

First SMU law dean, a mentor to generations of students, dies at 87

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Tributes have poured in for the first dean of Singapore Management University's (SMU) School of Law, Professor Michael Furmston, who died last Sunday. He was 87.

He collapsed at his apartment in Kuala Lumpur and died of heart failure about two hours later in hospital, said his daughter, Mrs Rebecca Machin.

SMU president Lily Kong said: "Our university was most privileged to have had Professor Furmston as the first dean of the School of Law between 2007 and 2012. A highly respected scholar, Professor Furmston has had a long, distinguished career in academia."

She added that his extensive

experience, reach and reputation lent prestige to the young law school, which he strived to steer to international standing.

Described by The London Times in 2007 as one of the 10 great law teachers, Prof Furmston expanded the law school's offerings to include Singapore's first Juris Doctor programme in 2009.

He laid the groundwork for the new School of Law building and Kwa Geok Choo Law Library, which became landmarks and deepened the school's engagement with its alumni, the community and the legal fraternity.

"Colleagues have described him to be energetic, creative and very well organised. He has touched many lives and was a great teacher and mentor to his many generations of students and younger



scholars," said Professor Kong.

He continued teaching at SMU after he stepped down as dean and retired as Emeritus Professor of Law in 2015.

Professor Simon Chesterman, dean of the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Law, said: "Words like 'giant' are often thrown

around in the context of scholars who have died, but Michael Furmston truly was larger than life both on the page and in person. It is impossible to be a scholar or a practitioner of contract law without knowing his work. He taught generations of students who went on to become leading practitioners, judges and

professors in their own right."

Prof Furmston is renowned as the author and editor of *Cheshire, Fifoot and Furmston's Law of Contract* – the standard work on the topic – among other works.

"He was large of heart, enjoying the company of students and colleagues. My colleagues and I join

Professor Michael Furmston, the first dean of Singapore Management University's School of Law, viewing a sculpture of Mr David Marshall with the late politician's wife Jean in 2011. Prof Furmston died last Sunday. PHOTO: SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

family and friends around the world in celebrating his life and work, even as we mourn his passing," said Prof Chesterman.

A student of Oxford University who graduated with first-class honours, Prof Furmston held a number of titles including dean and Professor of Law at Bristol University.

He joined Sunway University in Kuala Lumpur in 2015, and was teaching and writing, happily, up to the time of his death, said his family.

He is survived by his wife Ashley, 10 children and 15 grandchildren.

In a December 2015 interview with *Blaze*, Sunway University's magazine, he said: "Yes, I am the proud father of 10 children. Most of the time when I tell people that, after a pause, it's usually followed by the question of how many wives I have. I have only one wife and they are all our children together."

Mrs Machin said her father was loving and benevolent, very skilled in chess, loved John Wayne films and was a "true English gentleman".

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• Those who wish to pay their respects may e-mail inmemoryof michael.furmston@gmail.com