Professor Colin Ferguson passed away peacefully after a short illness in his native Warrnambool at the age of 64. Colin had an international reputation for work encompassing auditing, forensic accounting, and accounting information systems. Raised in Warrnambool where he completed his secondary education at the Christian Brothers (now Emanuel) College, he commenced tertiary studies at what was then the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education (now Deakin University), graduating with a Diploma of Business Studies in 1971. This was the modest start to what turned out to be a brilliant academic career. After working in the Melbourne office of Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co (now KPMG) in the early 1970s, he commenced teacher training and taught commercial subjects, including typing, for two years in state secondary-schools before completing a Bachelor of Business degree at Swinburne University. A Master of Economics at the University of New England followed in 1980 and a Graduate Diploma of Computing at Deakin University in 1985. The die was cast – Colin had entered the nexus of computing and accounting, a sub-discipline of accounting that has been described affectionately by more than one scholar as “lunatic-fringe”. In the meantime, he had obtained a lectureship at Deakin where he completed his PhD in 1994, under the supervision of Professor Peter Wolnizer, who went on to become an eminent Dean of Business at the University of Sydney. Colin’s interest in both accounting and computing was reflected in his choice of PhD topic – “An investigation of the effects of microcomputers on the work of professional accountants”. It was hardly a surprise when Colin was recruited by the University of Queensland (UQ) the following year – one of his examiners was Professor Ron Weber, an eminent professor at UQ in the field of information systems and accounting.

Drawing on his PhD and with the stimulus of one of Australia’s leading departments in accounting and information systems journals, leading to a professorial appointment as Professor of Accounting Information Systems in 2001. At UQ, he had the top echelon of professors with which to work, including Frank Finn, Ian Zimmer (whom he had known at Swinburne and Deakin in the 1970s), Paul Bowen, Fiona Rhode, Peter Green, and of course Ron Weber, to name but a few. At the same time, he maintained a close relationship with Deakin university, continuing to work with his close friend, Professor Graeme Wines, where he held an Honorary Professorship from 2003. While happy in Queensland, Colin always maintained that he was an avowed ‘Victorian living in Queensland’. He said this once too often to Professor Stewart Leech at a meeting of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia’s (ICAA) Education Board in Sydney in 2003, who promptly replied: “if we create a Chair of Business Information Systems at the University of Melbourne, will you move to Melbourne?” The chair was created and the move was made, despite some misgivings at the time from his wife Yvonne, who was also happy in Queensland.

At the University of Melbourne, Colin continued to publish regularly in top-ranking journals, facilitated by his outstanding success in gaining competitive linkage research grants (with industry partners) through the Australian Research Council. To his Melbourne colleagues he was known as an excellent teacher, higher-degree supervisor, program director and mentor to junior staff. He played a major role in strengthening the ‘town and gown’ links of the University’s Department of Accounting and Business Information Systems (now Department of Accounting) through his Directorship of the Department’s Centre for Accounting and Industry Partnerships and his instrumental roles in the creation of the Australian Accounting
Hall of Fame and the highly successful executive-in-residence program. He served on a variety of University committees, including positions as Associate Dean Research and Associate Dean Knowledge Transfer in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce (now Business and Economics), as well as Deputy Head of the Department of Accounting.

Colin was always in demand to present his research at a wide range of seminar programs, symposia and conferences. He had a natural brilliance about him – often it was more about his research philosophy than the topic at hand – often frustrating a session chair to keep him on track! But his depth of knowledge and highly-tuned presentation skills always meant that the audience was entertained and rewarded. At one academic conference, his co-author, who was to present the paper, was missing. Colin presented the research – no paper, no PowerPoint slides, no notes (in fact it was doubtful if he had seen the paper for six months or so). The resulting oration held the audience in awe – it was no less than brilliant.

A long-time friend of historian Dr Peter Yule, he was interested in a broad range of histories and initiated the publication of a history of the University of Queensland’s Department of Commerce. At Melbourne he was similarly supportive of histories of the University’s accounting discipline and of its longest-running annual lecture series: the University of Melbourne – CPA Australia Annual Research Lecture.

He served on a variety of committees of CPA Australia and the ICAA and was President of the Accounting and Finance Association of Australia and New Zealand for 2004–2005. Earlier he had been president of the Western District Branch, Victoria, of CPA Australia. His academic activities also extended to the membership of several editorial boards, including the *International Journal of Accounting Information Systems* and *Accounting & Finance*.

The son of a builder, Colin’s handyman skills were of tradesman standard and he had just completed major renovations to the family’s historic Warrnambool house in preparation for retiring there with his wife, Yvonne. The couple’s gardening enthusiasms were evident in their frequent gifts of fresh produce to friends and colleagues. A fine golfer, his handicap had slipped out from single-figures in recent years only due to other activities restricting him to occasional rounds of golf. He took great satisfaction from the performance on the US PGA tour of his Warrnambool club-mate, Mark Leishman, and was sadly deprived of his ambition of returning his own handicap back to single-figures.

Colin’s death is an enormous loss to academia and the accounting profession. A gentle person who was always positive and could always see the best in people, he will be missed but never forgotten by all his academic and professional colleagues, friends and ex-students. All our sympathy is extended to Yvonne, and their children, Sam, Katherine, Joseph and Patrick, and to the wider Ferguson family.

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