

Guillermo O'Donnell, 1936-2011

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Most appreciations of Guillermo O'Donnell emphasize his contributions to the literature on authoritarianism, then on transitions from authoritarian rule and the construction of effective democratic governance, and finally on the challenges of getting beyond low intensity and low quality democracy in order to achieve governance that builds citizenship and protects the rights of all citizens. Guillermo O'Donnell contributed brilliant insights and systematic theory building on all these issues. His work is widely recognized around the world, as the many translations of his writings and his many international honors and distinctions, including LASA's Kalman Silvert Award, amply demonstrate. A number of Guillermo's students and colleagues are also providing warm testimony about his qualities as a teacher and mentor: in Argentina, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere.

I wish to comment on Guillermo's major contributions as an institution builder, in Argentina and in the United States. He was one of the founders and the first director of the Center for Studies of State and Society (CEDES) in Buenos Aires, an island of critical inquiry in Argentina's dark days, an incubator of talented critical social scientists and to this day, an important place for research in that always-perplexing country.

Guillermo was also the first and longtime academic director of the Helen Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame. That institute began with high ambition and the vision of Father Ted Hesburgh but with few other assets until Father Ted and Father Ernest Bartell managed to recruit O'Donnell and Chilean economist Alejandro Foxley to build a center of excellence on development and democracy. The Kellogg Institute, now under the able

leadership of Scott Mainwaring, has become a world-class center, thanks largely to the highly creative, rigorous charismatic leadership that Guillermo provided during its formative years.

I saw first-hand Guillermo's extraordinary institution-building skills in the early years of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Latin American Program, where he served as one of nine members of its original Academic Council, chaired by Albert O. Hirschman. At the Council's first meeting, Guillermo urged that we identify a few privileged topics to organize our work, and to invite fellows to the Center. He suggested many of the topics we adopted, thus giving the program, from the start, an important focus on thoughtful exploration of normatively driven issues. After the first meeting, Guillermo and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the Brazilian sociologist, later to become that country's president, helped me design guidelines and policies to ensure that the program would achieve credibility in Latin American academic circles, where suspicion of a Washington-based institution could be anticipated. When delicate political issues arose at the center, in the context of political and ideological pressures that reflected changing currents in Washington, Guillermo flew up from Buenos Aires to participate in a half-day meeting of the council with the Center's director and to help protect the intellectual autonomy and academic quality of what we were doing. I will never forget the passion and persuasiveness of his presentation, and his effectiveness in helping to counter the pressures that were being brought to bear on the Program.

Guillermo's exceptional leadership of the Program's influential project on "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," together with Philippe Schmitter and

Laurence Whitehead, made a landmark contribution both to the study of comparative politics and to practice. The project's summary volume was consulted by many working to expand the prospects for democratic governance by cracking open authoritarian regimes. Guillermo's convening authority, inspiring leadership, incisive analysis and gifts as a political strategist all came together in the Transitions project.

When I think about Guillermo O'Donnell, I think not only of his professional achievements but of his personal qualities: his sheer brilliance and perspicacity on many questions, cosmic and micro-social; his warmth, sense of humor, friendship and loyalty. He had an enormous capacity for empathy and a strong commitment to equity, qualities that affected his scholarship but also his personal relationships. He courageously overcame the effects of polio, and his mental agility more than made up for his physical limits.

Guillermo O'Donnell cared deeply about justice and about the need to protect rights through institutions and constraints. He understood and wrote clearly about structural and systemic forces but also emphasized the possibility for expanding the scope of rights and justice through political engineering, individual leadership and coalition building. His analysis and insights are as important today as they have ever been. Guillermo O'Donnell will be missed. ■