

In Memoriam: Douglas G. Stuart (1931-2019): A Friend, a Colleague, a Mentor



By Raphael Gruener, PhD, Professor Emeritus

The inimitable Doug Stuart, Regents Professor, has left us for good. This is an inadequate and incomplete – there is so much to tell – but loving tribute to Doug’s life.

The room always fell into silence when Doug entered, not because he was intimidating, but because everyone knew that when Doug spoke it, would be very much worth listening to. In the early days, at the University of Arizona, Doug would affectionately refer to his students, postdocs, staff and colleagues as ‘son’ (not sure what he called his female colleagues). You knew an admonition was coming cloaked in deep affection and respect. That is how Doug would establish his relationships among his sphere of disciples, and there are many of those not only in Tucson but worldwide.

In his own words, Doug summed up his attitude about life by deciding “*to go through life with a consistently cheerful and positive attitude no matter what...*” Doug was very proud of his Aussie ‘convict’ (several generations removed) background. It emboldened him to be outspoken, precise in language, and straight to the point. Mixed with this proud persona, there was a compassionate and caring person. Whatever he had to say to you was always punctuated by his ear-to-ear smile. You knew, at once, that it was tough love he was delivering.

Doug began his academic career at Michigan State University, on an athletic scholarship (he was an excellent high jumper in those days), proceeding to earn his PhD at UCLA, and culminating this sojourn as a faculty member at UC Davis. In 1967 Doug arrived in Tucson with his family to become one of the first founders of the UA College of Medicine, where he based his outstanding, multifaceted career, which lasted more than half a century.

Doug’s background, which included being a high school teacher, an Olympic grade athlete, a superb and dedicated university teacher, and a meticulous organizer, led him to recognize that academic training programs required integrated input from a spectrum of fields. And so, early in his UA career, he formed the nucleus of academics that brought the ‘interdisciplinary’ ideology to the campus (his biography includes fifteen mentions of the concept of ‘interdisciplinarity’). Doug’s personal and scientific persona was so infectious that he succeeded in becoming a magnet for who-is-who in the neurobiology of motor control. With time, many of these luminaries joined Doug at the UA in scientific visits, collaborations, Doings in Motor Control, and seminar presentations, thus enriching our entire academic community.

Doug’s fruitful career at the UA was punctuated by numerous actions which shaped the University’s research, teaching, and administration for decades. He recruited numerous new colleagues across the campus, led the Department of Physiology, became vice dean for research

at the College of Medicine, advised central administrators, and taught a large community of undergraduate, graduate, and medical students. As a researcher, he became and remained a leader in the understanding on how the brain controls animal and human locomotion. In this endeavor, he impacted an international community of researchers from the United States and 19 other countries where he counted no fewer than 138 among his coauthor colleagues.

Doug clearly left a huge imprint at the UA, America, and the international academic community. Memories of his persona and accomplishments will remain with many, many of us.