

OFFICE OF THE CHAIR - SECTION OF CELL & DEVELOPMENTAL BIOLOGY

June 30, 2016

ALL ACADEMICS, STAFF AND STUDENTS AT UC SAN DIEGO

SUBJECT: Passing of Distinguished Professor Emeritus Bill Loomis,
Renowned Biologist at UC San Diego

In Memoriam, Bill Loomis, 1940-2016

William F. Loomis, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the UC San Diego Division of Biology, died yesterday in his campus office while working on a manuscript. He was 76. His research career included 50 years as a faculty member at UCSD where he was a leader in developmental biology. Bill was well known for his critical thinking and lively sense of humor. Students and faculty alike benefited from Bill's generous perspectives on their research projects. At the end of a long day in the laboratory, Bill enjoyed cruising home along the coast in his sports car.

Throughout his career at UCSD, Bill elucidated mechanisms regulating the development of a soil amoeba he called Dicty (*Dictyostelium discoideum*). This fascinating organism shares many features that are retained in humans but Dicty is much easier to use for experiments. Bill discovered molecular processes that control how cells interact in Dicty and showed that humans work the same way. Without his research, our current understanding of human cells would still be many years in the future.

An incredibly productive scholar, Bill published more than 240 articles, books, and book chapters. His achievements were recognized by advancement to Distinguished Professor, the highest faculty rank of the University of California; election as President, Society for Developmental Biology; election as Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science; award of an NIH Senior Research Scientist Fellowship; and he was named an American Cancer Society Scholar.

One key to Bill's success was a remarkable ability to self-train in the use of emerging technologies. He began his career studying the developmental regulation of enzyme activity in Dicty and isolating mutants that were disrupted at each stage of development. With the advent of molecular biology he refocused on genes and the mutual regulation between genes and development. Bill helped characterize the Dicty genome and applied this knowledge to understanding cellular interactions. Bill's current research explored the use of extremely powerful microscopes to record the behavior of cells in a three dimensional matrix.

Bill was an excellent teacher and mentor to many undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral associates.

Associate Dean Rick Firtel was a collaborator and long-time colleague of Bill's. Reminiscing on their many years together, Rick said, "Bill had an infectious enthusiasm for science, always ready to discuss and argue the most recent findings. He was a cheerleader for the Dicty field, pushing the field forward while being highly supportive of his colleagues. His contributions over his many years in science have been exceptional- he will be sorely missed."

Bill was born in 1940 in Boston. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1962 and a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1965. He did post-doctoral research at Brandeis University. Bill joined the UC San Diego faculty in 1966 and became Distinguished Professor Emeritus in 2010. He is survived by his wife, Maria (Marga) Margarita Behrens and his daughters Catherine Healy, Emily Murphey, and Carolina Arahuetes; and by his beloved grandchildren.

Bill was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He loved to paint, write, work in his garden, and to travel. He had just returned from a three-week European vacation with his entire family. Bill's light, passion, humor, and kindness will be greatly missed by all.

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