

In Memoriam

David Brian Mitchell, 1948–2021

Edna Einsiedel & Maria Bakardjieva
University of Calgary

With comments from others

It is with a profound sense of loss that we mourn the untimely death of our colleague and friend David B. Mitchell, professor emeritus and former head of the Department of Communication, Media and Film at the University of Calgary.

David was an intellectual leader, mentor, and inspiration for peers and students, and the creative force and steady hand behind many innovative projects with significant implications for policy and practice. The ways in which his imaginative pursuits enriched the Communication and Media Studies program at the University of Calgary are innumerable.

David obtained his BA degree from the University of Victoria and his MA in art history from the University of British Columbia. He completed his PhD in communications within the department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University.

He was appointed assistant professor at the University of Calgary in 1990 and retired as professor emeritus in 2016. He served as associate dean of graduate studies in the Faculty of Communication and Culture, as director of the graduate program in Communication Studies, and as chair of the Department of Communication and Culture, later renamed the Department of Communication, Media and Film. His steady leadership marked the development, growth, and transformation of the communications program through various administrative homes, changes in the societal technological landscape, and theoretical developments in the field.

David co-edited, with Professor David Crowley of McGill University, *Communication Theory Today*, a seminal collection exemplifying the original Canadian approach to the area. He also served as editor of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* from 2000 to 2006 and was president of the Canadian Communication Association from 1995 to 1996.

David's passion for exploring the opportunities presented by digital technology led to funding from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation for the construction of the videoconferencing laboratory at the University of Calgary, the first facility of its kind in a Canadian university. This initiative subsequently led to his establishing the Alberta SuperNet Research Alliance, supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant under its New Economy program. Involving 14 professors from different universities, the multidisciplinary alliance investigated the socio-economic and cultural impacts of the SuperNet, the broadband network of fibre optic and wireless connections linking government, schools, libraries, and communities across Alberta. This large-scale project recognized the need for high-speed connectivity to stimulate community and economic development and enhance government service delivery, especially in education and health. It advanced David's far-reaching vision of the social significance of digital technologies.

His support for collaboration across borders informed another early initiative that promoted student conferences involving graduate communication programs at universities in Western Canada, including Simon Fraser University, the University of Calgary, and the University of Alberta.

The numerous MA and PhD students who studied under his tutelage honour him as "an excellent guide through the brave new world of new technologies" and as someone who gave them room to innovate. They will remember his thoughtful theoretical ruminations, "his generosity in recognizing talent and creating conditions for it to flourish," and his "playfulness while pushing your brain to fire on all cylinders."

At the centre of this illustrious career stood someone who was never a careerist; who added a touch of wit and humour to everything he did; who genuinely enjoyed helping others; and who always had time to chat, listen, discuss, advise, and laugh. David was one of a kind: a gentleman, a builder, an intellectual, a principled leader, and a wonderfully kind human being.

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David's enduring contributions remain embodied in lives he helped change—for the better. Never willing to compromise the quality of the work, he was nonetheless also the first to let talented people run with their visions, to innovate and chart their own ways. He was an exemplar of how academia should run.

—Mark Wolfe, MA (1994), PhD (2004).

My times with David were, without exception, moments of great learning; his knowledge of art and art history was astounding. He also delighted in making us laugh. He was a raconteur, a bon vivant, and an exceptional human being. He was also a fine craftsman, and his knowledge of wood and construction techniques

was every bit as subtle, nuanced, and complete as his knowledge of communication and technology.

—Richard Smith, professor, *Simon Fraser University*

David was the supervisor of my MA thesis. He played a seminal role in my intellectual development and shaped my general education and career. It was a great time, full of both fun and learning. I cherish every moment I had with David, and I will keep his memory alive.

—Reza Akhlaghi

We are very saddened by David's passing. Our many shared years at the University of Calgary created fond memories of his strength as a leader through good times and bad, his sharp intellect, his enthusiasm, his sense of humour, his ready laugh, his warmth, his kindness.

—Tamara & Robert Seiler, retired professors, *University of Calgary*

Having worked side by side with David for many years, I will miss knowing that his wry sense of humour and erudite conversation will no longer enhance our world.

—Lloyd Sciban, retired professor, *University of Calgary*

David and I were great friends for the better part of four decades. Over that time, we would meet when we could, using the occasions to walk and talk our way into a bundle of ideas, publications, and projects. Thinking back on those walks, involving as they did several European countries and Canadian provinces, they were the unacknowledged pathways into development of all those purposive collaborations, matters we tend to attribute to our minds alone.

—David Crowley, *McGill University*

David was a prince of a man and a very dear friend. Among his many achievements, he rescued this journal from penury in the early 1990s and, along with Richard Smith and a succession of authors and editors, was instrumental in building its current presence in over 200 countries accessed hundreds of thousands of times yearly. He rises in the voices of our songs.

—Rowland Lorimer, *Simon Fraser University*