IN MEMORIAM

Mark I. Appelbaum (1941–2020)

Mark Appelbaum, a giant in the field of quantitative psychology and developmental methodology, died of COVID-19 on December 21, 2020, in San Diego, at age 79. At the time of his passing, he was Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

Appelbaum was born on December 17, 1941, in Canton, Ohio. He was a distinguished researcher, teacher, and administrator who helped to transform research in psychology, education, and medicine by developing and applying methods for analyzing longitudinal data. He also was an award-winning teacher and mentor, an innovative administrator, and an individual with a passionate commitment to service—service to his colleagues, universities, and to the discipline.

Appelbaum earned his BS in chemistry from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1963, but a growing interest in measurement in psychology led to a PhD in quantitative psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1968. He began his career at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, first as a postdoctoral fellow in the L. L. Thurstone Psychometric Laboratory and then as a faculty member in the Department of Psychology. In 1989, Appelbaum moved to the Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, and in 1996 he moved again to the Department of Psychology at UCSD.

Appelbaum introduced psychologists and educators to methods that focused on individual differences in development over time—in both level and rate of change—and he demonstrated their effectiveness, first with longitudinal developmental data and later in neuropsychology studies. Collectively, this work impacted how researchers think about changes in behavior and cognition over time. Moreover, as a prominent developmental methodologist, he served as the lead statistician on seminal investigations such as the Abecedarian Project, the NICHD Study of Early Childcare, and the Early Childhood Transitions Network of the MacArthur Foundation.

He was also a gifted teacher and mentor. In both formal classes and informal meetings, Appelbaum shared his deep knowledge of psychometrics with his students and mentees, along with his passion for the application of quantitative methods in a range of research domains. The many students he taught remember his personal warmth, humor, clear teaching style, and devotion to ensuring that all students—not just those who were studying quantitative psychology—were successful. Beyond the classroom, his graduate students and mentees also remember his emphasis on the importance of contributing to the development and application of innovative methodologies, something that is evident in their work to this day.

Appelbaum thrived on professional service. Serving the field was central to his sense of identity and work ethic. He believed strongly in the benefits—for the field and for individual researchers—of rigorous peer review, and this belief translated into a commitment to both grant review and editorial work. Among his many contributions, he served on the Human Development and Aging (HUD-1) study section for a record eight years; as the editor of Psychological Bulletin and the founding editor of Psychological Methods; and on the APA Publications and Communications Board, helping to supervise the publications program, the revision of the Publication Manual, and the development of Journal Article Reporting Standards.

His commitment to service extended to important administrative responsibilities at each of the universities with which he was affiliated. Among Appelbaum’s many activities, he founded the Quantitative Methods Program at Vanderbilt and helped turn it into a major center for training and research in methodology. Moreover, he was especially proud of working beyond the department level—as Associate Dean at UNC-CH and later as Associate Vice Chancellor at UCSD—to make the system “work” for students whose interests didn’t fit in the traditional academic table of organization, as well as for others who were first generation students whose families didn’t necessarily have the experiential background to help them navigate the university environment.

Throughout his long career, Appelbaum received many honors. For example, he was appointed as the Bowman and Gordon Gray Distinguished Professor of Psychology, in recognition of his outstanding teaching at UNC-CH, and he received awards from the Society for Research in Child Development for Distinguished Contributions to SRCD, and from the American Psychological Association for Distinguished Service to Psychological Science.

Beyond the world of academics, Appelbaum was devoted to his family and friends. He is mourned by his wife of 56 years, Suzanne; brothers, Fredrick and Jeffery; sons, Greg and Jonathan; daughters-in-law, Mai Nguyen and Andrea Doonan; grandchildren, Layla and Moxy; and a legion of friends, colleagues, and former students.

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