

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

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS JOHN ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG JR.

Professor Emeritus John Alexander Armstrong Jr., of the political science department, died on February 23, 2010, at San Marco Terrace, Florida.

He was born in St. Augustine, Florida on May 4, 1922, the first of three children for Maria Virginia Hernandez of St. Augustine and John A. Armstrong of Jacksonville. He attended public schools in Jacksonville, graduating from Robert E. Lee High School in 1940.

After a short course at Massey's Business College, he worked for the Florida Dry Cleaning and Laundry Board and, later, the U.S. Corps of Engineers, while saving money for college. He began studies at the University of Chicago in 1942 but was inducted in the Army in November, serving with the 514th Engineer Depot in Liege, Belgium, during 1944-45.

He earned the PhB and MA degrees from Chicago, then returned to Europe in 1949 as a member of that university's mission to the University of Frankfurt, Germany. In 1950 he enrolled at Columbia University, where he received his PhD in public law and government and the Certificate of the Russian Institute in 1953. Research for his dissertation on Ukrainian nationalism during World War II involved interviews with Ukrainians, Germans and other participants, as well as analysis of German documents. This was published in 1955 as *Ukrainian Nationalism*, with subsequent editions in 1963 and 1990.

John Armstrong joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin political science department in 1954. His early productivity was remarkable as he switched his scholarly interest to the Soviet Union. He published three influential monographs in seven years: *The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite* (1959); *The Politics of Totalitarianism* (1961); and *Ideology, Politics and Government in the Soviet Union* (1962). These volumes established Professor Armstrong as a leading Soviet scholar, and, as the titles imply, a fierce opponent of Soviet regimes. He was promoted from assistant to full professor in six years.

During these years, and for many years after, Armstrong was instrumental in building programs in Russian, Eastern European, and Slavic studies at the university. In 1958, with renowned Russian history professor Michael Petrovich, he started the Russian Area Studies Program. That program was expanded to the Russian and Eastern European Program in the 1960s, which was the precursor of the current Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies (CREECA). At times he served as chair of these programs.

His teaching not only contributed to the field of comparative politics, with specialized courses in Russian and Eastern Europe, but he also taught the large and popular course in American foreign policy. That course was taught every other year by radical historian William Appleton Williams. Thus, during those years of growing interest on campus in politics and social movements, students had a choice of two very different views of American foreign policy, taught by two internationally distinguished scholars, who also talked to each other.

As the behavioral revolution swept political science in the 1960s and beyond, led by American politics, Armstrong accepted the challenge of a more rigorous scholarship in terms of classification, precise definitions, and exacting research statements and questions, but drew the line short of the movement in American politics. He stated in his memoir that he refused "to relinquish my increasing number of PhD students to the extreme behaviorists."

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His own research continued to flourish, following increasing historical and geographically expansive lines of inquiry. His scholarly approach was that of the historical archivist, mixed with extensive field work. He accomplished this with the aid of fluency in French, German, Russian and Ukrainian. His skills, dedication and wide perspective, led to two magnificent, far reaching volumes, *The European Administrative Elite*, published in 1973; and what the department considered in its departmental history his “magnum opus,” *Nations Before Nationalism* appearing in 1982. Throughout his career he contributed numerous articles to professional journals and anthology chapters arising from many conference volumes. His international reputation and standing in the Russian and Eastern scholarship naturally led to many PhD students coming to Madison to study with Armstrong. A number of those students are currently senior leaders in their fields and departments.

The department nearly lost Armstrong early in his career when he accepted an offer from the University of California, Berkeley. He had already sold his house to now Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson and zoologist Seymour Abrahamson when Berkeley reneged on its offer; happily for the department, Armstrong thus remained and completed his distinguished career in Madison.

In his memoir, Armstrong makes the arresting claim that he was the first Roman Catholic to hold a faculty appointment in the social sciences; in our research for our departmental history, we could find nothing to refute this theory and we are quite certain he was the first Catholic member of the political science faculty. His Irish-Hispanic (Minorcan) ancestry contributed to his devotion to Catholicism and to numerous trips to Mediterranean cities, where he enjoyed photographing early Christian mosaics and Islamic architecture.

His opposition to what he considered a totalitarian Soviet state put him at odds with the liberal students and campus protests of the 1960s and 1970s. Those students were undoubtedly unaware of the bomb shelter he constructed in his home following the Cuban Missile Crisis—a shelter kept fully stocked and proudly displayed to their frequent dinner guests. John and Annette were also very proud of their three daughters, with John especially pleased that he taught them all “how to shoot.”

Professor Armstrong retired from the university in 1986, returning to his native Florida, living as one might expect, in the historic city of his birth, St. Augustine. His career was part of the rise of the Wisconsin political science department to national recognition and top-ten standing. He will be missed by those who knew him and those who have come after who benefit from his lifelong contributions.

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