



IN MEMORIAM

Richard Allen Schmidt
Professor of Psychology
UC Los Angeles
1941–2015

Richard A. Schmidt, a retired UCLA Professor Emeritus and leading scientist and researcher at the intersection of the fields of psychology, physical education and kinesiology, died at home in Los Angeles on October 1, after battling a long illness. He was 74. The cause was conditions related to progressive supranuclear palsy, a rare degenerative brain disease. His wife, Gwen Gordon, said that his symptoms first appeared in 2007.

Richard Allen Schmidt was born in March, 1941 in Evanston, Illinois. The son of a printer and avid sportsman, his family emigrated westward to Los Angeles, seeking opportunity in the war industries which were booming in this region at the time. He planned to become an electrical contractor or high school mathematics teacher, but instead graduated with advanced degrees from the University of California (Berkeley) and the University of Illinois (Champagne-Urbana), beginning a long career of teaching and ground-breaking research in motor control and learning which ultimately made him a giant in the field, with a name known to his peers around the world. He was a nationally ranked gymnast in college; this kindled his interest in how complex movements are learned and "remembered" by the body.

At the time, the fledgling science of kinesiology (the study of the physiological, psychological, and biochemical bases of human movement) was just beginning to emerge from the more traditional field of Physical Education, which focused mainly on the learning and teaching of sports and games. Fired by the idea of applying rigorous scientific methods toward the understanding of kinetic movement, he conducted innovative laboratory research and began publishing his work in academic journals of the day on a variety of topics: motor behavior; motor learning; the role of warm-up and various types of training in skills acquisition, and the impact of feedback on performance and learning. He solidified his impact on the field in 1971 with the founding of a new research publication, the *Journal of Motor Behavior*, which quickly became the publication of record for the latest thinking and research in the area.

His legacy was further assured in the late 1970's with his proposal of a comprehensive new theory of motor behavior, called Schema Theory, which became an important driver of scholarly thinking and research for many years going forward. This earned him various important academic awards, including Citation Classic and Distinguished Scholar. He received two honorary doctorate degrees, from the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) and the University of Joseph Fournier (France); mentored many Ph.D-level students during his long academic career, and authored four textbooks, one of which continues to be the premier graduate-level text. In the late 1990's he joined Failure Analysis Associates, a firm specializing in courtroom testimony, and in 1998 formed his own firm, Human Performance Research, to offer consulting in human performance as an expert witness.

At this time he became recognized as the world's leading expert on driver pedal errors associated with unintended acceleration accidents in automobiles. In addition to college gymnastics, Dr. Schmidt was also an outstanding athlete in several other fields. He was as avid and lifelong competitive sailor, competing at regional and national levels and winning championships in various sailing classes: Seashell, Windmill, Snipe, and Shock 35. He also joined the international running movement of the 1980's, racing frequently and completing several sub-3-hour marathons. Finally, he was a motorsports enthusiast (he owned 5 Porsches) and competitive auto racer in his later years. He is survived by his wife of 44 years, Gwen Gordon of Los Angeles; a brother, Craig, of Santa Barbara; two sons, Michael Nova, of Petaluma; Jeffrey, of Napa, and two grandchildren.