

Lyman W. Porter 1930 – 2015

By Milton D. HakeI



Lyman William Porter died on July 2, 2015, in Newport Beach, California. Known as “Port” by friends and colleagues, he was SIOP’s president in 1975–76 and was a trustee of the SIOP

Foundation since its creation in 1996. He was one of our most distinguished and admired researchers, authors, and mentors.

Port was born in 1930 in Lafayette, Indiana, and graduated from Northwestern University in 1952. He earned a PhD in psychology at Yale University in 1956 and then became a professor of industrial psychology at UC Berkeley. In 1967, he was appointed assistant dean of what was then UC Irvine’s Graduate School of Administration. He was dean of the school from 1972 to 1983, and he was instrumental in starting both its PhD and MBA programs.

His research contributions to I-O psychology and organizational behavior were numerous and path-breaking. Port was one of the founders of organizational behavior and served as the first chair of the Academy’s OB Division (1971). His scholarship was acknowledged by many awards, including the James McKeen Cattell Award for Research Design (1969) and the Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award (1989) from SIOP, and the first Scholarly Contributions to Management Award

(1983) from the Academy of Management. Let me convey three stories to illustrate Port’s influence and leadership.

Prosocial advocacy: At the 1970 Division 14 Business Meeting in Washington DC, Ann Lavee Hussain, a new PhD, introduced a resolution from the floor. It called for the Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology to become engaged in matters of public policy and social issues. This unexpected new business item turned out to be quite controversial; some thought it to be “revolutionary” and “seditious,” whereas others thought it was “overdue” and “a no brainer.” After contentious debate and a straw vote that took so long as to delay the social hour, the matter was referred to an ad hoc committee, which recommended a bylaws amendment to create a standing Public Policy and Social Issues Committee. That committee was created the following year, and eventually it conducted a *pro bono* technical assistance demonstration project for the National Association of Secondary School Principals. It was Port’s “light but firm hand on the tiller” that resolved the initial controversy and set Division 14 on a constructive path. By 1985 there were projects in all 50 states covering 1,000 school districts. Most projects were collaborative, multidistrict, or statewide efforts, and follow-up research published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* affirmed the validity of the program.

Publications: Port is well known for his texts and monographs. What is less well known is that he edited the *Annual Review of Psychology* with Mark Rosenzweig for 21 volumes from 1974 through 1994. It is easy to trace the growth of our field through inspecting the tables of contents over that interval, with a progression from one to several topical chapters per volume. Since then, Port and we have witnessed the launch in 2014 of the *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*. Its editor Fred Morgeson interviewed Port and Ben Schneider about the development of the field, an interview you can watch at <https://youtu.be/yF3vr-vDHmTA>. The thoughtfulness and charm shown there are also readily evident in his SIOP presidential autobiography, [An Unmanaged Pursuit of Management](#).

Management education: Port succeeded in gaining full accreditation for UC Irvine's fledgling school and graduate programs quite quickly. That brought him into contact with the leaders of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, so when they decided that it was time to evaluate the state of their art, they recruited Port. he signed on for what became a 3-year international examination of viewpoints, opinions, and objective data. Publication of Porter and McKibben's *Management Education and Development* in 1988 was welcomed for its frank and candid assessments. It noted, for instance, that graduates were weak in the "soft" skills: leadership, working in teams, social interaction. It also described graduates as narrowly trained specialists, unable to integrate their technical knowledge to solve practical problems.

It provoked the full range of reactions, from defensiveness and grumbling on one hand to creativity and innovation on the other. Most crucially, it solidified the growing understanding that grade point averages and credit hour totals are weak proxies for direct evidence of what really matters—applying one's knowledge and skills to solve the problems and to meet the challenges of working productively in organizations.

In sum: I will close this appreciation in a personal vein. I'll never forget my second meeting with Port. The first one took place at APA in Chicago 50 years ago. As a second year graduate student I attended the Division 14 Workshops. At lunch, another graduate student and I sat at the end of a long table, leaving ample room for the professionals. Then some professional-looking guy wandered over to sit with us—we both instantly recognized the name of Lyman Porter. We had a fine lunch, and I was deeply impressed with Port's warmth and humility, most especially because he was already so famous.

The unforgettable second meeting took place a year later at APA in New York. What startled me is that when we saw each other Port recognized me and called me by name! As I got to know him over the years, I began to understand that Port's greeting of me in New York was representative of how he related to everyone. It typified his strong sense of enjoyment of working with others.

Our field's growth and vitality owes so much to his grace and wisdom. He clearly was one of the "people who make the place." He was a giant among us.