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Tribute to Professor Peter M. Gerhart

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I will remember Peter for his smile. He always had a smile when we would meet. He had what I call the “happy gene.” But it was more than a smile. If you had a problem, he would make time for you. He went out of his way to help Sue and me when we needed help.

I knew Peter first as a dean, then as a colleague, and finally as a good friend. When Peter was dean, I worked closely with him as the Chair of the Promotion and Tenure Committee. Peter was very conscientious. He read everything. He also helped colleagues who had writer’s block. Later, I served as Chair of the Appointments Committee. Again, Peter was thorough and thoughtful. He recruited some of our best colleagues.

One of his main attributes, as a dean and then as a colleague, was high standards. He was always consistent on this score. I saw him handle some very difficult situations as dean—with both faculty and students. He would not compromise on standards. But he explained his position with grace and calmness.

When he stepped down as dean, I wondered how he would do. He was about fifty and didn’t have time to write when he was dean. But he made the transition, producing the groundbreaking scholarship that others have noted.

He was a good friend. I will miss the smile.

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