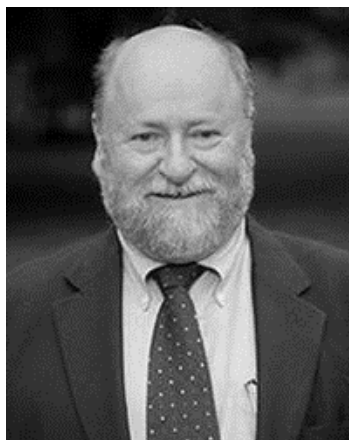


## In Memoriam: Ronald K. Hambleton

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In 1990, I was working on my dissertation in psychometrics and had just started at job as a psychometrician for the Certified Public Accountants (CPA) licensure exam. My boss came into my office and said, “We are going to redo the way we set the passing score on the exam. Can you call our consultant, Ron Hambleton, and check his availability for a meeting here?” I couldn’t believe I was given the chance to actually speak with Ron Hambleton—one of the most famous psychometric researchers of our time. Like many of the readers of this journal, I had learned so much from his books and journal article publications. Through his writings, I had understood item response theory, criterion-referenced testing, test translations, differential item functioning, and so much more. My boss may as well have asked me to call Eric Clapton. Ron was a true legend.



I drew on all my courage and dialed the number. Professor Hambleton was on sabbatical at the University of Ottawa and he answered the phone at his desk at the University. “I only have a little time,” he started, “I am teaching class in a few minutes.” After telling him of the purpose of my call, he began asking me questions not about standard setting or the CPA Exam, but about me. “Where are you doing your degree?,” “What is your dissertation topic?,” “Who are you working with?” We spoke for about 45 minutes. The whole time I was picturing students in a classroom looking at their watches and waiting for their very late Professor to arrive.

I tell this story because it says something about Ron Hambleton the man, rather than Ron Hambleton the psychometrician. Ron definitely cared about psychometrics, as his vita will attest. However, he cared more about people. He cared about me. He cared about all of us. For that reason, any obituary or memorial must first describe his most valuable feature—his heart—rather than his brain, which made him such a successful psychometrician.

I was fortunate to work with Ron for over 30 years. I can tell you his heart was filled with love. He loved to talk (there were no short conversations with Ron!), he loved to help, and he loved to problem-solve, which is why he was such a valuable

colleague. My story about my first encounter with Professor Hambleton is not unique. So many of us can credit Ron for not only teaching us about psychometrics, but also for advancing our careers.

Ron also loved psychometrics, which resulted in a list of professional contributions that is likely unmatched in the history of psychometrics. His curriculum vita is over 100 pages long. He published over 300 articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *Applied Measurement in Education*, *Applied Psychological Measurement*, *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, *Journal of Educational Measurement*, *International Journal of Psychology*, *International Journal of Testing*, *Psicothema*, *Review of Educational Research*, and many others. He served on numerous editorial boards, including the journal you are reading now (*Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling*), and he reviewed and provided thoughtful feedback on hundreds of manuscripts he reviewed during his career. If you submitted manuscripts to measurement journals between 1970 and 2020, there is a high probability Ron reviewed at least one of them.

Journal articles aside, Professor Hambleton was perhaps most noted for his books. In 1983 he edited a book on item response theory (IRT) applications (Hambleton, 1983), and with his good friend and colleague Hariharan Swaminathan, he published *Item Response theory: Principles and Applications* in 1985. This work popularized item response theory because it made accessible to wider audiences than previous treatments. In 1991, with Swaminathan and Jane Rogers he published *Fundamentals of Item Response Theory* (Hambleton et al., 1991), which became a classic textbook for many IRT courses throughout the world. He later published an edited book with another friend and colleague Wim van der Linden (van der Linden & Hambleton, 1997). Ron also wrote the first chapter on IRT that appeared in the *Educational Measurement* book series (Hambleton, 1989), and is the only author to have written a chapter in three volumes of that series (a chapter on standard setting in 2006, and a chapter on score reporting in the forthcoming volume).

