

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

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS WILLIAM B. YOUMANS**

William Barton “Bill” Youmans, MD, PhD, was born on February 3, 1910, in Mt. Healthy, Ohio. He received a bachelor of science degree in 1932 and a master of science degree in 1933 from Western Kentucky State College in Bowling Green. He earned a PhD in physiology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and in 1944, he received his medical degree from the University of Oregon, then served as intern at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit in 1944-45. He was a member of the medical faculty at the University of Oregon Medical School from 1938 to 1952, where he was chair of the Department of Physiology from 1946 to 1952. Dr. Youmans returned to Madison and served as chair of physiology in the Medical School from 1952 to 1971 and remained active in scholarly activities through 1976 as emeritus professor of physiology. That year, Dr. Youmans retired to Port Angeles, Washington, with his wife Cynthia. Dr. Youmans lived to the age of 96 and died in Columbia, Missouri, on November 10, 2006.

Throughout his long and distinguished professional career, Bill was highly regarded for the depth and breadth of physiological expertise, not only as a teacher and lecturer, but also as an investigator. His scientific work addressed a broad range of physiological topics, including cardiac rhythmicity and electrophysiology, gastrointestinal and respiratory control, effects of catecholamines on heart rate, contractility, and blood pressure, to name just a few. His approach to research was strongly influenced by his PhD mentor, Walter M. Meek, chair of the Department of Physiology in Madison until 1948. Professor Meek gained fame for his experiments with Professor J.A.E. Eyster that established the sinoatrial node as the normal site of origin for the cardiac action potential and the conduction of the heartbeat. It is noteworthy that a paper by Youmans and Meek (1937) describing reflex inhibition of gastrointestinal reflexes was referenced as recently as 2003 in a paper published in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*.

Professor Youmans was the author of more than 90 peer-reviewed articles dealing with physiology and pharmacology, as well as six textbooks that to this day occupy a place of prominence in the first floor conference room of the physiology department. His last citation in PubMed, U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, was a treatise on the discoverer of circulation of the blood, published in 1997 when Dr. Youmans was 87 years of age.

Professor Youmans realized and appreciated the rich history of the Department of Physiology and the challenge to maintain the high level of expectation when he took over as chair in 1952. By that time, over thirty-eight PhD degrees had been awarded since the department’s founding. As he points out in an essay published in *The Physiologist* that describes the first medical physiologists at the University of Wisconsin, at least thirteen PhD recipients went on to receive MD degrees, sixteen became professors, eight were appointed as department chairs, others went on to direct research or pharmaceutical companies, or acted as presidents of the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics and the American Association for Advancement of Science.

Professor Youmans had a passion for educating medical students in physiology. He placed great value in being able to teach effectively and enthusiastically in several areas of physiology; members of the Department of Physiology were molded in that tradition for many years. He went so far as to encourage and support several of them to attain medical degrees to add to their PhD degrees so that clinical applications could be incorporated into their teaching of basic principles of physiology. His promotion of excellence in teaching evidently succeeded because several members of his department, recipients of MDs and PhDs in the Department of Physiology during his years at the university, were selected by the first-year medical students to receive the Medical School’s Golden Apple teaching award.

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Even in retirement, Professor Youmans remained an educator and a stickler for accuracy and precision. In the News from Senior Physiologists section of *The Physiologist*, Volume 28, 1983, he described his life in retirement but could not resist complaining about laxity of expression in contemporary physiology textbooks. His obituary notes that after moving to a nursing home following the death of his wife, he instructed the staff concerning the symptoms of his congestive heart failure, informing them that he had written textbooks on the subject.

The many students, faculty colleagues and medical professionals who benefited from his devotion to excellence will remember Dr. William B. Youmans with great respect.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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