

Tributes to Ron Duncan

by Biman Prasad and Sadhana Sen

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Professor Ron Duncan

Photo Credit: Graham Hassell

Much of Ron Duncan's research was concerned with the Pacific and he lived in Fiji from 2003 to 2007 when he headed the Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance (PIAS-DG) at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Here we provide our tributes together with a number of others from Pacific colleagues.

Professor Biman C. Prasad, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Fiji); Leader of the National Federation Party:

I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Ron Duncan. The Pacific has lost one of its finest economists, an outstanding scholar and a remarkable human being.

Ron was one of the people who had a profound influence on my academic career. As Editor of the Pacific Economic Bulletin, he gave me the opportunity and encouragement to publish my research at an early stage in my career. His confidence in young academics, his meticulous editorial guidance and his commitment to intellectual excellence helped shape my development as an economist and researcher.

Ron believed that good economics and good policies should improve people's lives. His work on Pacific economies was always grounded in a genuine concern for the development challenges facing our region's policy makers and politicians. He combined academic rigour with pragmatic policy insight, and his scholarship influenced generations of researchers, policymakers and development practitioners throughout the Pacific. This also led him to accept a senior position at the University of the South Pacific and again I had the pleasure of working with him.

What I admired most was his generosity. Despite his international standing, Ron was humble, approachable and always willing to mentor younger scholars. He never hesitated to share his knowledge, offer constructive advice or encourage those

beginning their academic journey. I was fortunate to benefit from that generosity, and I will always remain grateful for his guidance and friendship and encouraging me to work hard, culminating in my appointment as Professor of Economics at USP.

As I later moved from academia into politics and public service, I often reflected on the importance Ron placed on evidence-based policymaking, integrity and intellectual honesty. Those values have remained with me throughout my career.

Professor Ron Duncan leaves behind an extraordinary legacy — not only through his pioneering scholarship, but through the countless lives and careers he helped shape. He inspired a generation of Pacific economists, and his influence will continue to be felt for many years to come.

My heartfelt condolences go to his family, friends, colleagues and the many students and scholars whose lives he enriched.

Thank you, Ron, for your mentorship, your wisdom and your friendship. May you rest in eternal peace.

Professor Steven Ratuva, Pro-Vice Chancellor Pacific and Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, New Zealand:

Those of us who worked under him were very fortunate to be led by someone who was exemplary in his innovative leadership and transformative in his ideas in the field of development, economics, governance and beyond. As a person, he was very approachable. Talented as a musician and as a sports person, he was at his best with his classic pieces on his piano.

Graham Hassall, Professor of Governance 2004-2009, PIAS-DG, USP:

Colleagues remember those years at PIAS-DG under Ron's leadership at the University of the South Pacific with gratitude. All describe him as a kind man, smart, hard-working and productive, respectful to all, quiet but collegial, sociable and supportive. All his achievements were equally his wife Rita's, as she was always there to support him and the institute.

The Institute rapidly gained respect across the Pacific under Ron's leadership. His collaborations with Pacific scholars are now embedded in the academic literature. The resonance of his deep and melodic voice is embedded in the minds of all who benefitted from his friendship.

Jon Fraenkel, Professor in Comparative Politics, Victoria University:

I will always remember Ron well because he was very good at relationships with his

juniors. I recall he once invited me into his office and said “Jon, I’ve been invited to go to Rapa Nui (Easter Island). I can’t go. Could you go in my stead?”. My response: “You bet!” I was in the plane a week or two later. Fantastic trip. Ron was like that. He made things happen around him. He was also prolific in his writing. That institute had an impact across the Pacific.

Dr Joe Ketan, PNG academic and Pacific scholar:

Ron Duncan was an exceptionally good man. A kind man. Once AusAID had inadvertently forgotten to pay for me to fly to Nadi from Suva for an assignment. Ron paid for it out of his own pocket. He was also responsible for ensuring PNG’s National Research Institute received significant AusAID support when Dr Thomas Webster was in charge. Ron was a quiet and soft-spoken man who opened doors for many Pacific Islanders. He was also a giant in Pacific Island scholarship.

Sadhana Sen, Regional Communications Consultant, Development Policy Centre:

Ron was very approachable, always ready to mentor and read scripts from those who sent them, especially his junior staff, with diplomatic comments to improve them. He was a good boss to work with, a facilitator rather than a gatekeeper.

I remember a regional electoral systems conference we organised in the middle of a charged Vanuatu election in our first year to be attended by many Vanuatu MPs. On the first day, the conference papers weren’t all in the folders. Much to my surprise, Ron got in there punching, stapling and helping organise the folders.

Ron definitely earned his respect and high regard amongst colleagues. May he rest with much music in heaven.

Read Satish Chand’s [obituary of Ron Duncan](#).

Author/s:

Biman Prasad

Professor Biman Prasad is a Fijian politician and economist. He has been Leader of the National Federation Party since 2014 and was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance from 2022 to 2025. He was formerly Professor of Economics and Dean at the University of the South Pacific.

Sadhana Sen

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/tributes-to-ron-duncan/>