

**Remarks Celebrating the Life of  
Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science Jeffrey L. Elman**

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Jeff Elman's many accomplishments as a scholar and his formal roles as a leader are noted in the program of this Celebration of Life, and they will be touched on today by others who knew and worked with him during the relevant periods of time.

I'd like to speak briefly about his academic leadership in the less quantifiable dimensions, those not always visible from the outside.

I knew Jeff for about 15 months, starting from the time he first helped interview me for the EVC's role here on campus. As part of my transition to UC San Diego in the summer of 2017, I arranged to meet with him for several hours, to learn his perspective on the structures and people of this great university.

This was partly because he had led so many still-important units and initiatives here on campus (including Social Sciences, Digital Learning, and Data Science). I knew he could help me understand how they fit into the pattern of the whole. But it was also because how I'd seen how he interacted with the Chancellor and others – and could I see that he was a wise person, one whose counsel would be valuable even regarding aspects of campus led by others. Those hours were time very well spent, as all here may imagine.

And they blended seamlessly into the several ways I would interact with Jeff over the coming months of my first year at UC San Diego:

- I spent countless hours working together with Jeff and with Rajesh Gupta and Pradeep Khosla on the guiding principles and founding documents of HDSI. Jeff and Rajesh, and I often found ourselves co-editing Google docs into the wee hours. And the four of us spent many weekend afternoons working together on HDSI proposals, guidelines, and long-term strategy; on the program for the festive March launch of the Institute; and on the slides for Jeff's presentation for the June Rep Assembly meeting that declared HDSI to be an academic unit. Jeff was such a beautiful, clear writer and so quick to see how to translate nuanced ideas into clear prose. He could also see the long-term implications of the decisions that had to be made before launching the Institute. We all relied on his perception and his willingness to engage in good-natured deliberative conversation (aka, debate). I will always treasure those hours and what I learned from them.
- Jeff and I also had a number of key conversations about climate issues here at the university and the importance of finding ways to make it possible for the most vulnerable graduate students and faculty to find their footing and succeed. He knew

that we still have significant work to do in this realm. And he emphasized that we must both take affirmative steps to give newcomers appropriate mentoring and support – and also take corrective measures when the climate is not as welcoming as it should be. I still draw on his perspective as I work on these issues of inclusion.

- Jeff was also one of the first people here to welcome me as a friend, to invite me to spend time with him and Ray walking in their beloved Torrey Pines Nature Reserve. Jeff and Ray personally introduced me to every plant, slope, and insect found along several miles of trails in the Reserve. This was an incredibly calming counterpoint to the relentless information overload and frenetic deadlines of the work environment. I fear that Jeff found me disappointing as a student of botany, but he nonetheless kindly showed me where the trapdoor spiders nest, trusting me not to endanger these shy arthropods by revealing the location.

In all of these ways, Jeff demonstrated himself once again to be a generous, courageous, and humane leader and mentor. By my reckoning, he:

- Welcomed a newcomer into one of his most beloved projects as a way of grounding her in institutional culture and practice. And generously accepted her contributions to his project as valid ones that could advance the mission.
- Prodded campus leadership to stay focused on the difficult and long-term issues of climate that require constant attention from all of us. This was a courageous move, given that he had not known me long and that it can be hard to predict how any given individual will react to these topics.
- Helped a new leader achieve some dynamic balance and “grounding” amid the tumult of work, providing an essential touchstone of personal connection.

I am honored to be able to help celebrate Jeff Elman’s life on this autumn day. While I did not work with him as long as many of those in the room today, I loved the time that we did spend together. He touched me deeply and I will miss him.