



## IN MEMORIAM

John H. Freeman

Leo Helzel Professor of Entrepreneurship, Haas School of Business  
Faculty Director, Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation  
UC Berkeley  
1944 – 2008

John H. Freeman, learned scholar, kind teacher and mentor, innovative educator and entrepreneur, faculty director of the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and Helzel Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Haas School of Business, died of a heart attack at his home in Lafayette, California, on March 3, 2008. He was 63.

Born in Rochester, New York, on July 21, 1944, Freeman received three degrees in sociology. He earned his A.B. degree from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, in 1966; and his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1970 and 1972, respectively.

A natural innovator, Freeman applied his work in sociology to business, joining the University of California, Berkeley's School of Business Administration in 1975 as assistant professor. From 1985 to 1993, he served as editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly* at Cornell University's Johnson School of Management. During his tenure, the journal published some of its most influential papers on strategic choice and environmental determinism, hybrid organizational forms, and entrepreneurial network dyads.

Upon his return to Berkeley in 1993, Freeman became professor of entrepreneurship and innovation and faculty director of the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University's business school, now known as the Haas School of Business. Four years later, he founded the Berkeley Entrepreneurship Laboratory, a free resource center for young firms founded by Berkeley students. Providing the ultimate in experiential learning, the 'Lab' was a passion for him and the entire Lester Center team. Under his guidance and support many student projects emerged as viable and successful ventures and contributed to building a vibrant entrepreneurial community that continues as a tribute to his efforts.

Freeman's early research focused on organizational politics and the variations among organizations in the ratios of managers and supervisors to the rest of the work force. Freeman's empirical studies revealed that organizations in decline have higher "administrative intensity" than similar-sized growing organizations because staffing decisions are made by managers, who might be expected to favor their close associates. The pattern came to be known as the "Freeman effect" and became a staple of macro-organization theory.

Perhaps Freeman's greatest contribution to the study of organizational theory was an area he helped create with colleague and friend Michael Hannan, professor of management at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and professor of sociology at Stanford University. The two sociologists pioneered "organizational ecology." Together they sought to answer the question, "Why are there so many kinds of organizations?" Their work included rebuilding the foundations of macro-organization theory by emphasizing change by selection rather than adaptation, shifting the level of analysis to the level of the population of organizations,

and introducing a focus on dynamics. Freeman was involved in building many now- standard themes including age dependence in organizational mortality, r and K selection, niche width, organizational forms, and density- dependent legitimation and competition. In 1992, the American Sociological Association awarded Freeman and Hannan the Max Weber Award for Distinguished Scholarship for their book *Organizational Ecology*, published in 1989.

Because of Freeman's work, organizational ecology became a major subfield in organizational studies and its influence extended into management studies in general and strategic management in particular. Hannan remembered his friend and colleague by saying, "His impact on our field was immense."

Jerome Engel, executive director of the Lester Center, also worked closely with Freeman for 20 years. He credited Freeman with helping to develop the still young, cross- disciplinary field of entrepreneurship and for emphasizing its applications for start- up businesses. Freeman and Engel's long collaboration is evident in "Models of Innovation: Startups and Mature Corporations," *California Management Review* 50:1 (2007).

Leo Helzel, an adjunct professor emeritus of entrepreneurship and business law at the Haas School, endowed the chair held by Freeman. Helzel believed Freeman had a unique talent for melding the practical, business world expertise of adjunct faculty members with the requirements of academia.

Before his death, Freeman headed a two- year project and a team of 14 Berkeley professors from a variety of disciplines, researching entrepreneurship in the United States. In the words of Jerome Engel, "At UC Berkeley, entrepreneurship is a team sport. John was a leader of our time, and his contributions will live long after him."

Freeman's contributions continue to live on in his students' successes. He was known for his devotion to them. According to former student Jaz Banga, cofounder of Feeva Technology Inc., a software platform company, "Professor Freeman was so much more than a professor. He was our mentor, guide, trusted friend and even, fishing buddy. He touched the hearts and minds of every one of our employees. He was there to encourage, course correct and just plain motivate during the times we just wanted to give up."

That ability to motivate inspired many of John's doctoral students to become faculty members themselves at leading institutions and contributors to the emerging field of entrepreneurship education. Chris Rider, assistant professor of organization and management at Emory University's Goizueta Business School, said Freeman was an exceptional advisor: "John stopped me from going down roads that, I realize only now, did not lead where I wanted to go. And he did so in a remarkable way. John would indirectly offer valuable advice with a story — almost a parable — that was clear but politely subtle ... I couldn't be more grateful."

In his free time Freeman enjoyed fishing, camping, skiing, and international travel. He is survived by his wife, Diane; sons Chris Freeman and John Freeman Jr.; daughters Jennifer Freeman, Sarah Freeman, and Amanda Bielskis; sister Mary Freeman- Dove; and eight grandchildren.

Jerome Engel  
Michael Hannan