Texas A&M Mourns Loss of Distinguished Mathematician and Former Provost Ron Douglas
March 02, 2018

“Within a short time, Ron established himself as an academic leader for Texas A&M who always displayed integrity, respect for teaching and scholarship, and kindness toward everyone. He was fearless in his passion for the students and faculty of Texas A&M. . . . I think it should be evident to all that Texas A&M University is stronger today because of the efforts of Ron Douglas during his years as our provost.”

— Dr. Ray M. Bowen ’58, President Emeritus, Texas A&M University

COLLEGE STATION --

Dr. Ronald G. Douglas, longtime mathematician and distinguished professor as well as former executive vice president and provost of Texas A&M University, passed away Tuesday, February 27, at the age of 79.

Funeral services are set for Saturday, March 3, at 2:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church of Bryan for Douglas, an esteemed researcher and scholar in the areas of operator algebras and operator theory who came to Texas A&M in 1996 as executive vice president and provost and a tenured professor in the Department of Mathematics. Visitation will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Friday, March 2, at Hillier Funeral Home in Bryan.

“I first learned of Ron when I read one of his beautiful books as a graduate student, but I only met him in person when he came to Texas A&M as provost in 1996,” said Dr. Emil J. Straube, professor and head of Texas A&M Mathematics. “I was very impressed by how he kept up his scholarship through his administrative years. In fact, when he returned to the department, he did some of his best work. He quickly grew into the role of elder statesman, and as department head, I have benefited tremendously from his counsel. Ron Douglas was an eminent scholar, a generous person and a true friend. I will miss him.”

Born in 1938 in Osgood, Indiana, Douglas earned his doctorate in mathematics at Louisiana State University in 1962. He was a professor of mathematics at the University of Michigan until 1969, when he moved to the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where he was a professor of mathematics and later vice provost in 1990. Douglas remained at SUNY at Stony Brook until he came to Texas A&M in 1996. He also held previous visiting professor positions in Sweden, Israel, England and Australia.

Douglas served as executive vice president and provost at Texas A&M until 2002. During that time, he was appointed as a distinguished professor of mathematics in 1999. He remained active in research and graduate student mentorship until the time of his death.

An Academic Leader and Global Visionary

During Douglas’ tenure as provost, Texas A&M established itself as a national leader in doctorates awarded to minorities in mathematics, the physical sciences and engineering. One of his main priorities as Texas A&M’s top academic officer was recruiting additional students to the university’s campuses to teach and conduct research in STEM-related areas, which he saw as vital to an increasingly technology-oriented global economy.

Douglas’ global vision proved central to another of his crowning achievements as provost: the creation of Texas A&M’s branch campus in Qatar. Texas A&M University at Qatar opened its doors in fall 2003, initially offering four engineering degrees and featuring plans for two future research centers that would provide related opportunities for faculty and graduate students. In May 2017, Texas A&M at Qatar graduated its largest class ever, awarding bachelor’s degrees to 110 students as well as 14 master’s of science and master’s of engineering degrees in chemical engineering.

“Ron Douglas came to Texas A&M as an internationally known mathematician with a history of major accomplishments in the areas of operator theory and operator algebras,” said Texas A&M President Emeritus Dr. Ray M. Bowen ’58, a professor emeritus of mechanical engineering who hired Douglas during his eight-year tenure as president from 1994 to 2002. “He also came with vast experience as an academic leader, having served as a department head, a dean and a vice provost. Within a short time, Ron established himself as an academic leader for Texas A&M who always displayed integrity, respect for teaching and scholarship, and kindness toward
In December 2014, Texas A&M Mathematics honored Douglas by establishing the R.G. Douglas Lectures, which
each year bring distinguished mathematicians to campus who work in areas similar to those pioneered by Douglas. Fellow Texas A&M mathematicians Ciprian Foias and Carl Pearcy made the lead gifts to create the lectureship, perhaps inspired by Douglas' and Pearcy's contributions that were instrumental in establishing the Foias Lectures earlier that same year.

Douglas is survived by his beloved wife of 34 years, Bunny; their children, Michael, Kevin, Kristin, Kim and Tana; his sister, Marilyn, and nephews, Steve and Tim; and his grandchildren, Adrian, Alec, Laura, Saba and Nicolas.

As an expression of sympathy, memorial contributions may be sent to American Parkinson Disease Association at www.apdaparkinson.org.

Memories and tributes may be shared online via Hillier Funeral Home's website.

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