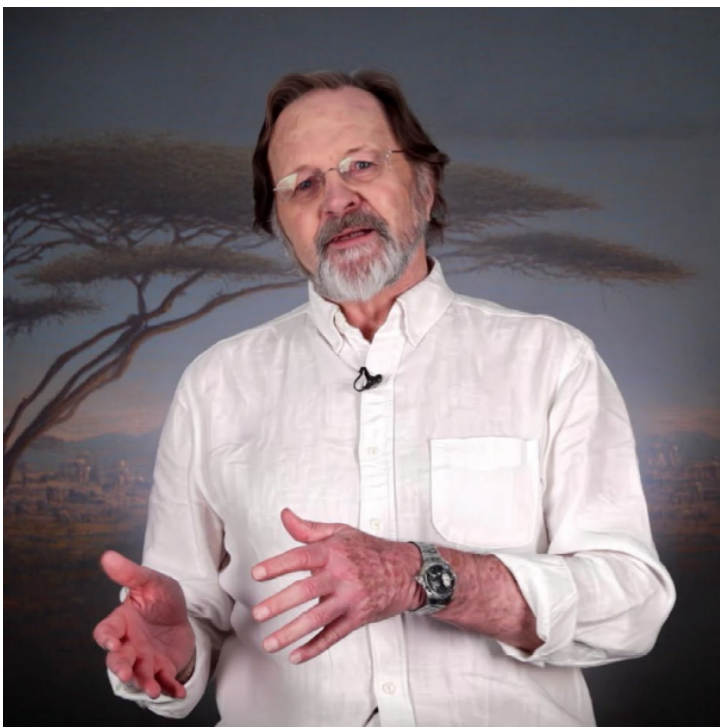


Obituary – Derek Smith

Irwin Brown – Irwin.brown@uct.ac.za,
Lisa Seymour – lisa.seymour@uct.ac.za,
Michael Hart – mike.hart@uct.ac.za,
Michael Eccles – meccles@iafrica.com

Derek Smith a distinguished academic, visionary leader, and cherished colleague whose contributions shaped the field of Information Systems in South Africa died on the 3rd December 2025. He was born in Durham, England on the 7th December 1945, and completed his schooling at Kings School, Pontefract, West Yorkshire. Derek began his career after earning a BSc in Chemistry from Bradford University, Yorkshire, joining Rolls Royce in 1968 as a Systems Programmer. In 1970, he moved to Zambia, serving as IT Operations Manager for Roan Consolidated Mines for five years. In 1976, he relocated to Cape Town, where he worked as Systems Development Manager at Shell.



In 1983, Derek enrolled for an MCom in Information Systems (IS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). During his studies, he transitioned from industry to academia, joining UCT as a Senior Lecturer. At that time, the IS Section was part of the Accounting Department. Derek's leadership was instrumental in transforming the section into a standalone Department of Information Systems as from 1994, where he served as its first Head of Department. Under his guidance, the department grew from five staff members into one of South Africa's leading IS departments, expanding its offerings from an undergraduate focus to postgraduate diplomas, honours, master's, and PhD programmes, and establishing a strong research culture. He retired as emeritus professor at the end of 2010.

Brown, I, Seymour, L, Hart, M, and Eccles, M. (2025). Obituary – Derek Smith [Obituary]. *South African Computer Journal* 37(2), 3–4. <https://doi.org/10.18489/sacj.v37i2.25171>

Copyright © the author(s); published under a [Creative Commons NonCommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)
SACJ is a publication of [SAICSIT](https://www.saicsit.org/). ISSN 1015-7999 (print) ISSN 2313-7835 (online)

Derek's academic passions lay in project management and the IS Honours programme, which has become a cornerstone qualification for aspiring IS professionals. His teaching and mentorship influenced countless IT leaders and entrepreneurs, many of whom credit Derek for inspiring them. He fostered strong ties between academia and industry, a legacy that continues today. In addition, he promoted community outreach being instrumental in establishing the Honours Outreach and Community Involvement Programme (HOCIP) in 2004.

Beyond UCT, Derek co-founded the Faculty Training Institute in 1989, which has grown into one of South Africa's largest training organisations in Business Analysis and Project Management. He also played a pivotal role in developing UCT project management short courses in partnership with GetSmarter (now a brand of 2U) and developed the first online 12-month Advanced Diploma in Business Project Management which was completed by over 1000 students. He contributed to multiple communities, lecturing at TSiBA and on the Tutu Leadership Programme and was Ministerial advisor to the South African Department of Education in 2006.

As a researcher, Derek published extensively on project management and the human aspects of IS, contributing to leading local and international journals and conferences. He was an active member of the South African Institute for Computer Scientists and Information Technologists (SAICSIT) community and a regular supporter of the Southern African Computer Lecturers' Association (SACLA). In recognition of his impact, he received the Pioneer Award from SAICSIT in 2012.

Outside academia, Derek had a lifelong love of cricket and rugby. He was a strong rugby forward in teams in England, Zambia, and then at Villagers in Cape Town. He was a regular at Newlands and even combined his expertise in team dynamics with his passion for rugby when invited to deliver a motivational talk to the Western Province rugby team. Colleagues and former students remember him for his warmth, generosity, and unwavering support. He was a tall man yet gentle. He loved the African bush and had a special affinity with the gentle giants of the bush – the African elephants and in his later years loved watching Safari Live. He loved a good glass of red wine, was especially fond of one at a bargain and was well loved in his community, fondly referred to as his village.

Derek's vision and dedication helped shape the Department of Information Systems into what it is today. We are profoundly grateful for his contributions. He is survived by his beloved wife Liz, his children Rachel and Simon, and his grandchildren.