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

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS CONVERSE H. BLANCHARD

Converse Herrick ("Connie") Blanchard, professor emeritus of physics, died August 13, 2009 at the age of 85. Connie earned the PhD in physics from UW-Madison in 1950. He then worked at the National Bureau of Standards and the Pennsylvania State University until 1961. He returned to UW as associate professor in 1961 and was promoted to professor in 1963. He served as associate chair of the department from 1961 to 1981 and continued serving the physics department and the university until his retirement in 1991, and even up to his death. He was a remarkably elective teacher at many educational levels. Graduate students remember his teaching with remarks such as "I was fortunate to have Connie Blanchard as the teacher for two first-year graduate courses: mechanics, and electricity and magnetism, subjects that are the foundation for many higher level courses in physics. He showed his students what it means to understand a subject on a deep level, and he took a sincere interest in their development as scholar-scientists." The university recognized his teaching of undergraduate and graduate students with a distinguished teaching award in 1987. After his retirement, he began a series of visits to third grade classrooms in the Madison area with "traveling physics demonstrations." He made hour-long presentations that got enthusiastic responses from the students and teachers. There were more than 1,600 of these presentations, and one of the teachers remembers his visits as follows: "Connie Blanchard faithfully gave physics demonstrations to my second/third grade classes over the last five years. He was excellent at breaking down very complex concepts into a concrete form that second and third graders could understand at their developmental level. A few years ago, a former third grader came back to visit me and asked, 'Whatever happened to that guy that taught us about physics? That was really fun!'"

He was a serious scholar and continued his scientific endeavors up to his death. Someone who had lunch with him only two weeks before his death commented, "He seemed as interested in physics as ever. He gave me a handwritten analysis he just made of the effects of wing-tip additions to small planes to make use of vortices for extra lift. He was also very excited about an article he had just read about the foundations of quantum mechanics." He was also a mentor to graduate students and faculty. One of the physics faculty comments: "Connie was a mentor, teacher, friend, and colleague for more than three decades." He oversaw teaching in the physics department, participated in reviewing graduate admissions applications and helped prepare the general graduate exams up through this fall. He was both talented and responsible and was an extremely valuable member of the department. Connie was a living embodiment of institutional memory, especially for the physics department. He tracked its graduates as they went on in their careers and paid special attention to the students they recommended. One faculty member who worked with him in the graduate admissions process comments: "I worked with Connie on the admissions committee and was amazed by his thorough knowledge of each and every candidate. We strongly relied on his knowledge and recommendations. I have no idea how he absorbed so much information from the huge collection of applications. Once the new students arrived, he seemed to personally look after them." Another describes the process as: "He delighted in searching through 500 to 1,000 applications to find 'diamonds in the rough.' These 'diamonds' were applicants with less than perfect records who had great research potential."

He co-authored a physics text "Introduction to Modern Physics." This fine textbook went through two editions from 1960 to 1970. He also left a record of his experiments for the third graders with a report "Nine experiments for a third-grade hour," published in 2003. Some comments from his introduction to that report will give a sense of his approach: "I try to show with these experiments that there are things in this world that are interesting and simple enough to understand and that, therefore, it does pay to try to think for oneself.... Why the third grade? I tried it there and it seemed to work." These experiments no doubt

(continued)

lead students to realize that not only simple things, but even complicated physical systems, can be understood in detail. He created a course Physics 115 "Energy" that was attended by many students interested in the fundamental physics that goes into our present energy and environmental problems.

He was a fellow of the American Physical Society. He was twice president of the Wisconsin Association of Physics Teachers and received its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004.

He was a founding member and initial chair of the Madison group of Amnesty International and taught a series of PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization of the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies) science seminars for Madison area senior learners. At the time of his death, he was preparing to teach a fall 2009 class on "The Fundamental Particles" and to participate in the PLATO Global Affairs discussion group.

Connie, having been a graduate student in Madison, fully embraced the University of Wisconsin and seemed to prefer its atmosphere to the more staid New England and Harvard of his youth. We know of no greater enthusiast for our university and community. He is survived by his wife, June Weisberger Blanchard, his four children, Elizabeth Blanchard Schaffer, Margaret Blanchard, Jean Blanchard Patt, and Brian Blanchard, and five grandchildren. His first wife, Margaret (Mardie) Blanchard, predeceased him in 1981.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
L. Wilmer Anderson
A. Baha Balantekin
Ludwig W. Bruch, chair
William A. Friedman