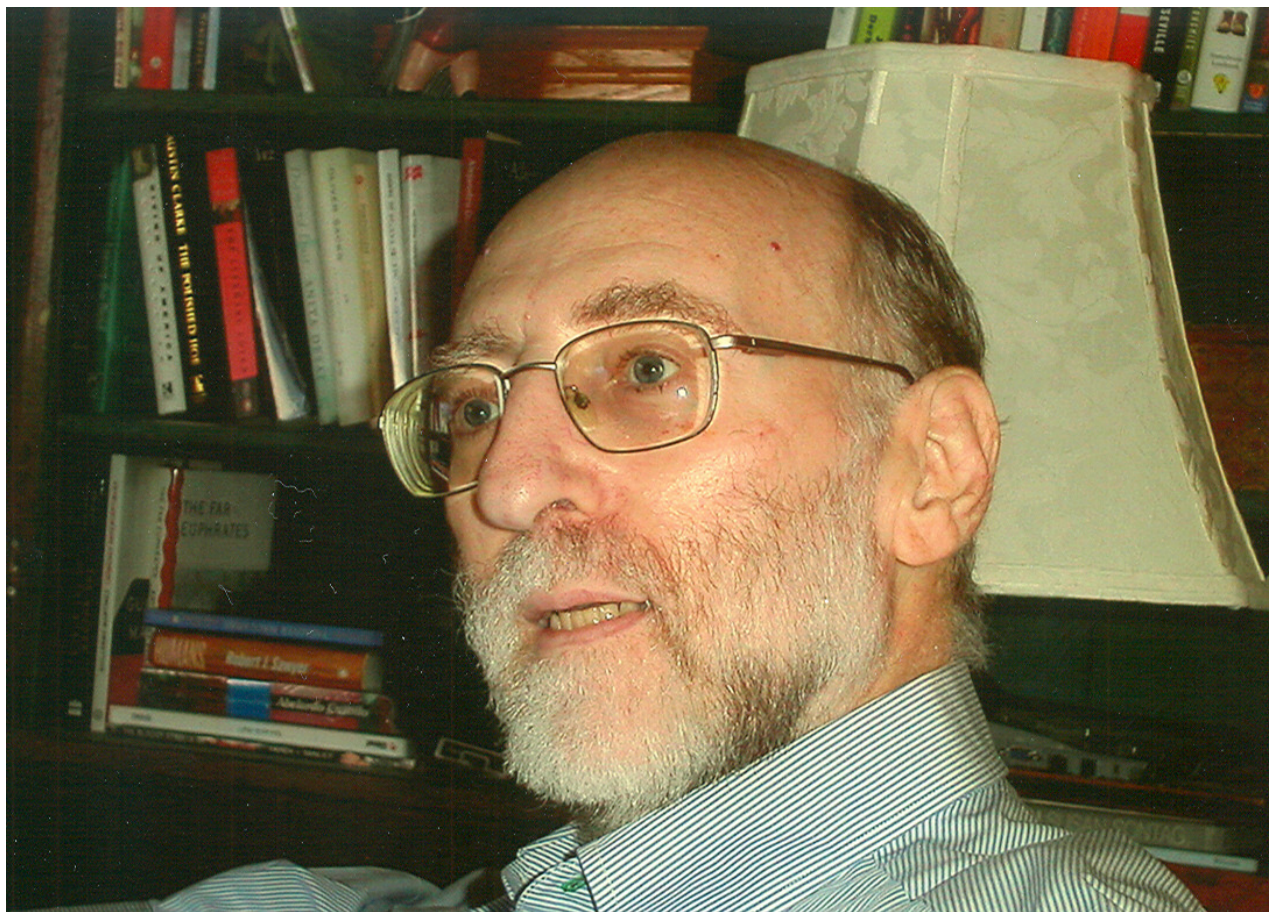


RENÉE J. MILLER

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**Alberto Oscar Mendelzon  
1951-2005**



Alberto Oscar Mendelzon passed away on June 16, 2005 after a two-year battle with cancer. Alberto was one of the pioneers who helped to lay the foundations of relational databases, the most prevalent type of database management system in use today. His early work on database dependencies has been influential in both the theory and practice of data management. He has made fundamental contributions in the areas of graphical query languages, knowledge-base systems, and on-line analytic processing. His work has provided the foundation for languages used to query the structure of the web. More than all of this, he was a man admired for his humour, his modesty, and his devotion to his students, his family, and his friends.

