



## *IN MEMORIAM*

Wendell E. Jeffrey  
Professor of Psychology  
UC Los Angeles  
1923-2015

Wendell E. Jeffrey, known as Jeff, took an unusual path to developmental psychology. He finished high school at the age of 16 and enrolled at the University of Iowa, planning to study moral philosophy. He left after one semester, feeling the need to aid the war effort. Too young to be drafted, he took a job as an usher until he found a training position in the nearby defense industry. This path led to a job at Lockheed Aircraft in California. When he was drafted, he moved from one Army training site to another in the United States, including to several sites on university campuses. Part of his Army training abroad was at a camp near Biarritz, France. There he met a psychology graduate student who introduced him to experimental psychology. Their conversations led him to discover that he was “a scientist at heart.”

His return to the University of Iowa put him in a leading psychology department, where faculty shared the Hull–Spence commitment to stimulus-response behaviorist theory. Faculty included Kenneth Spence (the Chair), Carl Seashore, Robert Sears, Donald Lewis, Alfred Shephard, and John Whiting. Jeff finished his bachelor’s degree in 2 years and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to graduate school at Iowa and soon became part of a group working to create the field of experimental child psychology, which shared its theoretical roots with the Hull–Spence doctrine.

Jeff was one of the early researchers who found that preschool children learn to discriminate shape more easily than they do color. He also showed that 4-year-olds could learn to distinguish left from right when figures that held up a left or right arm were associated with different proper names. This task, in turn, facilitated their learning to push buttons that pointed left or right. In a different study, Jeff demonstrated that

young children could pair low and high notes when they played the same relative difference on a piano but not when they sang or used words. Although Jeff did not put it this way, these efforts amounted to an interest in the performance–competence distinction. In retrospect, it is not surprising that he eventually developed a keen interest in attention and encouraged students to study it.

Jeff finished his PhD in 3 years and joined Barnard College at Columbia as an assistant professor of psychology. There, he met APS Fellow Bernice Wenzel, a physiological psychologist. Their decision to marry led nepotism rules to rear their ugly heads. Jeff was told that he would get tenure but that Bernice could only remain an untenured assistant professor. In one of his finest moments, Jeff responded, “Well, then I guess I will need to look for another job.”

Not long thereafter, the chair of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), psychology department offered him a faculty position, and the young couple decided to move west. Bernice left a tenure-track position eager to attend seminars and research meetings at the highly regarded UCLA medical school. Her fundamental contributions to these meetings led to a postdoctoral fellowship and then to a tenure-track job in the physiology department, which began a very distinguished career.

After arriving at UCLA, Jeff initially taught clinical psychology, but he soon became the area head for developmental psychology. Jeff was the “go-to” man for developmental graduate students. He almost single-handedly ran the developmental area, from being Principal Investigator of an NIH training grant to holding celebrated postcolloquium cocktail parties where graduate students mingled with famous developmental scientists. He also supervised much of the developmental research in the department at that time.

One of Jeff’s many talents was an almost uncanny ability to recognize budding scholars’ potential and to encourage them to find a coadvisor who could facilitate their research. Through his mentorship, he helped launch the careers of such stellar developmental scientists as Past APS Board Members Rochel Gelman and Diane Ruble; APS James McKeen Cattell Fellow Gail Goodman; APS Fellows Leslie B. Cohen, E. Mark Cummings, Marshall Haith, and Katherine Nelson; and Richard Bogartz, Patricia Goldman-Rakic, Tamar Zelniker, and many others.

Jeff’s idea of training was not prescribing particular content or methods-training courses. Instead, he was motivated by the belief that good students should acquire an independent line of research. To help them accomplish this, he coordinated office spaces that placed developmental students close to each other. This helped encourage cohorts to talk about their work as well as to socialize. His graduate courses invariably covered emerging hot topics, including attention, infancy, ethology, language acquisition, stage theories, memory, theories of cognitive development, and so on. Students were expected to read new, original papers and present them in class. Perhaps most importantly, if students’ research ideas could be facilitated by another faculty’s lab, Jeff worked to make this happen.

Jeff encouraged students to join the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) and present at its conferences, where he made sure that they networked with experts. To connect UCLA students and visiting faculty, he facilitated informal gatherings on campus and parties at the Jeffrey–Wenzel home. His Mentor Award from Division 7 of the American Psychological Association indicates the deep appreciation his students have for his role in their careers. All of his strategies fostered in-depth learning about various topics in developmental psychology and gave his students the wherewithal to make leading contributions and become excellent mentors themselves.

No biographical sketch about Jeff can fail to praise his brilliant job as Editor of *Child Development* and *Cognitive Development*. Here, too, he used his breadth and depth of knowledge to attract outstanding reviewers capable of picking important papers. This feedback led to an overall increase in high-quality submissions. Jeff also was on two important SRCD boards, the Governing Council and the Ethics Council. His time on the boards overlapped with the period that put SRCD on a strong organizational footing.

Jeff's commitments to excellence and community are threads woven through his life with Bernice. The couple established the psychology department's Jeffrey–Wenzel Cognitive Neuroscience speakers series as well as a Junior Research Chair for the psychology department. In turn, the department has honored both of them with its library–seminar, the “Jeffrey–Wenzel Room.”

Fortunately, Wendell Jeffrey's academic values live on in the work of his many famous students. He epitomized the role of a university faculty member whose goal was to offer an education that would prepare the next generations of undergraduates and graduate students for their futures.

Rochel Gelman  
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