

DAVID MARK HARRISON (1943-2025)



David Mark Harrison, Senior Lecturer Emeritus in Physics at the University of Toronto St. George Campus, died at home on July 22, 2025, with his family at his side.

David was born in New London, Connecticut, one of two children of Mark Harrison and Mary Davis Hughes. David's father, also a physicist, worked at the Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory during World War II. After the war, the family moved to Washington, D.C., where David completed high school. He attended Antioch College in Ohio for several years and eventually obtained his B.Sc. in physics from American University in 1967. In the 1960s David became active in the U.S. civil rights movement, protesting segregation and participating in Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964. He later came to Canada as a Vietnam War resister and completed his Ph.D. in experimental high-energy physics at the University of Toronto in 1972 under James Prentice.

After his doctorate, David became a teaching-stream faculty member at the University of Toronto, and thus began his life's work in physics education. He won many teaching awards throughout his career, including the Canadian Association of Physicists Gold Medal for Excellence in Teaching Undergraduate Physics in 2012.

In the 1970's, David was a pioneer in computational physics education, advocating for the devotion of a mainframe computer to undergraduates to use for data analysis in the labs. He started a popular breadth course called "The Zen of Physics", in which he explored the nature of reality and the parallels of the concepts with modern physics and Eastern mysticism.

David developed a vast collection of teaching resources that can still be found on the U of T physics website, ranging from explanations of Bell's inequality to the use of animations in teaching and uncertainties in physical measurements (<https://faraday.physics.utoronto.ca/~harrison/>). In the 2000's David spearheaded a massive transformation of the laboratory and tutorial components of all of the first-year physics courses at the University of Toronto. He designed and implemented the Physics Practicals, which applied new, evidence-based teaching methodologies from Physics Education Research. This project included a \$2 million interior renovation and laboratory equipment purchase, as well as more than 200 pages of student guides, along with instructor resources and detailed set-up notes. The Practicals launched in 2009 and we continue to use David's materials today.

All who knew David appreciated his warmth, as well as his irreverent humour. David loved bluegrass and country music and played the piano. He was an avid motorcyclist, and was a passionate student of the martial arts, especially karate and tai chi. He was also a devoted fan of baseball and of the Toronto Blue Jays. He is survived by Wendy, his wife of 45 years, and their son Christopher.

I will remember David not only as a colleague but as a great friend and supporter of my career. I know he played this role for many others who were fortunate to count him as a friend.

Jason J.B. Harlow, University of Toronto