

Tribute to David Pfeiffer  
1934 – 2003

Professor David Pfeiffer passed away unexpectedly on December 17, 2003. An internationally recognized scholar in the field of disability studies, Pfeiffer, who used a wheelchair as a result of childhood polio, received a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Rochester in 1975. Pfeiffer retired in 1997 from Suffolk University in Boston, where he served as Chair of the Department of Public Management. He also initiated Suffolk's Disability Studies concentration in the MPA program.

In Hawai'i, Pfeiffer became Resident Scholar at the Center on Disability Studies, Visiting Scholar in the Department of Political Science, and affiliated with the School of Medicine. Pfeiffer published over 200 articles about disability studies, primarily in refereed journals. He also was a well-known advocate who spent the years from 1977 to 1980 as the Massachusetts State Director for the White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals. He was instrumental in the creation of the Massachusetts Office on Disability, organizing the Massachusetts Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, and amending the state constitution to prohibit discrimination based on disability. Among his numerous other accomplishments, awards, and activities, he was a Past-President of the Society for Disability Studies and editor of *Disability Studies Quarterly*. In recognition of his combined excellence in the areas of research, teaching, and advocacy in disabilities, the American Public Health Association DisAbility Special Interest Group awarded Pfeiffer the Alan Meyers Award during its annual meeting in San Francisco in November 2003.

He also served as a mentor to many disability studies scholars and writers, as demonstrated in the many tributes that arrived after he passed on.

At the time of Pfeiffer's death, he was completing a book about disability theories and leading the effort to develop the *Review of Disability Studies (RDS)*. In recognition of his many contributions *RDS* will perpetually recognize him as Founding Editor.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara, of Hawaii, son Clifford, of Massachusetts and daughters Katherine Pfeiffer and Carol Messmore, her husband Peter, and their son, Peter, all residing in Florida.

Consistent with Dr. Pfeiffer's wishes and with the support of his family, anyone wishing to acknowledge his life-long accomplishments, may make a contribution to the Dr. David Pfeiffer Memorial Fund being established with the University of Hawai'i Foundation, Account #120-3263-4 (UAP) at the following address: University of Hawai'i Foundation, PO Box 11270, Honolulu, HI 96822-0270.

A Selection of Tributes to David Pfeiffer

"I and fellow Australians who knew David were saddened to learn of his recent passing. He was a giant among us in terms of his wisdom, energy, advocacy and plain common sense. Like many great people before him, his legacy will live on in our hearts and minds." Trevor Parmenter

"I first met David in 1982 when he and Irv Zola participated in an Office of Technology conference on mental health adaptation to physical disability. That year, I sat at the feet

of these two plus Hugh Gallagher as they opened my eyes and heart with their powerful stories to the world of physical disability that I, as a mental health clinician, had never known...Ten years ago, when David was Chair of the Public Management Department at Suffolk...he was a leader in research, teaching and advocacy and developed a devoted group of students and associates...All of the above, though, misses the real David...He was such a warm, kind person. He was a lover of fine aged port and stimulating conversation. He was a mentor, a father to many, and a role model for us all. We missed him when he decided to go surfing in Hawaii. I miss him now that he is gone.” Richard Beinecke

“[David] was a person who made a difference...I am thankful that the DisAbility Special Interest Group of APHA honored him with the Alan Meyers Memorial Award in November of this year for his scholarship, advocacy and teaching.” Gloria Krahn

“I came to know David first and foremost through the eyes of his daughter, Carol, some 25 years ago when we lived in the same freshman dorm at George Washington University and became fast friends. I will never forget the love and pride she had for him or how she stared people down when he fell coming into the dorm rather than have them gush all over him. Somehow this thing they call disability pride never seemed as palpable as it did after seeing him through her eyes.” Bob Williams

We at NIDRR were very sad to hear of the death of Dr. David Pfeiffer. Please accept our deepest sympathies. As a fellow Bostonian, I remember David from his days at Suffolk in Boston. He was a tireless worker to maximize the full inclusion, social integration, employment and independent living of individuals with disabilities of all ages.” Richard Melia

“...I could tell [David] was a man of integrity. I would watch him at SDS conferences, intrigued by his big and strong presence and his confidence. I thought: here is a man who likes who he is...” Laureen Summers

“...Often I feel as if I am a voice in the wilderness. [David’s] support meant a great deal to me...” Jim Overboe

“...[David] was kind and supportive. He encouraged me to join the field. He sent me articles on 5.25 floppy inch disks. We laughed at the time that perhaps we were the last ones using these disks and WordPerfect 5.0...I will miss him and his leadership. I regret that there will be no more lunch discussions with him. I mourn his passing and I salute him as a brother. Hail and farewell.” Jim Ferris

“A smile and a hug and a raised fist for David, to all his friends, and to his wife Barbara. I’m sitting here in sad shock, full of memories of David and glad to have a place where they might land. We met in 1977 when he chaired the Massachusetts component of the White House Conference on handicap...He was the first chair of the Adaptive Environments board of directors in 1978. Many stories to tell from those early days....” Elaine Ostroff

“...David was a wonderful mentor to me in graduate school in Boston back in the 1990’s, and for a couple of years I was privileged to assist him in teaching his Disability Studies courses at Suffolk University. I will never forget when David asked me in our first conversations if I would stutter, as I usually do, when I addressed his class at Suffolk. Braced to weather another job lost (ADA or no ADA), I answered in the affirmative. I was surprised and gladdened when David replied that it would be good for the students to hear me stutter. It would be important for them to realize that an individual with a speech impairment can communicate and explore complex thoughts and feelings in the classroom. I do quite a bit of teaching now, and occasionally I still look for support to the strength of David’s firm conviction that people who stutter can successfully teach. Thank you David, for your splendid contribution to my life and to the lives of so many and for your great dedication to the field of Disability Studies. I hope that have been able to return your [dedication].” Miriam Hertz

“Sorry we did not get your message until Sunday [that the celebration of David’s life had been postponed]. However, the gift given to us was spectacular! Thank you, David. The weather was gorgeous. My daughter was delighted to play along the beach. We made birds from palm leaves as we chatted with a group of tourists from England. It has been years since I had watched a sunset. It did my soul wonders. I will always remember David this way.” Richard Radtke

“David worked behind the scenes many times and I think many of us on the ‘in’ crowd don’t appreciate his many accomplishments...I knew David because of his work here in Boston, where he spent most of his life. David, from Suffolk University, and Irv Zola , from Brandeis University, were two of the great disability philosophers here...In 1979 RSA \$2,000 in end-of-year money...During those days consumer involvement was a radical concept...David was one of a dozen cross-disability leaders who planned a conference, funded by the \$2,000, that founded the Massachusetts Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities. Dave continued to advice the organization for many years, in addition to his work with the Boston Self-Help Center (one of the first and best self-help organizations for people with disabilities)...He worked hard to create effective advocates to interface with government at all levels...

“David is best known for his work as the Chairperson of the Suffolk University Master’s in Public Administration Program. He saw the valuable role that educated people can make on the inside, as well as the outside of government. He taught skills to people, with and without disabilities, that would make them better bureaucrats...I’m afraid that we’ve lost another vital philosopher and touchstone...The World War II generation is touted as ‘America’s greatest generation.’ I think that to people with disabilities, the post-polio survivors of the 1940’s and 1950’s will be known as our greatest generation.” John Nelson