Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor and Dean Emeritus Harland E. Samson

Harland Samson, Professor Emeritus of Continuing and Vocational Education and Dean Emeritus of Summer and Inter-College Programs, passed away on September 10, 2019 at the age of 90.

He was born September 30, 1928 in rural Minnesota and attended high school in nearby Rochester. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the Air Force for three years. Following military service, he completed an undergraduate teaching degree in distributive (now marketing) education at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. He developed and taught high school marketing courses in Garrison, North Dakota between 1953-55 before joining the faculty at the University of Northern Iowa. While teaching at University of Northern Iowa (1955-1963), he also completed his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota (1964) and served for a year as the acting state marketing education consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Instruction.

In the fall of 1963, he joined the University of Wisconsin faculty with a special assignment -- to launch the first Wisconsin program in marketing teacher education. Initially, he taught courses in the School of Business, while also developing marketing education courses as a faculty member in the then recently-created Department of Educational Policy Studies in the School of Education. The federal Vocational Education Act of 1963 created incentives for high schools and community colleges to offer multiple career pathway programs beyond agriculture, home economics, and trade and industrial education. To advance the emerging field of marketing education in Wisconsin high schools and technical institutes (now colleges), Dr. Samson delivered most of his teaching certification courses statewide via the Educational Telephone Network (ETN). Through his advanced and extensive use of the ETN, he was one of early pioneers in the development of distance learning at the university level. For numerous fields of study, his work was an exemplar for the integration of campus-based undergraduate and graduate instruction with the university’s outreach mission. These early marketing and vocational teacher education efforts served as a catalyst and foundation for the leadership roles he later undertook in School of Education and for the campus.

His colleagues and graduate students concur that he was the most significant ‘thought leader’ in marketing education as the field was developing from the late 1960s to the 1990s. Through writing, advising, and consulting his scholarship shaped the foundations of, specialties within, and the delineation of best practices in marketing education. His scholarship informed the development of marketing education standards and program outcome assessments in the Wisconsin technical institutes and colleges for several decades.

Through his textbooks and teacher education initiatives, Harland played a leading role in defining and developing marketing education courses and programs nationally over two decades. The 5th edition of his widely-used Retail Merchandising text was published in 1993. His other textbooks, which anchored courses in advertising and visual merchandising, were also adopted for use in high schools nationally.

Harland’s PhD graduates are widely regarded as some of the leaders in education. Through his commitment to career-long mentoring, they served as: professors at leading research institutions, presidents of community and technical colleges, leaders in other college and university settings,
and program or agency leaders in state departments or boards of education. Many of their professional contributions echoed or reflected in some way the key role of cooperative education and workplace learning championed in Harland’s scholarship.

His commitment to advancing educational practice reached beyond marketing education. With support from the WI Department of Public Instruction, in the summer of 1965 he conducted a 6-week pilot program to prepare 30 high school local principals, vocational education coordinators, and counselors to strengthen the design and implementation of career pathway programs, as required by recently enacted federal legislation. After more than 25 years of sustained efforts, in 1990 Professor Samson conducted a landmark state-wide assessment of vocational education in Wisconsin high schools, which generated several major recommendations (e.g., broadening the purpose to include preparation for college and continuing education, strengthening local program leadership). For more than a decade, these recommendations directly informed major improvements in Wisconsin high school offerings and high school-technical college partnerships.

Harland’s early and effective use of distance learning technology in adult, continuing, and extension education demonstrated to others his exemplary academic leadership expertise. In 1974-75, he chaired the newly established Department of Continuing and Vocational Education – one of the UW’s first Inter-College departments. Soon thereafter, Dean John Palmer invited him to be an associate dean responsible for the School of Education’s summer session programs and the expanding continuing education efforts with UW-Extension. In 1984, following his campus-wide assessment study of summer sessions, Chancellor Irving Shane invited Harland to serve as Dean of Summer and Inter-College Programs, a position he held until retiring in 1993.

Harland and his wife of 67 years Faye Finley Samson (who passed away May 20, 2020) had a deep and abiding love affair with the University, as demonstrated by their commitment to students pursuing teaching and leadership roles, which they deemed important for schools and colleges. In the 1990s, Harland guided the establishment of the UW Foundation’s Roy Fairbrother Fellowship fund. For decades, he mentored technical college and high school marketing instructors through continuing education experiences (usually in the summer), which enhanced their capacity to continuously upgrade their programs and instruction. In 2000, the Samsons established a scholarship for returning adult undergraduate students majoring in secondary or post-secondary science education.

Dr. Samson is survived by three sons: Craig, Lee, and Kirk and their families. His generosity of spirit, curiosity, perpetual energy, and focus on leading innovation will be missed by his family, as well as a wide circle of friends and colleagues.

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