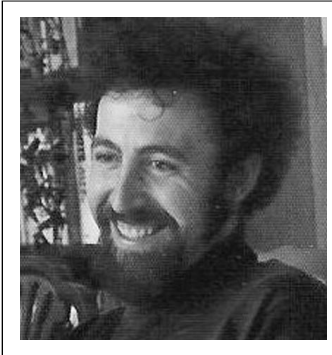


BOB SCHOMMER

Nicholas Suntzeff

*It is with deep sorrow that we publish this tribute to the late Dr. Robert Schommer.
Dr. Nicholas Suntzeff was a close personal friend and colleague.*

Dr. Robert A. Schommer, 55, Project Scientist for the United States Gemini Project Office and an Astronomer/Tenure at Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory and National Optical Astronomy Observatory, died in La Serena, Chile, on December 12, 2001. Bob was born in Chicago on December 9, 1946.



Bob Schommer, circa 1981.

Bob was an internationally recognized observational cosmologist with unusually wide-ranging interests. He was widely regarded as an authority in the field of resolved stellar populations and in the kinematics of the local universe. His work on the star clusters in the Magellanic Clouds and M33 forms a basis for our understanding of the formation histories, both chemical and dynamical, of these galaxies.

His early work with Aaronson and Olszewski on the distance to the Large Magellanic Cloud which is perhaps still the key step in the measurement of the Hubble constant, clearly set the stage for debate which rages on today, on the different distance scales as measured by the old and younger populations. He did fundamental work on clusters of galaxies and their use in establishing the distance scale, especially in the application of the Tully-Fisher relationship and its sensitivity to the detailed properties of the spiral galaxy population.

To advance the application of the T-F method independent of the declination limits of the Arecibo telescope, Ted Williams and Bob while still at Rutgers, built a Fabret-Perot imager which was used for many years at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO) to measure galaxy rotation curves. Finally, he was also a pioneer in the study of dark matter in dwarf galaxies.

Over the last six years, Bob was an active member of the High-Z Supernovae Search Team, which announced in 1998 the discovery of an acceleration in the local universe. His knowledge of the properties of galaxies and precision photometry greatly helped the team find and limit systematics of this result. In honor of this work, he was awarded the AURA Science Achievement Award in 1999.

In his last year at CTIO, Bob took over the management of the U.S. Gemini Project Office as Project Scientist. Bob was

an advocate for a strong national observatory which would allow all U.S. astronomers access to world-class, ground-based facilities. At the time of his death he was in the process of moving his operation to Tucson, to establish a U.S. Gemini Science Center and a remote observing facility.

In writing these words, I realize what a void has been left with his death. He has been a professional colleague of mine for over 20 years, and more importantly, a very close personal friend. He was an outstanding scientist and a very honest and moral person. As one colleague wrote of Bob, "There are few individuals ... who better personify the combination of internationally recognized research, unselfish service to NOAO and its user community, and professional leadership that defines the ideal in what one seeks in a staff member of a national observatory."

Bob received his BA in Physics at the University of Chicago in 1970, an M.S. in Physics at the University of Washington in 1972, and a PhD in Astronomy at the University of Washington in 1977. Prior to his position at NOAO, Bob had held postdoctoral positions at Caltech (Chaim Weizmann Fellow), the Hale Observatories, the University of Chicago, and the Institute for Astronomy in Cambridge, England (NATO Postdoctoral Fellow). From there he went to the Department of Physics at Rutgers University where he advanced to Professor of Physics. In 1990, he joined the NOAO staff as an Associate Astronomer at where he advanced to Astronomer/Tenure.

He is survived by his wife Iris Labra and his children Paulina, Andrea, and Robert.

Schommer Education Fund

AURA/NOAO/CTIO has suggested a fitting memorial to Bob Schommer is a fund to ensure his three children will be able to have the education Bob would have wanted for them. Please send your contributions to:

*Schommer Children's Fund
c/o Wendy S. Goffe, Esq.
Graham & Dunn P.C.
1420 Fifth Avenue, 33rd Floor
Seattle, WA 98101*