IRT may first come to mind when considering Professor Hambleton's accomplishments (e.g., Hambleton & Cook, 1977), but his work on IRT is only a small sample of his research contributions and his influence on educational testing practices worldwide. Ron co-founded the International Test Commission, and was the principal agent behind their *Guidelines for Translating and Adapting Tests* (e.g., Hambleton, 1984), and was the lead editor on the first comprehensive book on this topic (Hambleton, Merenda, & Spielberger, 2005). He also published many writings in this area with his good friend José Muñiz (e.g., Muñiz & Hambleton, 2000). He was enormously influential on educational assessment policy and was the major force behind setting achievement level standards on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the USA (e.g., Hambleton & Bourque, 1991), and he made enormous contributions to standard setting methodology (e.g., Hambleton, et al., 2000) and to differential item functioning detection (e.g., Hambleton, 2006; Hambleton et al. 1993, Muñiz et al., 2001). The assessment of IRT model fit (e.g., Hambleton & Murray, 1983) was

another area where he made great contributions, and we cannot forget his contributions to computerized-adaptive testing (e.g., Hambleton et al, 1991; Zenisky et al., 2010). Ron always focused on what he thought were the most important problems in educational measurement. Toward the end of his career, that became proper and comprehensible reporting of test scores, and he published many chapters and articles on this topic with his former student and friend April Zenisky (e.g., Hambleton & Zenisky, 2013; Zenisky & Hambleton, 2012; Zenisky et al., 2009).

Ron was also involved in the development of software to address the difficult measurement problems he was working on, and he felt strongly his software should be distributed for free. Some of it can still be found on the UMass Center for Educational Assessment website (<https://www.umass.edu/education/programs/research-educational-measurement-psychometrics/student-resources-remp>).

Given these contributions, it is no surprise Professor Hambleton received many awards and honors including honorary doctorates from two universities—Universidad de Oviedo (Asturias, Spain) and Umeå Universitet (Umea, Sweden). He received career awards from the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the Association of Test Publishers, the ITC, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), and was also granted fellow status in AERA, APA, and the ITC. Ron also served as the President of NCME and ITC. He was in the inaugural group of Distinguished University Professors at the University of Massachusetts Amherst—the first and only job he had in educational measurement—where he also received the Chancellor’s Medal, the Distinguished Teaching Award, and many other honors.

Although Ron lived in Massachusetts for over 50 years, he retained his Canadian citizenship and loved everything Canadian—particularly hockey. He received his bachelor’s degree in mathematics from the University of Waterloo in 1966 and his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1969. Upon completing his Ph.D. he starting teaching at the University of Massachusetts where he remained until his death.

I feel extremely fortunate to have known and worked with Ron for 30 years. Like many of you reading this memorial, I benefited from reading his work and from many conversations with him. He was a great mentor. He launched the careers of scores of psychometricians at UMass, and contributed to the careers of countless others. All of that was due to his generous heart. He was also a great husband, father, and grandfather. Those of you who know Ron likely also know his wife Else. Ron and Else were married for 56 years and perhaps represent the greatest love story in psychometric history. That is another notable accolade for Ronald K. Hambleton—one of the greatest friends, mentors, and psychometricians of all time.

Ron, thank you for your generosity of time and talent, and for your many contributions to the fields of educational research, and educational and psychological measurement. But most of all Ron, thanks for being a great friend. I hope all who read this lift a glass of wine in his honor. He would be pleased with that!

For those of you who would like to make a donation in Ron's memory, the Hambleton Legacy Fund, which supports UMass psychometric graduate student assistantships and travel, can be found here: [https://minutefund.umass.edu/project/6373/donate?des\\_id=111492](https://minutefund.umass.edu/project/6373/donate?des_id=111492).

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