

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Regents Communication

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: Report of Faculty Death
Action Requested: Adoption of Memorial Statement

The Regents of the University of Michigan acknowledge with profound sadness the death of **Samuel David Epstein, Ph.D.**, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, Marilyn J. Shatz Collegiate Professor of Linguistics, and professor of linguistics in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Professor Epstein died on November 29, 2019.

Professor Epstein received his B.A. (1981) degree from Hampshire College and his M.A. (1982) and Ph.D. (1987) degrees from the University of Connecticut at Storrs. He served on the faculties of the University of Texas at Austin and Harvard University. He joined the University of Michigan faculty as an associate professor in 1997, and was promoted to professor in 2002.

Professor Epstein was a major figure in linguistics, known for his influential theoretical work characterizing the nature of the human language capacity. His work on derivational syntax provided a foundation for the Minimalist Program, the current dominant theoretical paradigm of syntax within the field, launched initially by Noam Chomsky. Mr. Chomsky noted that, "Sam was a close friend for many years and a highly valued colleague – in fact the central figure in a group of which I was pleased to be a member working intensely and productively on crucial issues at the borders of inquiry into linguistic theory and its application. A wonderful person, a fine scholar. A painful loss, for all of us." Professor Epstein taught at the University of Michigan for 22 years. His distinction in teaching and mentoring was recognized by a John H. D'Arms Award for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring in the Humanities (2009) and an Arthur F. Thurnau Professorship (2013). He was instrumental in launching a program in cognitive science at Michigan, which has become one of the fastest growing undergraduate majors in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. He was the founding director of the Weinberg Institute for Cognitive Science, established in 2014 with a gift from Marshall Weinberg (UM Philosophy, '50) of New York City.

As we mourn the loss of our beloved colleague, we extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Elaine, his daughters, Molly and Sylvie, and his many loving relatives and friends.

Requested by:



Sally J. Churchill, J.D.
Vice President and Secretary of the University

February 2020