

Memorial Remarks for Gerald Schubert. May 8, 2026
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When I joined the then Department of Planetary and Space Sciences at UCLA, Jerry Schubert (who had been on the faculty for a few years) was already a recognized leader in geophysics, well on his way to receiving the 1975 Macelwane Award of the American Geophysical Society (the highest tribute to a young scientist in geosciences). The department had many occasions to congratulate Jerry who went on to reap major awards all over the world in the years that followed. Even casual interactions with him impressed me with his high standards of scholarship and ethics, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge of geophysics. It took longer to recognize his true character: his devotion to family and friends, his integrity, his fundamental kindness. To many, his intensity and his brilliance made him more than somewhat intimidating; it took time to dig more deeply and to discover that he was interested in people as well as science and that he was prepared to give generously of his time and energy.

Jerry became even more intimidating when one learned about his remarkable career, which started at Cornell for undergraduate and Master's degrees in aeronautical engineering. Jerry fulfilled his ROTC commitment (meaning Reserve Officer's Training Corps . . .for a generation that may not be familiar with this abbreviation) to the Navy by serving in Admiral Hyman Rickover's Naval Nuclear Power School as an instructor. At the same time, he completed a PhD in Engineering at UC Berkeley, which he received in 1964. Imagine completing a Ph.D. in your spare time; imagine doing that in only three years; imagine doing both!

I asked Google about Jerry and readily confirmed that (I quote) "Schubert was renowned as one of the founders of modern geodynamics, participating in major NASA missions like Apollo, Galileo, and Magellan." He brought distinction to our department as a giant in the field of geophysics. His work affected our understanding of almost every body in the solar system. Jerry made fundamental contributions to studies of the Sun, the Moon, Venus, Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, etc. He often, if not always, seemed to know what was interesting about the work in which his

colleagues were engaged, and he was eager to collaborate. In this way, he helped unravel the structure and dynamics of a daunting range of geophysical bodies. I invoke Krishan Khurana who stated to me: “On a more personal note, he co-authored several papers with both of us and his contributions helped explain the *why* of many discoveries we were involved with.” Krishan noted, in particular, Europa’s ocean, the internal field of Ganymede, and Io’s magma ocean as topics on which he and I collaborated with Jerry.”

I find that among the rather limited number of research publications that I keep on my laptop, there are multiple Schubert papers. They include his 1980 paper on the internal structures of the Galilean moons, his 2007 paper with John Anderson on the true rotation rate of Saturn and the structure of its interior, and a paper explaining how the winds at high altitude on Venus acquire high rotational speeds, thereby accounting for the rapid rotation of the upper atmosphere. These curated papers make it clear that Jerry influenced his colleagues indirectly as well as directly.

Jerry’s book on *Geodynamics*, coauthored with Don Turcotte and published in 1982, has more than 11,000 citations on Google Scholar, an enormous number for a book on a highly specialized scientific subject. More significant is the duration of interest in this publication, which continues each year to receive large numbers of citations more than 40 years after its publication.

Jerry was central to the EPSS curriculum. He taught undergraduate courses on earthquakes, the physics of the planets, and atmospheric physics, as well as graduate courses. His colleagues recognized him as exceptional in every way. Here, for example, is what Krishan Khurana had to say: “He set very high standards for himself, his students and colleagues, including in recruiting new faculty, and the department owes our high standing in the international ranks to his persistent cajoling and monitoring.” The admiration was mutual. So yes, the department valued Jerry, but Jerry also appreciated the department. When elected to the National Academy, he described UCLA as “a stimulating university” and added that he had “benefited greatly by being here.”

Oddly, I rarely socialized with Jerry on campus, although my visits to his office (where I was greeted warmly by his experienced Admin, Judy Hohl) were efficient and useful and he did me the honor of having me serve on committees for several of his students, most of whom were Davids. Off campus was different. He was in vacation mode. I recall an excellent meal in the French town of Nantes where Jerry and Joyce were as enthusiastic about the excellent cuisine and the enchanting décor as I was. And at the last AGU attended by Stan Peale (another distinguished geophysicist, once part of our department), Jerry and I arranged for him to join us for a meal at the Rotunda, an exceptional restaurant on the top floor of the Nieman Marcus department store in San Francisco. The restaurant is celebrated both for its signature stained-glass ceiling and for its cuisine. Although the surroundings was a bit out-of-the ordinary for us just plain scientists, we readily accepted the elegance, the good food and the supplementary tastes of chef's specials. We found that the surroundings lubricated conversation most effectively.

I echo the words of others, Jerry's colleagues, students, friends, and family in recalling him as a phenomenon, a highly talented, deep, principled, kind, caring, memorable colleague and a good friend. I join you all in saying goodbye. We were lucky to have known you, Jerry, and we treasure your legacy.