

UCSD Visual Psychologist Robert M. Boynton Dies at 81

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Eminent visual scientist and University of California, San Diego professor emeritus Robert M. Boynton died from bladder cancer Sept. 4 at his home in Del Mar, Calif. He was 81.

Boynton was best known for his book "Human Color Vision" published in 1979. Beginning with his arrival in the department of psychology at UC San Diego in 1974 and until his retirement in 1991, Boynton worked on experiments designed to clarify the neurophysiological processes in eye and brain that underlie vision. His main focus was on the study of color vision using visual psychophysics, but he had a variety of additional research interests, including physiological optics, light adaptation and temporal sensitivity.

Boynton received many awards for his efforts including the Optical Society of America's Tillyer Medal (1971), election to the Society of Experimental Psychologists (1971), the Frederick Ives Medal(1995), the Prentice Medal of the American Academy of Optometry (1997) and election to the National Academy of Sciences (1981).

Boynton's first academic position, beginning in 1952, was as assistant professor at the University of Rochester's department of psychology soon after completing his PhD at Brown University. In 1963 at age 39 he founded and headed the Center for Visual Science at Rochester. He and his family moved to San Diego in 1974 when Boynton joined the UCSD faculty.

According to Boynton's UCSD associate, psychology professor Don MacLeod, "He was widely regarded by his colleagues as a gold standard of reliability, honesty and fairness. But he had a playful streak that may have contributed to his creativity in research and to his success as an educator. Not infrequently at seminars, he would deliver his opinion on a contentious point in verse."

After retirement from UCSD as associate dean in the Office of Graduate Studies and Research, Boynton pursued his longstanding interest in baseball scholarship which resulted in such articles as "Three Hours Instead of Five: Playing a 2000 World Series Game at the 1948 Pace" in the journal "Grandstand Baseball Annual."

Boynton's first wife, Allie, died in 1996. He is survived by his wife Sheleah, children Sherry, Mike, Neil and Geoffrey and five grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at St. James Catholic Church, Solana Beach, on Sept. 16 at 11 a.m. Donations may be made to the San Diego Hospice.

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