

Obituary: Corwin H. Hansch

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Abstract This is the obituary for Corwin Hansch, pioneer of the quantitative structure activity relationship (QSAR) paradigm.

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With deep regret, I report that emeritus faculty member Corwin H. Hansch died in Claremont on May 8, 2011, at the age of 92, after a long bout with pneumonia. He had served on the Pomona College faculty from 1946 until 1988, and even after retiring from teaching he had continued with his research in the Chemistry Department until 2010.

Professor Corwin Hansch, the founder of Quantitative Structure Activity Relationships (QSAR), received his B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Illinois and his PhD at New York University. After a brief postdoctoral stint at the University of Illinois, Chicago, he moved on to work on the Manhattan Project, first at the University of Chicago and then at DuPont de Nemours in Richland, Washington. After World War II ended, he took a position as a research chemist at DuPont de Nemours but left shortly thereafter, coming to Pomona College in 1946. During his tenure at the College, he completed sabbaticals in V. Prelog's laboratory at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and in Rolf Huisgen's laboratory at the University of Munich.

Shortly after arriving at Pomona College, he met a Pomona botany professor, Robert Muir, and their mutual interest in understanding the workings of plant hormones

led to his pioneering work in QSAR. Hansch soon changed the direction of his research from the study of high temperature dehydrogenations to the correlation of biological activity with chemical structure; this led to the publication of his early, seminal works in QSAR, ably aided by Toshio Fujita. He came to be recognized as the “father of computer-assisted molecular design,” and the methodology that he spawned is now utilized in most pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

Hansch published numerous books, running the gamut from organic chemistry texts to medicinal chemistry and QSAR treatises, and authored or co-authored more than 400 publications in all. During the period 1965–1978, he was one of the 300 most cited scientists in the world. He also received many awards, including two of Pomona College's Wig Distinguished Professorships for excellent teaching, two Guggenheim Fellowships, and numerous accolades from the American, Italian, and Japanese Chemical Societies. He was the first recipient of the American Chemical Society (ACS) Award for Research at an Undergraduate Institution (1986) as well as the first recipient of the Smissman-Bristol-Myers-Squibb Award from the ACS's Division of Medicinal Chemistry (1975). He was elected to the Royal Society of Chemistry in 1990 and inducted into the ACS's Medicinal Chemistry Hall of Fame in 2007.

Mentor to a large number of undergraduate students and more than 40 visiting scientists and postdoctoral scholars from the US and around the world, Hansch helped raise the profile of research at primarily undergraduate institutions and was instrumental in establishing the Fred J. Robbins Lectureship in Chemistry, which helps bring scientists of Nobel Laureate stature to the Pomona College campus.

In recent years, Hansch devoted his time and effort to developing and organizing QSAR equations based on data

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generated internally and from the global literature. His electronic database, CQSAR, now contains more than 22,000 mathematical models. He was especially interested in comparing chemical QSAR with biological QSAR to gain insight into how chemicals interact with biological receptors.

Corwin was a voracious reader whose reading tastes extended from the scientific literature to politics, economics and film. He and his amazing wife, Gloria, who was

instrumental to his success, loved to travel and their travels spanned the globe. They enjoyed trying different cuisines although his favorite food was Italian. He was an avid skier and loved to ski Mt. Baldy, Aspen, the Alps, and the Andes.

Professor Hansch was preceded in death by his daughter, Carol. He is survived by his wife Gloria, son Clifford, and son-in-law Brian Hemminger.