

One of Willamette's originals is retiring

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Bruce Gates is handsome, charming and witty, not exactly what one would expect of a professor of quantitative methods. Students gravitate toward his office, conveniently located just outside the student lounge in the Atkinson Graduate School of Management at Willamette University, to learn the nuances of statistical analysis.

"He's been a very popular faculty member," says Russell Yost, the director of marketing for the school and one of Gates' former students. "With his personality, even statistics is interesting."

Gates, 64, is retiring this semester, marking the end of an era. He is the last of the original faculty who launched the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) program in 1974.

He remembers when classes were held in another building, above the band room, and he had to lecture over the din of tubas and drums. Back when professors taught classes, interacted with the community, helped students find jobs and recruited new students.

"Now we have people who do that," Gates says. "As a result, the job's not as much fun."

Gates likes to have fun, whether it's raising his two young daughters or sailing the 14-foot boat he crafted with his own two hands.

Photographs of his girls, Stephanie and Chloe, adorn the office wall he faces sitting at his desk. He is divorced but shares custody. He glows when he talks about outings with his girls, like the time the three of them went to Claire's at Salem Center and he got his left ear pierced after turning 60.

"Chloe held my hand," Gates remembers. "She was 3, and said, 'It won't hurt, Daddy.'"

He looks forward to creating more special memories with them in retirement, with plans to volunteer at their schools and teach them to sail.

A governor's invitation

He will, of course, miss being a fixture at Willamette, where he



ANDREA J. WRIGHT | Statesman Journal
Professor Bruce Gates, the last of the original faculty who launched Willamette University's MBA program in 1974, is retiring this semester.

Bruce Gates

Age: 64

Residence: Salem

Family: Divorced, with two daughters, Stephanie, 13; and Chloe, 6

Education: Bachelor's degree in engineering, Princeton University, 1966; doctorate in public and international affairs, University of Pittsburgh, 1971

Hobbies: Sailing the 14-foot boat he built. A skilled woodworker, he hopes to get involved with Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization that builds houses for families in need.

Commencement

Willamette University commencement ceremonies will take place Sunday on the Salem campus. No tickets are needed for attendance at any of the four ceremonies:

Atkinson Graduate School of Management, 9:30 a.m., Hudson Hall

School of Education, 11 a.m., Smith Auditorium

has spent more than half his life. He was 29 when he took the job in the Atkinson school.

He had taught three years at Syracuse University, in what was called the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Before that, he was a scholar-athlete at Princeton University, playing wingback on the football team. He likes to note that the Tigers were ranked 11th in the nation and won 17 consecutive games during his junior and senior years.

"I wear an orange and black tie, and people think Oregon State," Gates says, referring to school colors also worn with pride at Princeton.

He was trained as an aeronautical engineer and had his sights set on working for NASA, but soon decided the field wasn't for him.

"I hated it," Gates says. "It was the least creative thing I've ever done."

He went to graduate school on a fellowship from NASA, received a doctorate in public and international affairs, then accepted the job at Syracuse. When the opportunity arose to come West and start a new school of management, he was more than eager to leave the harsh winters of New York.

The first person Gates remembers speaking to about the school was Wally Carson, then a state senator and member of Willamette's Board of Trustees.

"I went, 'Wow, if they have people like him, it's where I want to go,' " Gates says.

But to hear founding dean Steven Archer tell it, Gates took his time accepting the offer.

"While we were waiting to hear from him — it was delayed and delayed — I finally went to Governor McCall and asked if he would send Bruce a note saying it was all right to come to Oregon," Archer says with a chuckle. "Soon after that, Bruce said OK."

McCall, for those who might not know or remember, was famous for his "Visit, but don't stay" sentiment.

Gates wishes he still had the letter, on official letterhead with the state seal, but it presumably was lost during one of many moves.

"It meant a ton to this East Coast boy," he says. "It said a lot about Archer's influence."

Gates was one of four associate professors hired by Archer that first year.

"He was the only public administration person who had a strong background in quantitative skills and statistics and that sort of thing," says Archer, who retired from Willamette in 1996 and now lives in Vancouver, Wash.

The other original faculty members were Jann Carpenter, Marc Choate and Russell Petersen. Choate retired in 2003, leaving Gates as the last remaining link.

All were lured by the challenge of starting a school from scratch, especially one that merged students interested in business administration with those interested in public administration.

Most MBA programs "forsake or eschew the public sector," Gates says. "If they don't, it's given subservient status. We've made it front and center and done everything we can to make it equivalent. Management is management, regardless of where it's done."

Leaving a legacy

The future of the school was a bit shaky in the early days. Gates remembers the time the university librarian arrived with students and carts and hauled off the contents of the school's library, perceived to be an ominous sign.

But Willamette had a reputation for its law school back then, and Gates says the MBA program "parlayed that into a mutual flurry of interest."

Today, Atkinson has a well-earned reputation of its own, with 15 faculty members and an enrollment of 236 students in both the full-time and professional programs. It is one of only two MBA programs in the world accredited for both business and public administration. The Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, Calif., is the other.

"That's a big deal," Gates says. "It's also a ton of work. There's a lot of overhead, and here we are this tiny little school."

The accreditation process puts pressure on professors to do research, he says, taking them away from the classroom. And that's where Gates thrives.

Archer was never surprised by Gates' popularity among students.

"He doesn't talk down to them. He relates directly to them," Archer says.

Retirement means Gates will have to sever most of those ties, although he hopes to continue to teach one course per semester.

"The saddest part will be not interacting with students every day," he says.

Gates leaves a legacy at Atkinson. The school announced during his retirement party that an endowed scholarship was being established in his name, with a lead donation of \$25,000 collected from alumni, faculty and staff.

He is honored by the gesture, and thankful for a 34-year career at the university.

But being a father is the only job on his mind now.

Gates is eager to spend more time with his daughters and more time on his sailboat, which he christened "Mi Dos Chicas," Spanish for "My Two Girls."

"I'm having the time of my life," he says.

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