CAMPUS NOTICE

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DIVISION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

January 23, 2015

ALL ACADEMICS, STAFF AND STUDENTS AT UC SAN DIEGO

SUBJECT: Passing of Sociology Department Founder Joseph Gusfield

It is with sadness that we announce the death of Joseph Gusfield, internationally renowned sociologist and founding chair of the sociology department at UC San Diego. He was 91 years old.

Gusfield was born in Chicago, on Sept. 6, 1923, and attended public high school there before enrolling in the University of Chicago in 1941. After the outbreak of World War II, he served in the Army for three years, and then returned to the University of Chicago, where he earned his bachelor's degree and then, in 1954, his Ph.D. He expanded his dissertation into a classic book, "Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement" (1963). In his analysis, social movements were as much about struggles for a particular version of moral order as about struggles for wealth and power. This work remains a foundation for the study of contemporary "culture wars."

After teaching at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, he was recruited in 1968 to be the founding chair of UC San Diego's sociology department. He recalled that he "wanted a department that would break with the emphasis on quantitative work. I wanted one that had much more of a concern with observation. I was also interested in historical sociology. I was interested in culture...All these, in one sense or another, were part of what was going on in the intellectual work which was now called a cultural turn; moving towards a greater importance given to how the world is perceived and given meaning, rather than correlations between factors." The distinctive strengths of the university's sociology department still manifest the influence of his vision.

Soon after coming to UC San Diego, Gusfield undertook a study of sentencing in drinking
and driving cases. This eventually culminated in another sociological classic, "The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking, Driving, and the Symbolic Order" (1981). It was about the social and moral forces that led drunk driving to be a public problem and ultimately about the nature of the law as a symbol of what is good and moral in the particular contexts of American society. This book too remains a major point of reference for the sociology of law and the sociology of culture.

Joe's sociological vision was inspired by activism and cross-cultural travel as well as scholarship. He participated in the third civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery. He was there in 1965 as the faculty sponsor of the student non-violent coordinating committee at the University of Illinois. He lived in India as a Fulbright scholar and taught for six months in Tokyo just before coming to San Diego. He wrote articles on the sociology of development based on his overseas research and, long after his retirement in 1991, he continued to write about the sociology of law and deviance, addiction and its treatments, and the distinctive ways such issues are perceived in American culture.

Together with other colleagues in UC San Diego's founding generation, he played a major role in shaping the structure and standards of this institution. He did this not only through his wise judgment, but his personal warmth and generosity of spirit. He and his wife, Irma Gusfield, provided countless hours of social support to generations of colleagues.

In retirement, Joe and Irma moved to Danville to be closer to their children in Oakland and Davis. There, Joe became a Distinguished Affiliated Scholar at Berkeley's Center for the Study of Law and Society. Irma, his wife of 66 years, died in 2012. He is survived by his son Dan, daughter Chaya and granddaughters Yeshi, Talia and Shira; and daughters-in-law Carrie Shepard and Judith Dambowic. He was predeceased by his daughter Julie.

A campus memorial will be held on April 6, beginning at 3 p.m., in the Atkinson Pavilion of the Faculty Club. For more information, please contact the Department of Sociology. In lieu of flowers, the Gusfield family suggests donations be made to the sociology department in support of its annual Gusfield Lecture (Fund 4575). Checks payable to the UC San Diego Foundation can be sent to University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive #0940, La Jolla, CA 92093-0940. Donations also can be made online at http://giveto.ucsd.edu. Please type "4575" in the "Explore more giving options" section. Gifts can also be made to the Art With Elders program at Eldergivers. Please make your gift online at http://www.eldergivers.org or send a check payable to Eldergivers to 236 West Portal Ave., #845, San Francisco, CA 94127.

Carol Padden
Dean
Division of Social Sciences

Akos Rona-Tas
Chair
Department of Sociology