

Randy Bartlett: Memorial Minutes
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No words can fully capture the admiration, affection, and respect that surrounded Randy Bartlett. Randy's scholarship and teaching reflected a deeply interdisciplinary approach. In his writing and in the classroom, Randy seamlessly connected economics with political science, sociology, business, and law. A distinguished scholar, phenomenal teacher, and a profoundly valued colleague, he devoted his career to advancing both the economics discipline and the art of teaching.

Beyond his academic life, Randy was a gifted, self-taught musician who played guitar, saxophone, and piano. He loved performing and sharing that joy with others.

He earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in Economics from Stanford University, where he met the love of his life, Catherine Payne, a doctor to be. Randy told us that soon after they married Cathy changed her last name to his for reasons you can imagine! He used to refer to her as the real doctor Bartlett.

Randy began his academic career as an assistant professor of economics at Williams College, where he earned tenure and was promoted to associate professor in a relatively short period. In 1979, he joined the faculty at Smith College, beginning a chapter that would define much of his academic life.

As an eclectic scholar, Randy published widely articles, books, and book reviews, across urban economics, public policy, political economy, industrial organization, economic pedagogy, and the history of economic thought. In *The Crisis of America's Cities*, he offered a thoughtful, historically grounded analysis of urban policy, emphasizing equal educational opportunity, regional cooperation, and affordable housing, as essential to addressing challenges of American cities. His book combined analytical rigor with a sense of moral purpose, a combination that was distinctly, unmistakably Randy.

Randy's deepest and most enduring impact was as a teacher. His courses were rigorous and demanding, yet animated by warmth, humor, and empathy. He left no one behind; he brought everyone in! He received two major teaching awards: the All-College Distinguished Teaching Award for Senior Faculty (1993) and the Sherrerd Prize for Distinguished Teaching (2008).

He was not only an inspiring teacher to his students but also the colleague to whom we all turned for advice. Even years after his retirement, we continue to repeat his enduring advice to teachers, old and new alike: *"It doesn't matter how much you teach; it matters how much they learn."*

His presence in the department significantly increased our enrollments, what we fondly called the "Bartlett Effect." He reached countless students across the college through his ever-popular introductory economics courses, where he had an uncanny ability to make the subject matter

accessible and engaging. His elective courses, focused primarily on public policy, were always heavily subscribed and extended well beyond economics majors. And then there were the songs. He performed his original music for graduating seniors, most famously the “*Senior Year Blues*” and, for the Class of 2000, a special piece titled “*00s!*” In the final class meeting, he would bring his guitar and sing with his baritone voice to his students, transforming an ordinary academic moment into a lasting memory.

We often said that Randy could teach anyone. And he proved it, again and again. He was instrumental in the development of the Women and Financial Independence (WFI) Program, now Conway Center. Each year, he taught his renowned non-credit course, “*Financing Life*,” which drew audiences of more than 100 students, staff, and faculty. Similarly popular was his workshop, “*From Backpack to Briefcase*” for graduating seniors during commencement. He also contributed to the Smith Management Program for mid-level women managers and later to the Smith Executive Consortium for several years. He was featured in the College’s “Great Lectures” series alongside nationally recognized scholars, delivering a lecture titled “How to Think Like an Economist.”

Upon news of his passing, the messages came pouring in, from faculty across the curriculum, from staff, and from students spanning decades. His students spoke movingly about the lasting impact he had on their lives. Here are a few excerpts:

“This makes me so sad. A favorite professor, the kind of life force you never imagine will go away.”

“He will always be a legend.”

“Professor Bartlett was a passionate educator. Anytime I hear the words ‘It depends,’ I am transported back to my Intro Macro class.”

Randy was deeply engaged in the life of the department. He served more than once as department chair. He was a steady and trusted voice of reason, someone whose judgment we relied upon in moments both routine and difficult. His commitment extended well beyond the department; along with Don Baumer, he was a long-time steward of the public policy program, and he served on many of the College’s elected committees. In essence, he exemplified the very best qualities of an engaged and caring citizen of the institution. He received the Smith College Distinguished Professor Award in 2003.

If you knew Randy, you quickly saw what mattered most to him: his family. He spoke with great pride, and affection about Cathy and their three Children, a family of five doctors, including three real doctors!

Randy was the kind of friend everyone hopes to have, always ready to listen, help, and lift you up. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing him will carry so much: his multifaceted mind, his uncanny sense of humor, his genuine interest in others, his friendship, and his unwavering optimism. He was a dear friend to many of us, and his memory will be with us always.