



IN MEMORIAM

Michael Tarter
Professor Emeritus of Public Health
UC Berkeley
1938-2014

Michael Tarter, professor emeritus at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, died in Oakland, California, on Sunday, May 10, 2014, at the age of 75. He retired from active professorship in 2013, after serving as a dedicated member of the School of Public Health for more than four decades.

Professor Tarter received his BA and MA in mathematics and his PhD in biostatistics from UCLA. After serving as a faculty member at the University of Michigan and UC Irvine, he joined UC Berkeley in 1972, and remained for the length of his career. In the 1970s, Tarter was a pioneer of the application of computational methods in statistics who co-wrote a series of influential papers with Professor Richard Kronmal at the University of Washington on the use of Fourier series for density function estimation. These papers were on the forefront of density estimation techniques that were assumption free — letting the data determine the estimate versus trying to force a specified form. He was passionate about using data in statistics, not just theoretical modeling.

“Michael was ahead of his time in his research interests in his early career, when seminal work on density estimation and other computational techniques were just beginning in biostatistics,” says Nicholas Jewell, professor of biostatistics and statistics at UC Berkeley and current head of the Biostatistics Division. “His interest in nonparametric statistical methods, his use of high-speed computing to tackle more complex problems, and his data visualization methods — these are all a standard part of today’s statistics toolbox, but these ideas weren’t as common at the time.”

Tarter was elected as a Fellow of the National American Statistical Association (ASA) in 1971, and he was very active with the association up until his death. He served as the elected program chair for the ASA Section on Risk from 2006-2012, and also served as an associate editor for the Journal of the American Statistical Association, instrumental in founding the journal’s section for Applications and Case Studies, separate from the Theory and Methods section.

Later in his career, Tarter used his expertise in risk and demographic statistics and biometrical data analysis to contribute to food safety and food contamination research, as well as agricultural worker safety, and was affiliated with the recently formed Berkeley Food Initiative.

Tarter served on the Academic Senate Committee on Computing and Communications from 2002 to 2004. He was a member of the Committee on Research from 2006 to 2012.

Known for his broad interests and love of knowledge, Tarter was an expert in a number of fields beyond his academic pursuits. He was a voracious non-fiction reader and an avid collector. Some of his interests

included music, photography, high- fidelity audio systems, American Civil War history, and — somewhat incongruously — men's fashion.

Michael Tarter was born on December 20, 1938, in St. Mary's Park in the Bronx, New York, to William Tarter and Frieda (Browdy) Tarter. When Tarter married his first wife, Dolores (Dick) Lysmer, he became a stepfather to her three sons, Ken, Rick and Dale Higginbotham. In 1966, they had a fourth son, Douglas Alan Tarter. Tarter later married his second wife, Orna (Benzenburg) Tarter, and their daughter, Robin Ron Tarter, was born in 1982. Tarter had a great love for his family, and was devoted to his children and grandchildren.

School of Public Health, Marketing and Communications
Berkeley Committee on Memorial Resolutions