DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
TIMOTHY W. RUEFLI

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Timothy W. Ruefl, professor, information, risk, and operations management, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
TIMOTHY W. RUEFLI

Timothy Walter Ruefl, the Daniel B. Stuart Centennial Professor in the Applications of Computers to Business, passed away on June 19, 2010, in Austin, Texas. He was born October 21, 1942, to Walter and Beatrice Ruefl in the small mill town of Torrington, Connecticut. A gifted student and the first in his immediate family to attend college, Tim earned his B.A. in quantitative studies (minors: economics and studio art) from Wesleyan and his master’s degree (1967) and Ph.D. (in industrial administration, 1969) from Carnegie Mellon University. Tim accepted a fellowship at Air Force Project Rand in Santa Monica, California, in the late 1960s, and then joined his mentor, George Kozmetsky, as a faculty member at the UT McCombs School of Business, in the fall of 1968.

He was part of a new wave of faculty in the business school that would focus on high-quality research that would have an impact on scholarship and on practice. One of Kozmetsky’s most notable initiatives was the creation of IC2, a think tank that conducted research on the intersection of business, government, and education. Tim worked with Kozmetsky to bring the institute to life and became its first associate director.

Tim’s research and teaching spanned the areas of high technology strategic management, information systems, management science, and microeconomics. He authored and co-authored two books and numerous book chapters, along with articles and monographs for leading academic and practitioner journals in the U.S., Europe, and Japan. He was a consultant for McKinsey in those areas, which is a testimony to the relevance of his work for practice. He thrived on academic debate and did not hesitate to take on the prevailing theories or scholars of the time when he believed that his reasoning and evidence required the rebuttal of these theories and assumptions.

His initial research efforts followed the path set by his creative dissertation that focused on the efficient allocation of resources in decentralized organizations. These ideas led to a series of articles in the flagship journals, Management Science and Operations Research, that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. In the mid-1980s, his focus turned to issues related to the determinants and sustainability of superior firm performance. He recognized superior firm performance as a frontier phenomenon, and he developed new nonparametric statistical methods for studying superior firm performance on a longitudinal basis. His findings showed that sustained firm performance is a relatively rare phenomenon and called into question the explanatory power of existing approaches, such as the structure-conduct-performance paradigm or the resource-based view of the firm. This work has attracted the attention of the very top scholars in strategic management.

As personal computers became available as tools for business in the early 1980s, Ruefl was involved in creating the first classroom in the business school with a computer at each workstation; it was known as Classroom 2000. Tim provided leadership in establishing the M.B.A. concentration in management information systems (MIS) in the early 1990s, and in the continued development of the MIS undergraduate program. Both programs are ranked in the top five among all business schools. He successfully built up the industry advisory group and integrated their ideas into the classroom experience as well as into the curriculum development. Later, he took the lead in a program for M.B.A. students that focused on preparing students to work and lead high-tech businesses. This program set the stage for a concentration in MIS.
In the mid-1990s, working again with Professor Kozmetsky, Ruefl helped create the Master of Science in Technology Commercialization (MSTC) program. This one-year graduate program, which recently moved from IC2 to the McCombs school, prepares high-tech entrepreneurs to move viable technologies from concept to market. The course he taught was *Technology Commercialization Strategy*. It was Tim’s unique course that applied the general ideas of business strategy specifically to technology ventures and products. He received several awards based on his classroom teaching in that program.

Tim served as chair of the Department of Management from 1986 to 1991 and emphasized excellence in teaching, research, and service to the University and community. He was an inspiring professor in the MSTC, M.B.A., undergraduate, and executive education programs at McCombs, mentoring countless students and opening his home to them during the holidays.

The appeal of his classes was derived from the broad relevance and fundamental importance of his seminar topics, such as systems theory and inquiring systems design. He did not constrain investigation only to niche perspectives of “management” or “strategy” or “economics,” but explored their connections to the broader social and natural systems, which set their contexts. This approach also increased the relevance of his classes to other courses. Moreover, he also keenly appreciated the benefit that understanding historical developments brought to understanding current problems and evaluating potential approaches to them. He had a discerning understanding of the implications of epistemological issues for management, economics, and systems problems.

His pedagogical style of developing topics of study within their larger contexts not only led to deeper and broader understanding of the subjects but also provided the basis for one his favorite maxims for solving seemingly intractable problems: Whenever a problem seems to offer only inadequate, contradictory, or contrary-to-fact results, extend the analysis to a higher, a “meta-” level, to situate the issues in a more comprehensive context, which will provide a higher systems evaluation of these component or constituent subsystem. His teaching awards include the M.B.A. Applause award for elective teaching, the Joe D. Beasley Teaching Excellence Award, CBA Foundation Advisory Council Award for Teaching Innovation, and the Hank and Mary Harkins Foundation Teaching Excellence Award.

Dr. Ruefl designed and taught executive programs for such diverse companies as Dell, Texas Instruments, Samsung, Axalto, Lockheed Martin Aerospace, and Essilor of America. He also taught at the University of British Columbia and was a member of the extended faculty of Escuela de Graduados en Administración y Dirección de Empresas at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Monterrey, N.L., Mexico. He received the Fawn and Vijay Mahajan Teaching Excellence Award for Executive Education.

Tim was a dedicated family man who took great pride in his wife and children’s accomplishments. He is survived by wife, Elizabeth Ruefl; daughters, Tia and Rebecca; sons, Chad, Roy, and Michael; and five grandchildren.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James S. Dyer (chair), Gary M. Cadenhead, and Andrew B. Whinton with special thanks to Chester Wilson.

Distributed to the dean of the McCombs School of Business, the executive vice president and provost, and the president November 24, 2010. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at:
http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.