

# PAIA's Professor William D. Duncombe passes away



A beloved member of the Maxwell family, Professor William D. Duncombe, passed away on Saturday, May 11, in Portland, Oregon, surrounded by his loving family.

Duncombe was a professor of public administration and international affairs, senior research associate in Maxwell's Center for Policy Research, and associate Director of CPR's Education Finance and Accountability Program.

He was a valued colleague, dedicated mentor, renowned scholar, and devoted friend. He made vital contributions to the culture of collegiality, service, and scholarship in Maxwell's Department of Public Administration and International Affairs, and he will be sorely missed.

Duncombe first came to Maxwell as a graduate student in the mid-1980s. He received his MPA in 1987 and his PhD in public administration in 1989. Duncombe's first academic job was teaching public administration at the University of Georgia, but he returned to Maxwell in 1991 and stayed for the rest of his career.

Duncombe was well known both in and out of the Maxwell School for his dedication to his students. In 2006 he received the Excellence in Graduate Education Faculty Recognition Award from Syracuse University, and in 2001 he was the first recipient of the Birkhead-Burkhead Teaching Excellence Award and Professorship given by Maxwell's Department of Public Administration and International Affairs. His teaching skills were also recognized by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, which gave him the Leslie A. Whittington Excellence in Teaching Award in 2006. During his 22 years at Maxwell, Duncombe taught public budgeting and statistics to hundreds of MPA students, and he introduced education policy into the MPA curriculum. He also mentored dozens of PhD students in public administration, many of whom now teach public budgeting and financial management in public administration departments around the country and around the world.

Duncombe had an international reputation for his research on education finance, property taxes, public budgeting, and financial management. His 66 main publications include one book along with 51 articles in leading professional journals and 14 chapters in professional books. Thanks to the high quality of his research, he was selected as the editor of *Public Budgeting and Finance* (the top journal in its field) in 2011, elected as a fellow in the National Academy of Public Administration in 2010, and given the Aaron Wildavsky Award for lifetime achievement in budgeting and financial management scholarship by the Association of Budgeting and Financial Management in 2009. He also received the Richard A. Musgrave Prize for the best article in the *National Tax Journal* in 2011. The article that received this award, like many of his

others, highlights his talent for partnership, in this case with a former graduate student and a Maxwell colleague.

Duncombe's career was also the epitome of scholarship in action. He made important scholarly contributions to public debates about school finance reform in California, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, and Texas. These contributions include testimony in court cases concerning education finance reform in Missouri and Texas and a co-authored *Amicus Curiae* brief for the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* court case in New York. In addition, he served as a consultant in the design of education finance formulas for the New York State Education Department; the states of Kansas, Nebraska, and Maryland; and the City of St. Louis.

Duncombe was admired by his colleagues not only for his professional accomplishments, but also for his kindness, generosity, and dedication. He served on far more than his share of departmental and student committees. He provided detailed comments on draft after draft of his students' dissertation essays. Many of his colleagues benefitted from his advice on research methods, and on more than one occasion he stepped in to teach the class of a colleague who was unexpectedly ill. His many acts of selflessness will long be remembered.

Professor Duncombe is survived by his wife, Julie, and his sons, Chris and David.

A memorial service for Professor Duncombe will be held on Friday, June 7, at 2:30 in Hendricks Chapel. The service will be followed by a reception in the Maxwell Public Events Room, 220 Eggers Hall.

Professor Duncombe's family invites his friends, colleagues, and students to honor his life by supporting future MPA students through a donation to the William Duncombe Memorial Graduate Scholarship, Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 200 Eggers Hall, Syracuse NY 13244. Donations can also be made on-line at [https://secure.syr.edu/giving/maxwell\\_giving.aspx](https://secure.syr.edu/giving/maxwell_giving.aspx). (Please select "Other" on the drop-down menu of purposes, and input "William Duncombe Memorial Graduate Scholarship" in the Comments box.)