



## IN MEMORIAM

Norman Jacobson  
Professor of Political Science, Emeritus  
UC Berkeley  
1922 – 2007

Norman Jacobson, a political science professor whose outstanding skills as a teacher drew national recognition and inspired many students to delve into political theory and political action, died on September 4, 2007, at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley. He was 84. According to his family, the cause of death was complications associated with chronic respiratory disease and pancreatic cancer.

Jacobson, who joined the University of California, Berkeley faculty in 1951, was especially renowned for his courses on American political theory and the history of political thought — dealing with such thinkers as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Sigmund Freud, and George Orwell — until he retired in 1989.

Following retirement, he continued to teach, including, most recently, a freshman- sophomore seminar (called “Truth, Lies, and Politics”) that he taught this past spring until he became ill and was unable to complete the course.

Jacobson’s most influential published work consisted of several articles that appeared in professional journals in the early 1960s and that may well have inspired some of the young thinkers who became intellectual leaders of the decade’s student movement. His only book was a 1978 collection of essays on political theory titled *Pride and Solace: The Functions and Limits of Political Theory*.

Jacobson’s true love was teaching, according to his son, Ken Jacobson, who added: “Tales of his pedagogic gifts were said to draw to Berkeley’s political- science department graduate students who had scarcely read a word he had written.” In 1988, Jacobson was honored by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) as Professor of the Year for California.

Mi Lee, a graduate student instructor who worked with Jacobson, said of him: “As his GSI for his undergraduate course on American political thought, I got to see countless students discover that they possessed real political imaginations, even, again to their astonishment, rich ones. For many students, his courses were life- changing experiences. He awoke in them the same insatiable curiosity he had, largely through his entrancing lectures. Truly each one was a performance.”

Paul Pierson, chair of the Charles and Louise Travers Department of Political Science, said of Jacobson that he “wore so many hats, so well, over such a long period that it is impossible to do justice to his contributions to the political- science department and the university. His good humor, boundless curiosity, and commitment will be greatly missed by faculty and staff — as they will by the generations of students who profited so much from working with him.”

Jacobson was born in the Bronx, New York, on October 15, 1922. As a young adult he packed dresses in Manhattan’s garment district to help the family overcome financial hardship. At night, he attended St. John’s College in Brooklyn, graduating in 1946, following wartime service in the Navy. He ultimately obtained his master’s and doctoral degrees in political science from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, in 1948 and 1951, respectively.

Though Jacobson was a member of the Berkeley faculty for decades, he also served teaching stints at Stanford University, Columbia University, and the University of South Carolina.

Jacobson's interest in political theory at times led to political action. During the 1960s he delivered a noted address in support of Berkeley student demonstrators who had been arrested during the Free Speech Movement in 1964. He was an early public opponent of the Vietnam War. During the early 1980s, said Ken Jacobson, his father participated in demonstrations held to protest UC investments in companies with interests tied to South Africa, which then was living under apartheid.

During the 1954-55 academic year, Jacobson served as a delegate of then- Berkeley Chancellor Clark Kerr to the U.S. Presidential Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which was involved in planning the nation's interstate highway system. He also trained as a psychotherapist and during the 1960s served in that role for five years at the campus student clinic. And during the mid-1970s he served as both vice chair and chair of the political science department.

Jacobson is survived by two former wives (Jean Pines Jacobson of Berkeley and Jennifer Ring of Reno); five children (Ken Jacobson of Silver Spring, Maryland; Ellie Jacobson and Matt Jacobson, both of Richmond, California; JoJo Ring Jacobson of Seoul, South Korea; and Lilly Ring Jacobson of Poughkeepsie, New York); four grandchildren, one great- grandchild, and a brother, Jerry Jacobson of Boulder, Colorado.

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