In memoriam: Professor Kenneth Dion

April 25, 2005

Professor Kenneth Dion of psychology, a well-known and respected social psychologist, died Nov. 16 of a heart attack. He had just turned 60.

Born in Laconia, N.H., Dion attended the University of New Hampshire, graduating summa cum laude with a BA in psychology. After graduating Dion spent a year at the State University of New York at Buffalo before transferring to the social psychology program at the University of Minnesota where he received his PHD in 1970, the same year he joined the psychology department at U of T.

Dion’s principal area of interest was the study of prejudice and inter-group relations. His groundbreaking research in the 1970s on prejudice from the viewpoint of the target was a radical departure from the prevailing research at the time — which focused on the perpetrators of discrimination — and effectively turned the study of prejudice on its head, setting a new agenda for the way prejudice would be examined in the years to come. His concern for understanding the effects of prejudice and trying to identify personal and collective resources to combat it continued throughout his academic career. At the time of his death he was involved in two collaborative research projects at U of T, examining the impact of prejudice and discrimination in diverse community contexts. He also made significant contributions to several other areas of social psychological research including group cohesion, immigration and acculturation and interpersonal relationships. Within the literature on close relationships, the study on romantic love he co-authored with his wife and colleague, Professor Karen Dion of psychology, for example, is considered a classic.

For his outstanding contributions, Dion received the Donald O. Hebb Award in 2001 from the Canadian Psychological Association for distinguished contributions to psychology as a science. As well he was a fellow of the Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Society.

All through his career, Dion was known for his generosity and willingness to share his knowledge and expertise not only with students but with colleagues, serving as a mentor and friend. “Although Ken was a senior, well-respected researcher, he treated everyone, especially junior colleagues, as if they too were important,” said Professor Vicki Esses of the University of Western Ontario, a colleague and friend, at a memorial service held at Hart House Jan. 29.

Dion was also a major contributor to psychology outside of his research program. Among other commitments, he was a member of the board of directors of the Canadian Psychological Association and the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation for several
years and early in his career he served as associate editor of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. Most recently he was associate editor of the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

“The incisive critiques and insights drawn from his vast knowledge of the social sciences will be sorely missed by both students and colleagues as will his affable personality, his wry humour and the generous support he so unselfishly offered,” longtime friends and colleagues John Adair and Brian Earn wrote in an obituary for *Canadian Psychology*. “He set a high standard for personal and professional conduct as an academic and as a psychologist for the discipline that he loved and lived.”