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45 Years of Dedication

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45 Years of Dedication

44 Years of Dedication

Muyi Yang

Dear friends:

Professor Robert Leekley's retirement is upon us. The date we have feared, yet anticipated.

Arriving at Illinois Wesleyan in 1974, Professor Leekley earned a bachelor's degree from Carleton College in 1967, and a master's degree and doctorate from Michigan State University in 1968 and 1974, respectively. Ever since joining the Economics Department at Illinois Wesleyan University, Professor Leekley has been an esteemed member of the faculty for 44 years.

An outstanding economist, Professor Leekley actually started off as a college student studying chemistry and physics. Professor Leekley took his first economics class as a Gen-Ed requirement and discovered its appeal. Taking another economics class later in his sophomore year along with a chemistry class finally made him realize his true passion about economics because "it has the rigor of chemistry and physics but is more applicable to the real world and human beings."

Among several prominent projects, it is worth mentioning of two pieces of works by Professor Leekley. The first one is his scholarly contribution of *Multiple Out-*

puts and Community Choice in Public Education that was accepted by and published in *Economic Inquiry, Journal of the Western Economic Association*, Volume XVIII, Number 3, July 1980. However, despite Professor Leekley's interest in topics of economics about higher education, he became aware of the inconsistent research in this subject. Some people use one method and demonstrate that class size significantly influences the academic outcome of students, while other scholars find opposite conclusions via a different approach. These inconsistent findings seemed to Professor Leekley that "if you try hard enough, any factor can become important." Consequently Professor Leekley shifted his research interests to statistics and data analysis.

The second project took place after Professor Leekley came to Illinois Wesleyan teaching classes like Intermediate Microeconomics, Applied Econometrics, and Introductory Statistics. During this period, Professor Leekley became increasingly aware of the shortcomings of textbooks for applied statistics.

"I felt textbooks in this field were headed in the wrong direction," said Professor Leekley from his office in the Center for Liberal Arts on campus. "They were increasingly written so that instructors could pick and choose

topics in any order they pleased. That might seem desirable, but then students lose any sense of continuity.”

To solve this problem, Professor Leekley authored his own textbook titled *Applied Statistics for Business and Economics* to use in class, which was published in 2010.

Besides writing his own text book, Professor Leekley also contributed to establishing a statistics class which is based on data and the use of Excel. “Statistics is really just a few key ideas applied differently to different data,” Professor Leekley said. “My goal for the textbook was to bring out the connections.”

In addition to these two extraordinary achievements, Professor Leekley has supervised many senior and Honors Research papers in economics. Having suffered through big classes with several hundred students during his graduate school period, he specifically chose to teach at a liberal arts college with a low student-faculty ratio, dedicated to providing more engaging and approaching learning experience. “The research topics of many senior and Honors Research papers used to be graduate level research in my time. It’s very cool,” he laughed in his office on the 3rd floor of State Farm Hall.

Not only an excellent educator and academic, Professor Leekley is also an admirable colleague. “Very support-

ive, extremely approachable,” described by Professor Ilaria Ossella-Durbal, another economics professor at IWU who has been working with Professor Leekley for almost two decades. “He gave me so much help throughout the years, advising me both on teaching but also on administrative affairs during my time as department chair. I have so many good memories from working with him.”

On a final note, Professor Leekley has also served on the faculty advising committee of *The Park Place Economist* since Volume 4, 1996. It is with the commitment of Professor Leekley to the success of students that helped *The Park Place Economist* to be an extraordinary platform for undergraduate students at Illinois Wesleyan University to publish their original researches.

It was our fortune to have Professor Leekley with us here at Illinois Wesleyan University for more than four decades and he will be greatly missed. We wish him a very pleasant new chapter after his retirement.