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Lasting Impact

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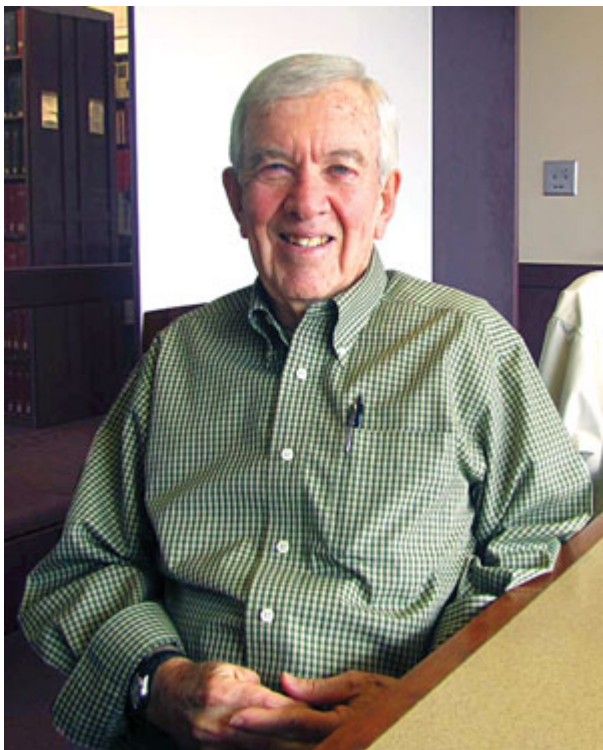
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Hess's legacy as professor and administrator is remembered



Interviewed by University Archivist Meg Miner in 2011, Hess (above) said he was drawn to Illinois Wesleyan because of the close relationships it fosters between faculty and students. (Photo by Meg Miner)

Emeritus Professor Wendell Hess died April 3 at the age of 79. He was the University's first provost and a former acting president.

"Wendell's commitment to the University was enduring, and we are saddened by his sudden passing," said President Richard F. Wilson in a message to the campus community. He called Hess "one of our longest serving and most loyal faculty members and administrators."

Hess made a lasting impact on the University during his 27-year career, including spearheading efforts to convert Buck Memorial Library into a campus technology center. In 2012, he and his wife gifted the University with the Wendell and Loretta Hess Endowed Professorship in Chemistry.

Hess joined IWU's chemistry faculty as an assistant professor in 1963. Six years later, he was named the Century Club Honoree, the University's highest honor for teaching excellence. Over the course of his career, he held various leadership positions, including chemistry department chair, director of science programs, associate dean and dean of the University. In 1987, Hess was named Illinois Wesleyan's first provost and served as acting president the following year while a search was conducted for a successor to President Wayne Anderson.

IWU Board of Trustees Chair George Vinyard '71 recalled his time in Hess's Chemistry 101 course, calling Hess a "great teacher and administrator who contributed mightily to decades of consistent excellence and improvement at Illinois Wesleyan University." Jane Snell Copes '70, who went on to become a senior chemist, said Hess "is the reason that I'm a scientist. I still have (and use) my lab notebook from general chemistry."

Even non-science majors recalled Hess's approachable demeanor, which inspired their own passions for science through his popular "Man and Molecules" class. "One of his goals was to make science understandable," said Karl Bruhn '72, who studied music. "His style was always relaxed, but inspiring. He was one of the teachers at IWU who inspired me to be a teacher."

Hess worked as an adhesive chemist and nuclear reactor engineer before earning his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. In describing what drew him to IWU, Hess said in a 2011 interview, "I wanted to get to know the students as people, and I wanted to help them meet their aspirations, as a colleague more than a distant faculty member. So I was always drawn to the students, and I thought Wesleyan had then and still does have a tremendous student body." Hess added, "I think advising and rapport in the classroom and out of the classroom and through student organizations was one of the great things for me."

In addition to students, Hess inspired faculty colleagues such as Ram Mohan, who is the current Wendell and Loretta Hess Professor of Chemistry.

"He has been a source of inspiration for me and encouraged me to aim high in research and teaching," Mohan said. "He will be deeply missed but his positive impact on the department has left indelible marks that will remain with us for a long time to come."

In addition to his work at IWU, Hess was active in the Bloomington-Normal community, serving on the board of the Wesley United Methodist Church and as president of the Board of Trustees of The Baby Fold. In 2011, he was named "Citizen of the Year" by the Town of Normal.

He is survived by his wife; his two children, David and Cara, and three grandchildren.