Alberto Mendelzon, professor of computer science at the University of Toronto, was born in Buenos Aires; Argentina. His academic journey began in Argentina and he maintained, throughout his life, close ties to his home country and home continent. He graduated from the University of Buenos Aires in 1973 before studying at Princeton as a Fulbright Scholar. At Princeton, he received a MSE in 1977, a MA degree in 1978, and a PhD degree in 1979. He was a post-doctoral fellow at IBM's T.J. Watson Research Center for a year before joining the University of Toronto in 1980 as an assistant professor. He was promoted to full professor in 1989 and remained an active and cherished member of our community until his passing.

Alberto established some of the earliest results on using the relational data model. Alberto's 1979 Princeton PhD on "Data Dependencies in the Relational Model" provided a foundation for understanding and reasoning about the consistency of data.

These results helped to show how the relational model could be used in a principled way to organize data. His work has been highly influential: it is used on an everyday basis, directly or indirectly, by people who design databases, and it is used in commercial systems to reason about the consistency and correctness of a data design. His results helped to make the relational model ubiquitous for modeling business data.

In the 1980's, Alberto began an important line of work on graphical query languages. His work has been called prescient as it predates, and in many ways foreshadows, the emergence of the World Wide Web. The web is the largest database ever; one that uses data formats different from those found in standard database management systems. Typically, web data is stored using mark-up languages, the best known being a language called XML. Techniques required to store and query such data are fundamentally different from techniques used for traditional data models, and Alberto was among the first researchers who recognized and precisely articulated these differences. He can be credited with defining many of the scientific principles required for designing languages to query the web.

Alberto was a leader in the international database community. He was selected by the top societies in database research to chair or co-chair ten Program Committees of major conferences that span the entire spectrum of database research from the theory, to systems, to emerging areas (including the World Wide Web conference). He was an outstanding educator who guided the research of 19 doctoral students and numerous postdoctoral fellows.

In response to the news of his passing, condolence emails have flooded into Toronto from all over the world. Many of the messages came from South America. Alberto was instrumental in bringing many South Americans to the University of Toronto. His long list of graduate students, postdoctoral students, and visitors reads like a Who's-Who of South American computer science.

He was also a key contributor to the creation of the Computer Science Department at the University of Buenos Aires in the early eighties. Perhaps more than academic evidence, the personal testimonies remain as Alberto's most lasting legacy.

Alberto was praised for having an academic vision that people trusted. He is remembered as a creative researcher who constantly pushed the data management field in new directions. Perhaps the most frequent theme in these messages were the appreciative remembrances of a kind, gracious, and welcoming Alberto who had helped and influenced many, many people, especially at the beginning of their careers. He was remarkably open; generous, and patient with students and colleagues alike. He was shy, modest, full of joy and curiosity.

We cherished his fun-loving and teasing sense of humour, and the calm and open way he approached the various tasks and duties of academic life. Alberto was at his best after a good laugh, and he believed that innovation is more likely to flow from a research meeting at which there is laughter. One colleague wrote that Alberto inspired an atmosphere of emancipation that was very conducive to research and discovery.

Alberto was the beloved partner of Colette Granger, devoted and proud father of José Manuel and Martin, stepfather to Emma and Paul, loving son of Maria Gloria Rabinovich de Mendelzon and the late José Mendelzon, dear brother of Daniel and Ricardo, and brother-in-law to Marta and Paula. He will be greatly missed by niece Laura, nephews, Ariel, Guillermo and Andrés uncles, aunts and cousins in Argentina and Paraguay, and many friends and colleagues around the world.

Alberto was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in April 2005. He passed away before his formal induction which was to take place in the fall of 2005. In June of 2007, the ACM (Association for Computing Machinery) voted to establish an endowed award named after Alberto, the ACM PODS Mendelzon Test-of-Time Award. PODS is the ACM Annual Symposium on Principles of Database Systems, which is regarded as the premier international conference on database theory. This award is for a paper published ten years prior that has had the most impact over the intervening decade. This is the first named award that this distinguished conference has established. It is named for a consummate academic, research, and educator whose research and personal contributions to his field will continue to have lasting impact.

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*(Author's title given as of the time of writing)*