He was an active Reservist throughout his academic career, being promoted to the rank of Captain in 1987. He was a member of The Army and Navy Club and the Naval Reserve Association.

Professor Zurcher was widely recognized as an intellectual leader in sociology, especially in the areas of social psychology and social movements. His research studies included a study of community leaders in an anti-poverty program (Poverty Warriors); a study of community response to disaster (Tornado); a study of anti-pornography crusades (Citizens for Decency), and in particular a long-term study of the citizen volunteer in the Naval Reserve (Citizen Sailors in a Changing Society).

Professor Zurcher was a prodigious researcher who gained a national reputation for a distinctive style of scholarship that creatively combined theory and application. As reflected in the title of his first two books, From Dependency to Dignity and Poverty Warriors, he believed that the social and behavioral sciences could help others to make the world a better place. Indeed, the
entire social world in which he found himself was his laboratory for the study of social interaction, and for finding ways to help others experience self-fulfillment.

Dr. Zurcher's scholarly works--16 books and 90 journal articles and book chapters--were of extraordinary range and breadth and include seminal contributions to sociology, social psychology, and their applications. His research and writing on roles and self, as developed in The Mutable Self: Self-Concept for Social Change, Social Roles: Conformity, Conflict and Creativity and numerous articles, dealing with personal identity and role performance, have become part of the conceptual vocabulary of social psychology. He was particularly interested in the enactment of ephemeral roles, that is roles, such as service volunteers and military reservists, deliberately selected by individuals as related to personal definitions of identity. His contributions to the study of social movements were also on the cutting edge of scholarship. Relatively few scholars make enduring conceptual and theoretical contributions to more than one area or discipline, but Dr. Zurcher is clearly among this group. As one colleague noted:

"If scholars are measured not only by their published works, but also by the eyes they open and the minds they stimulate in other contexts, then Lou Zurcher was an eminent scholar in the true sense of the word."

Professor Zurcher had an extensive career as a journal editor, serving as a consulting editor or member of the editorial board of thirteen journals. He was the series editor of Contemporary Studies in Behavioral Science. His interdisciplinary perspective and his sustained effort to use social and behavioral science theory and research to improve society were combined in his editorship of The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science. From 1979 until his death, Dr. Zurcher broadened the journal's scope, improved its quality and, in general, guided it through its most successful years.

Dr. Zurcher was a model professor, continuously striving to help students achieve their professional goals and develop their capacities as scholars. He was an energetic, committed,
creative and gifted academician. He consistently and voluntarily served as an instructor at the undergraduate, master’s and doctoral levels. This was indicative of his strong belief that senior faculty must serve as role models for all students. Dr. Zurcher was an excellent lecturer. He was able to illustratively and critically draw upon the applied social science research presented in his more than a hundred published journal articles and books, as well as the wide range of pertinent literature with which he was familiar.

In addition to his classroom teaching, Dr. Zurcher chaired master’s theses and doctoral committees in sociology as well as in social work. He was always in high demand as a committee chair. This overwhelming interest in working with Dr. Zurcher could be attributed to his reputation as an outstanding scholar, professor, researcher, and most importantly, his commitment, sensitivity, support and keen interest in helping students achieve their maximum potential.

Dr. Zurcher was always willing to go that extra mile with former students even after they had completed their dissertations. Some of his graduate students recalled:

"Lou would urge us not only to publish articles from our dissertations but to convert our dissertations into books while the momentum was still there."

"He was always willing to advise us regarding career opportunities and remained a friend and mentor to us long after graduation."

In the role as faculty colleague Dr. Zurcher was a giver--supporting and encouraging junior level faculty in their teaching and research. He had a unique way of assessing strengths and capabilities of both students and faculty and helping them to capitalize on those strengths. According to one faculty member:

"Although he was always very busy as a journal editor, or fulfilling his numerous administrative responsibilities, preparing for class, writing articles, traveling, meeting with students, he would always take time to assist a colleague. He was never too busy to advise and
counsel on the selection of a journal for manuscript submission, to review and give editorial comments on manuscripts, to write a reference letter, or to send a note of congratulations or encouragement for achievements. However, he didn't mince words when it came to telling junior faculty what needed to be done to qualify for tenure promotion. Dr. Zurcher held high standards and expectations and had a gift for assisting colleagues in their quest for excellence."

Another colleague stated:

"He was an exemplary role model, not by design but by performance, and was so recognized by his students and faculty colleagues."

As an administrator in his many posts including Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at Texas, Associate University Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Interim and then Acting Dean of the School of Social Work at Texas, Dr. Zurcher was praised by students, faculty and administrators. In this arena too, he exhibited an extraordinary gift for "making bureaucracies work." As in all his endeavors, Lou excelled as an administrator. Well organized, Lou was able to juggle his administrative responsibilities while maintaining his prolific writing and research record. Lou was also a friend (the best friend one could have) and a wonderful advocate. Another colleague recalled:

"I always admired him and I have always felt that one of his greatest attributes was that he was without ethnocentric biases--Lou saw people as people and when necessary, would take firm stands against injustice."

Dr. Zurcher's sensitivity, interpersonal skills, fairness, good humor, and sense of direction were admired and appreciated by his colleagues and students. All lost a dynamic and effective leader whose agendas were not yet complete. As one colleague wrote:

"[He] would have especially benefitted people who had special struggles; he would have invented ways to bring them in. It would have been serious and it would have been fun, full of food, liquor, laughter and cigars, which might even really have been smuggled from Havana."
Dr. Louis Zurcher, Jr. was the epitome of academic, personal and professional excellence—a scholar, administrator, professor, editor, faculty colleague, mentor and friend. He will be greatly missed.


Professor Zurcher is survived by his wife, Susan Lee Shrum Zurcher, and their two children, Anthony Walsh and Nora Breen Zurcher.

William H. Cunningham, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors David M. Austin (Chairman), Ruth G. McRoy, and Charles M. Bonjean.