

In Memoriam - John H. Freeman

John H. Freeman, business professor and entrepreneurship pioneer, dies.

BERKELEY – John H. Freeman, a leader in the field of entrepreneurship and a professor at the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, died of an apparent heart attack at his home in Lafayette, Calif., on Monday (March 3). He was 63.

John Freeman

Freeman joined UC Berkeley in 1975 as an assistant professor at the School of Business Administration, which predated the Haas School. He went on to serve as the Helzel Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Haas School and was a member of the school's Organizational Behavior and Industrial Relations Group.

Since 1993, he was the faculty director of the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. In 1997, Freeman founded the Berkeley Entrepreneurship Laboratory, an off-campus business incubator for Haas School students and recent graduates starting their own businesses.

He received the Max Weber Award from the American Sociological Association in 1992 for "Organizational Ecology," a trail-blazing book he co-authored in 1989 with Michael T. Hannan, now a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University.

In their book, Freeman and Hannan said that organizations that are reliable and accountable survive, but also are beset by a high degree of inertia and resistance to change. The authors also proposed that change is so disruptive that it can put many firms out of business.

Organizational ecology and its scholarly examination of how business enterprises emerge, grow and dissolve is now a central tenet of organizational studies.

Tom Campbell, dean of the Haas School, called Freeman "a great scholar, a leader in the field of entrepreneurship, a devoted supporter of our school and an inspired teacher. Most of all, he was a good man, husband and father. We will miss him deeply."

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

Jerome Engel, executive director of the Lester Center, worked closely with Freeman during the past 20 years. He credited Freeman for helping to develop the still young, cross-disciplinary field of entrepreneurship and for emphasizing its applications for start-up businesses. The latter emphasis has added greatly to the international success of the Haas School's entrepreneurship program, he said. "At UC Berkeley, entrepreneurship is a team sport. John was a leader of our time, and his contributions will live long after him," Engel said.

Freeman and Engel co-authored an article, "Models of Innovation: Startups and Mature Corporations," that appeared in the 50th anniversary issue of the Haas School journal *California Management Review* last fall.

Before his death, Freeman had been heading a team of 14 UC Berkeley professors from different disciplines who are conducting research on the causes and consequences of entrepreneurship in the United States. They are exploring areas such as job creation and destruction, differing processes through which companies are started and developed, and the impact of a pool of stakeholders that extends beyond company founders. The project is funded by a \$600,000, two-year grant to the Lester Center from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City. It is expected to continue for four years and reach a funding total of \$1.2 million.

Freeman was known for his devotion to students. One of them was Jaz Banga, a student and an entrepreneur at the Haas School.

Banga recalled meeting Freeman in 2000 at the UC Berkeley Business Plan Competition, where his team was pitching its entry to him. "He grilled our team pretty hard about our business plan and gave us advice and a lot of 'tough love,'" he said. Over the years, Banga added, Freeman helped the team get its first office, in the Berkeley Entrepreneurship Laboratory, and assisted it with presentations, venture capitalist pitches and more.

"After all the years of effort, our company, Feeva, is a thriving, venture-backed business in San Francisco, working in active partnerships with some of the biggest technology companies in the world," Banga said. "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."

A native of Rochester, N.Y., Freeman earned his A.B. degree from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va., in 1966; and his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1970 and 1972, respectively. All of his degrees were in sociology.

During his career, Freeman served as an editor of several top journals in sociology and business, including the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review*. He also advised many start-up businesses.

Freeman was fond of fishing, camping, skiing and international travel, his family said.

Freeman is survived by his wife, Diane, and five children: Chris Freeman of Centennial, Colo.; John Freeman Jr. of Iowa City, Iowa; Jennifer Freeman of Denver, Colo.; Sarah Freeman of West Hollywood, Calif.; and Amanda Bielskis of Walnut Creek, Calif. Other survivors include a sister, Mary Freeman-Dove of El Granada, Calif., and eight grandchildren.

A remembrance celebration in Freeman's honor is being planned by his family and the Haas School. His family asks that in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the American Diabetes Association, P.O. Box 11454, Alexandria, VA 22312.