

The former USC Dornsife molecular and computational biologist was a leader in the Human Genome Project. He also invented technology used in COVID-19 rapid tests.

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Renowned molecular biologist and geneticist David Galas, a former faculty member at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, died on May 27. He was 79.

Having dedicated his career to unraveling the mysteries of the human genome, Galas leaves a legacy of groundbreaking research and an enduring impact on the scientific community.

Galas joined USC Dornsife in 1981 as assistant professor of molecular and computational biology in the Department of Biological Sciences, rising to full professor in 1988. He served as head of molecular biology from 1985 to '90.

His pioneering research demonstrated the potential of DNA sequencing technologies in unraveling the intricate code of life. His contributions — including his leadership in the Human Genome Project — proved pivotal in the development of technologies that have since become indispensable tools in genetics and genomics research.

He also invented technology decades ago that was used for the first rapid-response COVID-19 test.

In 1993, Galas left USC to pursue several leadership positions at high-profile organizations as an entrepreneur, including Darwin Molecular Corporate (later Chiroscience R&D Inc.). He also held positions at Battelle Memorial Institute, the Institute for Systems Biology and the Pacific Northwest Research Institute. His visionary approach to research,

emphasizing the importance of integrating biology, mathematics and engineering, led to new strategies for understanding complex biological systems.

During his career, Galas served on a number of National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council boards, committees and panels as well as on nonprofit organization committees.

Beyond his scientific achievements, Galas also was known for his warm personality and infectious enthusiasm. Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences Norman Arnheim, whom Galas helped recruit to USC Dornsife, recalled Galas' thoughtfulness, which helped Arnheim decide to join USC in 1985. Arnheim wrote in his tribute to Galas, "We will always be grateful to him for introducing us to Southern California."

University Professor Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Biological Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science Michael Waterman noted Galas' wide-ranging interests and skills.

"In David Galas we have a man who can conceive of important biological experiments, carry them out with his own hands and then analyze the data; who can formulate and prove theorems in pure mathematics; who can write and publish poetry; who is a painter of high quality," Waterman wrote. "Just to satisfy one of these categories is more than most achieve in a lifetime. How many people on the globe fill all of them? I conjecture that number is precisely one."

Learn more about Galas at davidjgalasphd.com.