

UC SANTA BARBARA

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## **Richard Helgerson, Renowned Scholar of Renaissance Literature, Dies in Santa Barbara**

Richard Helgerson, 67, a leading scholar of Renaissance literature and a UC Santa Barbara professor of English for most of four decades, died April 26 after a long battle with pancreatic cancer, according to an announcement by the Department of English.

Helgerson, who began teaching at UCSB in 1970, was known for, among other things, his studies of the ways in which the earliest European nation states described themselves to themselves and to the world.

A memorial service will be held at the UCSB Faculty Club from 4 to 6 p.m. on Friday, May 23.

Helgerson was the author of six important books, including an edition and translation of the French Renaissance poet Joachim Du Bellay, and more than 60 articles and reviews.

His most influential publications were "Self-Crowned Laureates," a major study defining the distinctively Renaissance career patterns of three major English writers – Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, and John Milton; and "Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England," on the early discourse of nationhood.

Published in 1993, "Forms of Nationhood" won multiple scholarly awards, including the British Council Prize for the best book in any area of British studies and the Modern Language Association James Russell Lowell prize for the best book in any area of literary studies.

This book in particular established Helgerson's international reputation as one of the leading Renaissance scholars of his generation.

Helgerson, who was recalled by UCSB colleagues Patricia Fumerton and Michael O'Connell for "humility, generosity, and grace" and for the "deep humanity" of his scholarship, was the recipient of many grants, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, a University of California President's Fellowship, and awards from the Folger and Huntington Libraries.

In 1998 he was chosen Faculty Research Lecturer at UCSB, the highest scholarly honor the campus can bestow, and in 2005 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Spenser Society.

According to colleague Mark Rose, he was "one of the most distinguished scholars ever to have taught in the humanities at UCSB."

Called by colleague Alan Liu "a consummate citizen and leader," Helgerson was chair of the UCSB Department of English from 1989 to 1993 and also served in other important administrative and consultative roles in the university and the scholarly profession at large.

He was particularly noted as a mentor to graduate students and his former doctoral students are now established scholars at colleges and universities all over the United States.

Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2005, Helgerson immediately launched a new scholarly project, a wide-ranging discussion of the classical, imperial, and personal themes of the "new poetry" of the late sixteenth century in Spain, France, and England, as refracted through a single early Spanish sonnet.

Completed within a year, "A Sonnet From Carthage" was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2007 and has been hailed by, among others, David Quint of Yale University as an "elegantly crafted scholarly and critical essay."

Helgerson was born August 22, 1940, in Pasadena, Calif., where he attended school.

He graduated from the University of California, Riverside, in 1963 with a B.A. in English.

From 1964 to 1966 he served in the Peace Corps in Atakpamé, Togo.

He received his Ph.D. from The Johns Hopkins University in 1970, after which he joined the faculty at UCSB as an assistant professor, advancing through the ranks to full professor in 1982.

Helgerson is survived by his wife of more than 40 years, Marie-Christine Helgerson, who is well-known in France as the author of novels for children; by their daughter, Jessica Helgerson, a "green" interior designer based in Portland, Oregon, and her husband Yianni Doulis, an architect; by two grandchildren, Max and Penelope; and by his sister Jan Ondeck, of Walnut Creek, California.

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The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.