Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus David B. Slautterback

David B. Slautterback, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Anatomy in the UW Medical School (now the UW School of Medicine & Public Health), passed away at the age of 93 on March 28, 2020 in Madison, Wisconsin.

Professor Slautterback was born on July 15, 1926 in Indianapolis, Indiana and grew up in Benton Harbor and later in Fremont, Michigan. He graduated from Fremont High School in 1943 and two weeks later enrolled in the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Professor Slautterback enlisted in the United States Army during World War II. He was on a train en route to the west coast to board a military transport to the Pacific when he heard that Japan had surrendered. He arrived in Manila one month later and worked in a medical dispensary in the Philippines until his discharge in 1948.

Professor Slautterback completed his B.S (1948) and M.S. (1949) degrees in Zoology at the University of Michigan. These experiences accelerated his lifelong interest in the study of cells, cell physiology, and cell differentiation. His Master’s thesis research focused on cancer cells, an interest that stemmed from his grandmother’s death from breast cancer. He then pursued research for a year at the Werner-Grens Institute for Cell Physiology in Stockholm, Sweden. Upon his return to the States, he was the first graduate student in a new program developed jointly by Cornell University Medical College and Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute in New York City, where he received his Ph.D. in Anatomy on June 9, 1952. He subsequently received a postdoctoral fellowship from the American Cancer Society.

On June 10, 1952 David Slautterback and Marilyn Clarke were married. The couple had met three months after his arrival at Sloan-Kettering where Marilyn, a graduate of Wellesley College, worked in a technical position. They shared 60 years of marriage, until her death in 2012, and together raised four children.

Dr. Slautterback taught Human Gross Anatomy and Histology and continued his research in the Department of Anatomy at NYU Medical School and Cornell University Medical School. After a number of years in New York City, Dr. Slautterback looked to return to the Midwest.

A chance meeting with Dr. John Anderson, a faculty member at UW-Madison, ultimately led to a position in 1959 as an Assistant Professor at the UW Medical School. An esteemed colleague, Dr. Harland Mossman was very supportive of Dr. Slautterback’s research, and he welcomed the opportunity to join Dr. Mossman in the Department of Anatomy. Professor Slautterback became deeply involved in teaching, research, and administrative leadership at UW-Madison over the next decades. He taught Gross Anatomy and Histology for many years and set up the new electron microscopy facility. He served as Chair of the Department of Anatomy from 1967 to 1982. After stepping down as departmental chair, Dr. Slautterback spent a year as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University.

In the 1950s Professor Slautterback was among the first biologists to apply electron microscopy, with its increasingly improved visualization of ultrastructural details, to the study of biological tissues. His research led to significant advancements in our understanding of the structure and function of cell organelles and membranes. In his seminal studies on Hydra, he provided the first
full description of rod-shaped intracellular structures, which he called “microtubules.” Microtubules are now recognized as ubiquitous cellular structures essential for myriad functions related to cell shape, division, and intracellular transport. Dr. Slatterback was also the first to identify and characterize subcellular isolates now known as endoplasmic reticulum, which is the site for protein synthesis in the cell. He continued to work over the course of his career to advance the development and refinement of electron microscopy as a key tool for studying biological systems. He also trained several doctoral students, one of whom, the late Allen Clark, went on to become a faculty member in the UW Department of Anatomy. Before his own passing, Professor Clark characterized Dr. Slatterback as inspirational, and personally highly supportive both as thesis mentor and later as his chair.

Upon his retirement from the university in 1994, Professor Slaatterback became involved with several organizations focused on improving health care and long-term care. These included the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) for which he served as an advocate and chief lobbyist, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and the Long-Term Care Advisory Council. He was active in the First United Methodist Church where he chaired the Committee for the Lyons Lectureship in Theology and was a founding member of the Faith and Reason group. He also worked on behalf of the Madison Institute, the Media Reform Group, and the United Nations Association. His lifelong enjoyment of the arts was evident in his service as Senior Docent at the Madison Arts Center and the Elvehjem Museum in Madison.