

My Community Service Award Nominee -- "In Memoriam"

David L. Rosenhan, Professor of Law and Psychology, Emeritus

For his outstanding service to the Mental Health Community that apparently our Mental Health Board knows little if anything of.

Ask Dr. Florence Keller who Dr. David Rosenhan was: she's his archivist. "You can't fix it" she told me over the phone. Everyone knows it's broken. And been so for a long long time. (ok, not "everyone" -- I sure hope I don't have another "Mission Impossible" ahead of me). "The Rosenhan Experiment" should be a licensing requirement* of all those holding dominion over involuntary patients. And until this happens, it will remain as true today as it was over 4 decades ago when he and his courageous volunteers first performed it.

*: For the same reason graduate students in speech therapy are required do their public voluntary stuttering assignments. Not all do, we know the ones who haven't: "oh, it's not so bad" we hear from them and that we worry too much about it.

Painfully last November I first learned of his passing in 2012, but worse, that he had been a professor at Stanford for the last 4 decades. And resided here locally. And was still living after I first read (~4 years ago) his paper "On Being Sane in Insane Places". And wish I had known this so I could have thanked him personally for his contribution that haunted him the rest of his life as it does for me also.

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<http://blogs.law.stanford.edu/newsfeed/2012/02/16/stanford-law-school-mourns-the-loss-of-david-l-rosenhan-professor-of-law-psychology-emeritus/>

SLS News

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STANFORD LAW SCHOOL MOURNS THE LOSS OF DAVID L. ROSENHAN, PROFESSOR OF LAW & PSYCHOLOGY, EMERITUS

February 16, 2012 • by Judith Romero



David L. Rosenhan, Professor of Law and Psychology, Emeritus

STANFORD, Calif., February 16, 2012—David L. Rosenhan, professor emeritus at Stanford University and leading expert on psychology and the law, died Monday, February 6, 2012, at Stanford University Hospital in Stanford, California. He was 82 years old.

Professor of law and of psychology at Stanford since 1971, David Rosenhan was a pioneer in the application of psychological methods to the practice of trial law process, including jury selection and jury consultation. He was the author of more than 80 books and research papers, including one of the most widely read studies in the field of psychology, "On Being Sane in Insane Places" (1973). He was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a former president of the American Psychological Association, a former director of the American Psychology-Law Society, a former president of the American Board of Forensic Psychology, a former vice-president of the Institute for Psychosocial Interaction, a former director at the Mental Research Institute, and a member of the Clinical Projects Research Review Committee at the National Institute of Mental Health.

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, David L. Rosenhan was a yeshiva student in his youth and received a BA in mathematics (1951) from Yeshiva College, and an MA in economics (1953) and PhD in psychology (1958) from Columbia University.

As part of his research study for "On Being Sane in Insane Places," Professor Rosenhan and seven others had themselves admitted as patients to a total of 12 mental hospitals during a three-year period. They described hallucinations and "empty" feelings and were diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenics. As soon as they were admitted they began acting normally and waited for the hospital staff to notice. The hospital staff never did notice, although many of the real patients caught on to the fakes. Rosenhan wrote, "It is clear that we cannot distinguish the sane from the insane in psychiatric hospitals. ... The consequences to patients hospitalized in such an environment—the powerlessness, depersonalization, segregation, mortification, and self-labeling—seem undoubtedly counter-therapeutic."

Former psychology department colleague Professor Lee Ross, recalls, "David was a spell-binding lecturer, and this famous study was as much an exercise in pedagogy as research. While it offered an important lesson about the failure of hospital staff (in contrast to the patients) to distinguish sane from insane behavior a second lesson was no less important. That is, normal behavior—simply writing notes and going about one's normal activity—when it occurred in the relevant institutional setting—was perceived by the staff to be a manifestation of mental illness. The lessons he cared most about offering, in his research and in the classroom, were most importantly ones about human dignity and the need to confront abuse of power and human frailties."



David Rosenhan

At a time when legal scholars were just beginning to look to economics for insights into legal analysis, Professor Rosenhan was among the first to draw from the social sciences, especially experimental psychology, to examine assumptions made by legal scholars in the trial process. Building on research on juror behavior undertaken by the University of Chicago Law School Jury Project in the 1950s, Professor Rosenhan began to focus on other aspects of juror behavior. Among his interests was the jurors' ability to abide by the judge's instructions to disregard evidence the judge had ruled inadmissible.

Stanford Law School Professor Emeritus Miguel A. Méndez, whose own work was influenced by Rosenhan, said that his former colleague played a key role in attracting students to the law school interested in the intersection of law and psychology and was known for his generosity, always making time to mentor young faculty and students. Before joining the Stanford faculty, David Rosenhan was a member of the faculties of Swarthmore College, Princeton University, Haverford College, and University of Pennsylvania. He also served as a research psychologist at Educational Testing Service. He was a psychologist for the Counseling Center at Stevens Institute of Technology from 1954 to 1956; a lecturer at Hunter College and director of research in the Department of Psychiatry at City Hospital at Elmhurst from 1958 to 1960; assistant professor for the Departments of Psychology and Sociology at Haverford College from 1960 to 1962; lecturer for the Department of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania from 1961 to 1964; lecturer for the Department of Psychology at Princeton University from 1964 to 1968; professor in the Department of Psychology and Education at Swarthmore College from 1968 to 1970; visiting professor in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University from 1970-1971; visiting fellow at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, Wolfson College and Department of Experimental Psychology at Oxford University from 1977 to 1978; visiting professor at University of Western Australia, Tel Aviv University, and Oxford University from 1984-1985; and a visiting professor in the Department of Psychology at Georgetown University in 1988.

David L. Rosenhan is survived by his son Jack Rosenhan of Palo Alto and his beloved granddaughters Cecily and Yael, as well as his brother Hershel of Jerusalem.

"The Rosenhan Experiment" (a brief summary)

*Transcription of David Rosenhan's appearance on Philip Zimbardo's "Discovering Psychology" PBS video series
(boldface is mine for emphasis on the key points) G.M.*

>> ZIMBARDO: A different kind of criticism, but one that's just as provocative, has been leveled by David Rosenhan of Stanford University.

>> ROSENHAN: Between 1969 and 1972, a group of colleagues and I gained admission to psychiatric hospitals by simulating, by faking a single symptom, which was that we said that we heard voices. And the voices said, "Empty, dull, thud."

The moment we were admitted to the hospital, we abandoned our symptom and we behaved the way we usually behave.

The question was, would anyone detect that we were sane? The answer was no, no one ever did.

Admitted with the diagnosis in the main of paranoid schizophrenia, we were discharged with the diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia in remission. Now, in remission doesn't mean quite the same thing as sane.

The term we used to describe the experience is dehumanized. Nobody talks to you. Nobody has any contact with you.

The average contact of patients with staff was about six-and-a-half minutes a day. Nobody comes to visit.

The first time I was in a psychiatric hospital, on an admissions ward with 41 men, my wife constituted four of the seven visitors on a weekend.

Psychiatric hospitals are storehouses for people in society who you really don't want, who you really don't understand, and for whom you've lost a great deal of sympathy.

Staff need constantly to be reminded, and it's very hard to remind them. They are, after all, doing their best on the front end.

But they need constantly to be reminded that the people who are **their charges are not merely collections of symptoms; they are people with spouses, with children, with parents, with jobs, with mortgages and bills to pay.**

That they are, in the fullest sense of the word, very human and very unhappy.

>> ZIMBARDO: The lesson of David Rosenhan's experiment is that virtually anyone can be diagnosed as mentally ill depending on the situation.