IN MEMORIAM
WILLIAM W. COOPER

William W. Cooper was born on July 23, 1914, in Birmingham, Alabama, and passed away on Wednesday, June 20, 2012. Bill had a long and productive life and was coming to work every day until a few days prior to his death. His successful career can be attributed to his determination and enthusiasm, which was first exhibited in his childhood.

To financially support his parents and siblings, Bill dropped out of high school and worked as a bowling alley pin-setter, golf course caddy, and a professional boxer. As a prizefighter, Bill had fifty-eight wins, three losses, and two draws. Professional boxing might have been Bill’s career, had he not shared a ride with Eric Kohler during his regular hitch-hiking commute to the golf course. Kohler was a professor at Northwestern University and a partner at Arthur Andersen & Co. Impressed by Bill’s passionate talk about physiological psychology, Kohler encouraged Bill to continue his education and, in fact, paid for it at the University of Chicago. Bill said he decided to go to the University of Chicago because he figured that if he had a few years in college no one would ask him if he had graduated from high school. Bill began his studies in physical chemistry, but switched to economics after working under Kohler on a patent infringement case. Bill worked as an accountant for the Tennessee Valley Authority under Kohler’s supervision after graduating with a B.A. and began graduate studies at Columbia University in 1940. He completed the coursework for a Ph.D. two years later, but the advanced research in his dissertation could not be fully understood by the committee, so they refused to either accept or reject it. Thus, Bill decided to continue his career with only a B.A. In the late 1990s, Bill and Leonid Hurwicz, a Nobel laureate, met at a conference and debated who had the least formal credentials to be an academic: Hurwicz with a prewar law degree from Poland as his terminal degree or Bill with his B.A.

Venturing out from under Kohler’s wings, Bill worked at the U.S. Bureau of the Budget (now the Office of Management and Budget), where he was placed in charge of coordinating all of the Federal Government’s accounting and accounting-related statistics programs. World War II was coming to an end by late 1944, and Bill left the White House to teach at his alma mater, the University of Chicago. Later, he transferred to Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), where he helped found the Graduate School of Industrial Administration (now the Tepper School of Business). He also founded and was the first dean of the School of Urban and Public Affairs (now the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management). In 1976, after thirty years at Carnegie Mellon, Bill joined the Harvard Business School to help reorient their doctoral programs. With this task completed in 1980, he came to The University of Texas at Austin, where he was initially appointed professor of management accounting in management science and information systems. “William W. Cooper came to Texas in 1980 at age sixty-six, already a giant in his field, at a time when many would be preparing for retirement. But as a man who began his work career as a prize fighter from Chicago, he had no intention of slowing down,” said Thomas Gilligan, dean of the McCombs School of Business. “I speak for generations of Texas business students and many grateful colleagues, when I say that Bill was a cherished friend, a steady mentor, and an inspiration to everyone who knew him.” In 1993, Bill officially retired and...
became a professor emeritus after thirteen years of teaching in the Graduate School of Business (now part of the McCombs School of Business) at The University of Texas at Austin.

Bill was a catalyst for change on a world-wide basis. He was known at “Mr. Linear Programming,” along with his long-time collaborator, mathematician, Abraham Charnes. Together they published the first book on the subject. Cooper and Charnes shared a legendary joint publishing record of more than thirty-five years. They developed new areas of use and research, such as goal programming, chance-constrained programming, and data envelopment analysis. Bill was the founding president of the Institute of Management Sciences and first editor of the journal *Management Science*. Bill authored more than three hundred and twenty-five articles while at UT and, as noted in a 2002 Austin American Statesman article, his publication rate increased in the decade from 1992 to 2002, when he was between seventy-eight and eighty-eight years old. His research and publication record was significant, but so was his attention to and relationship with his graduate students.

Weeks before his ninety-sixth birthday, Bill was asked what kept him working so hard. He replied with a quote from a book, “I don’t want to die from a cold or pneumonia or anything, I want to die from living.” Bill explained: “That’s the way I feel. My life revolves around work. I like solving problems, I like advancing knowledge, and I like helping people.”

Bill was awarded honorary Doctor of Science degrees by Ohio State University and Carnegie Mellon University, and the degree of Doctor Honoris Causae by the University of Alicante in Spain. In 1945, he received an award for the most valuable article on accounting, the first ever awarded by the American Institute of Accountants (now the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants). Bill was a Ford Foundation Faculty Fellow (1958-59 and 1962-63) and an American Accounting Association Outstanding Accounting Educator (1990). He received the U.S. Comptroller General Award for Significant Contributions to the U.S. General Accounting Office (1986), the John von Neumann Theory Prize of the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (1982), and a University of Texas Career Research Excellence Award (2002). He was inducted into the McCombs School of Business Hall of Fame (1990), the Accounting Hall of Fame (1991), and the International Operational Research Hall of Fame (2005).

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Patrick L. Brockett (chair), Linda L. Golden, and Andrew B. Whinston.

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