



OBITUARY

William “Bill” Joseph Whelan (1924 – 2021)

By [Alexandra Newton](#)

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We are sad to relay the news that William ‘Bill’ Whelan, a renowned biochemist with a long history of influential service to the IUBMB, died June 5, 2021 at his home in Miami. He was 96.

Bill was born on November 14, 1924, in Salford, Lancashire, England. He received his undergraduate and graduate training at the University of Birmingham, receiving a B.Sc., Ph.D., and D.Sc. degrees. He held faculty appointments at the University of Birmingham, University College of North Wales, University of London Linster Institute, and the Royal Free Hospital, where he was head of the Department of Biochemistry. In 1976, Whelan moved to the U.S. to accept the position of Professor and Chair of the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Miami School of Medicine. He was Chair for 24 years, and an active faculty until his [retirement in 2019](#). He was highly influential in shaping the course of the Miami School of Medicine, as outlined in an article in the [University of Miami Magazine](#). He also created the Miami Winter Symposium conferences in 1968, which will be holding its [54th meeting in 2022](#).

Bill’s contributions to biochemistry were vastly influential. He discovered the enzyme glycogenin, a self-glycosylating protein that primes glycogen synthesis and plays a central role in the structure and metabolism of this storage polysaccharide. He offers some additional insight in his IUBMB Life article [“My favorite enzyme: glycogenin”](#). He received many awards for his scientific contributions, including the FEBS Millenium Medal, Ciba Medal, and was elected as a fellow of the Royal Society in 1992. He is a [Life Time Special Member of IUBMB](#). In addition to his own research, Bill was highly influential in promoting biochemistry. He started the journals TIBS and FEBS letters, and was the co-Editor-in-Chief along with Angelo Azzi of IUBMB Life from 2000 to 2020. He was IUBMB General Secretary (1973-1983) and President-elect, President, and Past-president from 1994-2003. His extraordinary commitment to training the next generation of biochemists was recently honored by IUBMB with the creation of the [Whelan Young Investigator Award](#). Also named in his honor are the highly popular [Wood-Whelan Fellowships](#) that provide opportunities for trainees around the world to visit labs in different countries to enhance their training.

Bill shaped biochemistry, the IUBMB, and three generations of biochemists. We will miss his keen insight, generosity, and sense of humor.