

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ROBERT M. GATES

Emeritus Professor Robert Gates died on July 12, 2004. He was born in Madison in June 26, 1918 and graduated from Madison West High School in 1936. He enjoyed science, mathematics and the out-of-doors, so decided to pursue geology at the university. Gates received both the bachelor and master degrees in geology from the university simultaneously in 1941 thanks to a special honors program, which emphasized intensive independent studies with leading faculty members in several departments; he remembered that no less than three of his professors were eventually elected to the National Academy of Sciences. The extra time required for this program was made possible for Bob by an unusual group of eastern philanthropists who wished to finance the education of "bright young men." Prior to receiving this support, Bob had to work 20 hours per week.

After Pearl Harbor, Gates enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in 1942. He was appointed Communications Officer for a Fighter Group and served in England from May, 1944 until the end of hostilities by which time he had risen to the rank of Major.

Gates returned to the university, earned the Ph.D. in 1949 with a minor in physics, and was immediately appointed assistant professor in the Department of Geology. Bob's education traces a long lineage of distinguished Wisconsin "hard rock" geologists, which included former Professors Conrad Emmons, Alexander N. Winchell, Charles K. Leith, and Warren J. Mead. Bob rose to full professor in 1960 and remained an active member of the department until his retirement in 1988. He served as chairman of his department from 1965 to 1968, during which time its faculty nearly doubled. Gates also served on many university and departmental committees. From 1979 to 1988, he was the director of the Wasatch-Uinta Geological Field Camp in Park City, Utah, a consortium comprised of students and faculty from five midwestern universities, who studied geology in the field for 8 weeks in summers. The staffing and logistics for this operation with as many as 90 students and 5 to 10 faculty members was a formidable undertaking, which Bob discharged with great dedication and efficiency. Gates was a fellow of the American Mineralogical Society, the Geological Society of America, and Sigma Xi. He was the president of the local Sigma Xi chapter.

Bob Gates was an unusually dedicated teacher who emphasized the undergraduate student in his efforts. Practically every student who graduated from the department felt Bob's love for teaching and concern for their education. His principal teaching responsibility was an undergraduate mineralogy-petrology series, which is fundamental for every geology major in that it deals with the building blocks of the earth. Besides lectures, these two courses involve a great deal of laboratory time for specimen study. Bob closely supervised all of these laboratories in good Socratic style. He was a demanding taskmaster, but his students left knowing minerals and rocks thoroughly. One of the laboratory projects involved the identification of various building stones along State Street and in the Capitol plus a written report. A memorable moment occurred in his lecture at the height of the Viet Nam war when student unrest was rampant. Gates walked into class shortly after one of the campus riots, held up a fist-sized rock specimen, which had been thrown through a window, and declared that "Today I would like to discuss this as an object of scientific curiosity and as an object of social change." Gates occasionally taught a course titled Gems and Precious Stones said to be popular especially with coeds contemplating engagement for marriage. In an unsolicited written appreciation of this course, a mature student wrote in 1988 to the department "I hope that you realize that the real gem of the Geology Department is Dr. Robert Gates."

Field geology was also emphasized by Gates. He taught for many years a field mapping course in Ontario during an intensive week in May, so scheduled in the hope that winter snows had melted from the outcrops

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and blackflies had not yet hatched; with some notable exceptions, both hopes were usually realized. With Professor Emmons, Gates established the course just before World War II and introduced 25 years of students to the sobering realities of field work before handing it over to younger faculty, who have kept the White Lake tradition alive for over 60 years. Few geology undergraduate alumni have missed the experience, and most speak of it as one of the most important courses that they took. During the last two decades of his career, Bob Gates taught and directed the eight-week field course in Utah.

Besides formal teaching, Bob Gates fulfilled a vital role in his department by very conscientiously advising and vigorously advocating for undergraduate majors, efforts which are too easily taken lightly in large, research-oriented institutions. He also served on several important campus committees relating to undergraduates.

When Gates joined the faculty, he began a three-decade-long research effort for the Connecticut Geological and Natural History Survey deciphering the complex geology of western Connecticut and adjacent New York. Nineteen graduate students completed theses under his direction in Connecticut. One of those students, Professor Nik Christensen, recalls an incident in Connecticut that illustrates a blunt honesty so characteristic of Gates. Bob interrupted dinner to intercede in an adolescent squabble by telling his son "Don't call that boy a stupid idiot – that's redundant."

After retirement, Bob became very active in the Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization for people craving intellectual stimulation in retirement. He served as the first president of PLATO in 1989. This organization sustained his lifelong dedication to learning and provided the opportunity to expand his intellectual horizons beyond his professional background in science; it also further stimulated a lifelong political awareness. In addition, Gates helped start a group called Sports for Active Seniors, which involved biking abroad as well as locally. He also became an avid golfer in retirement, which ironically was something he used to tell his graduate students was a waste of time. Besides remaining very active both mentally and physically after he retired, he traveled extensively in Europe, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, China, Japan, Mexico, South America, India and Nepal. Bob was a longtime active member of the Kiwanis Club of Downtown Madison and of the First Unitarian Society.

Bob Gates was a man of strong convictions and unswerving honesty. He could be argumentative, especially about political issues, and was a formidable debater. For example, he was proud of a wartime success in arguing the hypocrisy of a military court punishing an enlisted man for a serious crime often overlooked for officers. Gates was very personable, had a good sense of humor, and could be depended upon for lively conversation on a broad range of subjects. One could be assured that he was well-informed on whatever position he might take and, as a good scientist, always demanded evidence to support his own or another person's position.

Bob Gates is survived by his first wife, Lera Gates, second wife, Janet, her daughter Tracy Kramer, a son Robin Gates, and three grandchildren.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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