



## Dr. David Richard Colburn

September 29, 1942 - September 18, 2019

Dr. David Richard Colburn, age 76, passed away Wednesday, September 18, 2019 at Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Florida.

He was born in Providence, Rhode Island on September 29, 1942 to Rosemary Thomson Colburn and Earle Bertram Colburn. Dr. Colburn is survived by his loving wife of 53 years, Marion Faircloth Colburn; his children Margaret Cauthon (Ray) of Gainesville, FL and their daughters Claire and Caroline, David Colburn Jr. (Michelle) of West Hartford, CT and their daughters Ali and Kate and Katherine Fulmer (Jamie) of Spartanburg, SC and their sons, James, Ben and MacLean; his brother Paul Colburn and sister Lynn Dyson.

Dr. Colburn retired this year as director of UF's Bob Graham Center for Public Service, where he worked for seven years building academic and civic programs, leadership initiatives and dozens of research opportunities for undergraduates. He served as the university's provost and senior vice president from 1999 to 2005; vice provost and dean of the International Center from 1997 to 1999; and chairman of the Department of History from 1981 to 1989.

"The University of Florida mourns the loss of one of its greatest leaders," said President Kent Fuchs. "Dr. Colburn served our campus, our students and our state with steady, selfless dedication for nearly a half a century. He will be greatly missed."

Joining UF's history faculty in 1972, Dr. Colburn's teaching and research focused on politics, race and ethnicity in 20th-century America. Even amid writing or editing 14 books and some 25 book chapters, he was focused most keenly on his students. He was a master at inspiring, motivating and guiding them. He sent a generation of public leaders across Florida and the nation in a range of professions, and they often called to seek his counsel and returned to visit him. Dr. Colburn was named teacher of the year on three occasions.

He was also a trusted counselor to elected officials, including the late Florida Governor Reubin O'D. Askew and former Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham. "It was my honor to work with him and experience his scholarship and values," Graham said. "He was a loving husband to Marion, and devoted to his three children and grandchildren.

Contributing five decades of service to the University of Florida and to our state, his

wisdom, grace and friendship will be sorely missed. His achievements and contributions to the university and to the Bob Graham Center for Public Service are a source of strength for the future.”

Dr. Colburn served as provost at a critical time for UF, leading the university through reaccreditation with a focus on international education, said current UF Provost Joe Glover. “David Colburn will be remembered as one of UF’s great provosts,” Glover said. “Among his many accomplishments, he will be remembered for creating the Distinguished Professor award to recognize, elevate and reward outstanding and sustained faculty accomplishment.”

Dr. Colburn was born Sept. 29, 1942, in Providence, Rhode Island—and never lost his Ocean State accent despite leaving at age 24. He earned his AB and MA in history from Providence College, where he was a member of the Army ROTC. He was sent to Vietnam in 1966 and served a year in the Signal Corps, promoted to captain in that time. When he returned to the States, he entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received his PhD in 1971. After teaching at UNC and East Carolina University, Dr. Colburn came to UF, where his specializations included the American presidency, politics of the American South and civil rights.

Dr. Colburn helped bring to light many of the uncovered racial stories of Florida, including in his book *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980*. He served as one of the authors of Florida’s Rosewood Report in 1993, part of an inquiry into the 1923 destruction of the town of Rosewood that helped push Florida to approve unprecedented reparations for racial violence.

His most recent books were *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans: Florida and Its Politics Since 1940* (2007) and *Florida’s Megatrends* with Lance deHaven-Smith (2010). Other books included *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City* (2001) with Jeffrey S. Adler; *Government in the Sunshine State: Florida Since Statehood* (1999) with deHaven-Smith; and *The African American Heritage of Florida* (1994) with Jane Landers, which won the Rembert W. Patrick Book Prize for best book in Florida history and a special commendation from the Association of State and Local History in 1996.

Dr. Colburn wrote more than 200 essays on state, national and international politics. He appeared on many news programs to discuss civil rights; race relations; and state, national, and international politics. He was a regular contributor to the *Orlando Sentinel* for 20 years and more recently wrote for the *Tampa Bay Times*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Florida Times-Union*, the *Gainesville Sun* and the *Ocala Star-Banner*.

He was a champion of the humanities who had served as past chair of the Florida Humanities Council and the U.S. Federation of State Humanities Councils. Just this week, on Thursday Sept. 19th, the Board of the Florida Humanities Council was to present him its “Florida Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award,” for only the second time in the

Council's history. "His commitment to humanities education at the state and national level was unprecedented," said Steve Seibert, Executive Director of the Florida Humanities Council. "No one has done more to support the humanities, in deed and in cause. We will miss his wisdom, friendship, and leadership; we loved David and will remember him always."

Dr. Colburn was past president of the Florida Historical Society, served as a distinguished lecturer for the Organization of American Historians, a professional organization of more than 8,000 members, and as a Road Scholar for the Florida Humanities Council, speaking internationally, nationally and statewide on history and politics. He served as a Fellow in the United States Senate from 1993 to 1997, where he worked on national and international issues.

He was also founder and director of UF's Reubin O'D. Askew Institute on Politics and Society, which presented public programs to civic leaders and citizens on critical issues confronting Florida and the nation. The Askew Institute worked with Florida communities to help them plan and prepare for a post-recession economy, and addressed challenges facing the state and region, from aging, to children and families, health care, ethnicity, race and the environment. In 1999, the Institute received the Distinguished Community Service Award from the Florida Board of Regents for its service to Florida and the nation. In 2013, the Institute merged into the Graham Center, where its mission lives on through the Askew Scholarship program.

Nickerson, one of the student scholars in that program, said Dr. Colburn taught her "what it means to be a good citizen."

"When I first became an Askew Scholar, he told me that Governor Askew stood for public service, good government, and love for Florida," Nickerson said. "As a historian, Dr. Colburn knew the value of memory, and he enlisted students in a mission of public service, making us part of the legacy he had in common with Gov. Askew, Gov. Graham, and others. Dr. Colburn touched so many lives in all the different roles he held, but in terms of how he touched my life, I know that, when people ask why I want to pursue public service, I'll tell them about Dr. Colburn."

Dr. Colburn was deeply involved with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church serving on the Vestry for numerous terms and being involved in all aspects of the church.

The family suggests that expressions of sympathy may be made in the form of donations to the Graham Center's David Colburn Student Advancement Fund, c/o the UF Foundation, P.O. Box 14425, Gainesville, FL 32604-2425, or to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 100 NE 1st Street, Gainesville, FL 32601.

Services are scheduled for Sunday, September 22, 2019 at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 100 NE 1st Street at 2:00 p.m. The university plans a public service later this fall.



# Events

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**SEP**   **Service**                      02:00PM

**22**

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Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

100 NE 1st Street, Gainesville, FL, US, 32601

# Comments

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“ I know how difficult a time this is especially for Marion, children and grandchildren, but also for friends and others who appreciated David's life well lived. Such a phenomenal educator, historian, mentor and leader who gave so much in the service of others. To paraphrase Amelia Burr "I gave a share of [myself] to the world, when and where my course is run, I know that another shall finish the task I surely must leave undone". That is certainly a significant part of David's legacy -- the foundation for so many to create their own "life well lived".

Jill Varnes - September 21, 2019 at 06:50 PM

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“ Lily and Rose Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Dr. David Richard Colburn.



September 20, 2019 at 02:08 PM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Dr. David Richard Colburn.



September 20, 2019 at 01:11 PM