Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Neil M. Ford

Neil M. Ford, Emeritus Professor of Marketing in the Wisconsin School of Business, passed away on October 14th at the Columbia Health Care Center in Wyocena, Wisconsin, at the age of 88. He received his Bachelor’s degree from Southern Illinois University, his Master’s degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1961, and his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1966.

Neil accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Marketing in the Wisconsin School of Business in 1966, and was subsequently promoted to Associate Professor with tenure and Full Professor. He was Chair of the Marketing Department for several years, and served the School of Business and the University in many other capacities. For instance, he worked closely for many years with Mu Kappa Tau, the undergraduate marketing society. In this role, he helped introduce students to the marketing profession and gave them exposure to industry experts. As an educator, Neil was deeply committed to his students, not only by imparting marketing knowledge, but also by finding ways to enhance their employment opportunities.

Within the marketing area, Neil’s research was focused on different aspects of sales management. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Neil, together with his co-authors Gilbert Churchill and Orville Walker, developed this research area more or less from scratch. While sales management had always been a key part of many firms’ marketing programs, the area historically lacked a systematic empirical foundation and well-grounded conceptual frameworks. Neil and his colleagues, through a series of impactful articles and a highly acclaimed textbook, brought rigor and focus to the sales management area. In doing so, they opened up research opportunities for generations of younger scholars who followed in their footsteps. His work continues to be used extensively and it is highly cited. An example of this is his Journal of Marketing Research article (1985) on “The Determinants of Salesperson Performance: A Meta-Analysis” which has received 1688 Google Scholar citations.

In addition to his substantive work, his research made several methodological contributions to the area of survey research. This line of work reflected his doctoral training; in particular his work with Professor Robert Ferber in the Survey Research Center at the University of Illinois.

Neil was an impactful and popular classroom instructor. He taught Sales Management and Marketing Strategy in the School’s undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs, and his teaching had a profound impact on many students’ lives and careers. A strong testimony to his impact is the large number of students that kept in touch with him over the years.

In the marketing department, Neil was a cherished colleague and a highly effective department chair. His sense of humor was legendary, and he was always available to offer his colleagues advice and support. He was an enormously positive influence and a great contributor to departmental morale.

Neil retired from the Wisconsin School of Business in 1996, but remained active in his community, among others as a member of the Columbia County Board of Supervisors. He also served on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired. In everything he did, Neil was a selfless contributor to the greater good. He touched a lot of people, and he will be deeply missed.

Memorial Resolution Committee:
Jack Nevin
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