

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on November 22, 2005,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Robert Freed Bales
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

ROBERT FREED BALES

BORN: March 9, 1916

DIED: June 16, 2004

Robert Freed Bales, Professor of Social Relations, Emeritus, was born in Ellington, Missouri. His family moved shortly afterwards to rural northeastern Oregon. His undergraduate education was at the University of Oregon, where he entered on a music scholarship, but received the B.A. and, later, M.S. degrees in Sociology. Entering graduate study at Harvard in 1940, Bales spent the year 1944-45 at Yale University as Research Associate in Alcohol Studies.

He received the Ph.D. in Sociology from Harvard in 1945. His advisor Talcott Parsons then invited Bales to join the newly-forming Department of Social Relations with an appointment as Instructor. After serving as Assistant Professor of Sociology, Lecturer on Sociology, and Associate Professor of Social Relations he was, in 1957, appointed Professor of Social Relations. He served as Director of the Laboratory of Social Relations from 1960 to 1967. Bales retired with the rank of Emeritus Professor in 1986.

Bales's main work focused on a fundamental topic in social psychology, namely the nature of interpersonal interaction in small groups. His first book, *Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups*, was published in 1950, the culmination of a series of early studies on interactions in therapeutic group settings for alcohol addicts. Bales's orientation was much influenced by the concepts of field theory, especially as developed in psychology by Kurt Lewin. The behavior of individuals in group settings could be understood as a joint product of the influence of others and the characteristics of the individuals themselves, factors conceptualized as forces operating in a social field. By studying many such groups, Bales hoped to discover recurring patterns that might be used predictively in the composition and functioning of groups formed for problem solving or other managerial purposes. This work reflected his conception of social psychology as the scientific study of social interaction, in which the group and its activity, rather than the individual, are the primary units of analysis. At the same time, he paid close attention to the role of individual personality in social interaction and was a lifelong student of personality theory. In all of his efforts, he sought to integrate the psychological and sociological sources of social psychology.

Bales was a pioneer in the development of systematic methods of group observation and

measurement of interaction processes, including several technological innovations designed to facilitate observation itself and the rating of observed behavior in progress. His approach was set forth in technical detail in what he termed the SYMLOG system (an acronym for SYStematic MultiLevel Observation of Groups). SYMLOG became the focus of a consulting group devoted to the practical application of the method in managerial settings to assessment and training for team effectiveness, individual leadership potential, and related matters. His goal in all of his work, as expressed by himself in his last book, *Social Interaction Systems: Theory and Measurement* (1999), was the development of "a theory of personality and group dynamics integrated with a set of practical methods for measuring and changing behavior and values in a democratic way."

Bales was deeply interested in the role of individual values in the generation of conflict or cooperation in human social groups of all sizes. His analysis of the processes that lead to consensus concerning effective forms of interpersonal behavior and of group survival cast light on conflicts of ideology such as that between democratic and authoritarian societies.

For many years, Bales taught a popular undergraduate course on group psychology, centering around a practicum experience. Students were divided into two self-analytic groups that explored their own interactions as a basis for learning about the problems faced in groups by members and leaders. Furthermore, each group made systematic observations of the other group's interaction and fed back to that group the results of their observations.

Bales also played a central role in graduate training. For many years, starting in the late 1960s, he chaired the Doctoral Program in Social Psychology. When the Department of Social Relations broke up with the sociologists' decision to form a separate Department of Sociology, he opted to stay with what was originally (and, in fact, until Bales's retirement in 1986) called the Department of Psychology and Social Relations and to continue as Chair of the Social Psychology Program.

As a colleague Bales provided a clear example of how the goals of his work were integrated into his own behavior. He had come into a newly formed interdisciplinary department in which three separate fields had combined with a vision of developing an overarching discipline of Social Relations. The merger became a federation rather than a union. Opportunities for disagreement were plentiful, and the management of meetings was critical to the success of the enterprise. Bales was a believer in the vision, but an even stronger believer in fairness, in the need to understand other viewpoints and to create a democratic mode of management. As Director of the Laboratory of Social Relations he did all these things. He was trusted and admired by colleagues in each discipline. They and his students regarded him with deep affection. Freed was one of few faculty members in Social Relations who had moral authority derived from his colleagues' recognition that he placed the welfare of the department above personal motives.

Bales was a person of broad interests and sympathies. As a young man he was a talented singer. In later life he was an accomplished amateur painter, an achievement the more remarkable because he had suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis since the age of twelve.

His scientific and scholarly work was widely recognized. He received the Distinguished Career Award of the American Association of Specialists in Group Work in 1982, the Cooley-Mead Award of the American Sociological Association in 1983, and the Distinguished Teaching Award of the American Psychological Foundation in 1984.

Bales died in San Diego. His wife Dorothy predeceased him in 2002. He was survived by his sister, Joan McCormack, a nephew, Stewart McCormack, both of Oregon, and a niece, Dr. Julie Ann Sadie of Somerset, England.

Respectfully submitted,

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Herbert C. Kelman
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Brendan A. Maher, Chair