



Dennis G. Peters

April 17, 1937 - April 13, 2020

Dennis G. Peters, Herman T. Briscoe Professor of Chemistry at Indiana University, Bloomington, passed away on April 13, 2020, a few days short of his 83rd birthday.

Born in Eagle Rock, CA, in 1937, Peters pursued a degree in Chemistry first at Caltech, receiving a B.S. in 1958. He then attended Harvard, where he obtained a doctorate in 1963. He immediately began his academic career at Indiana University, where he has served since.

Peters was renowned as a chemical educator, having received all the local awards for education available on the Bloomington campus. Included are the Ulysses G. Weatherly Award for Distinguished Teaching (1969), the Herman T. Briscoe Professorship (1975), and the College of Arts and Sciences–Graduate School Award for Distinguished Teaching (1984)—all three distinctions for teaching at the highest level. In April, 1995 and again in April, 2000, Prof. Peters received the Favorite Faculty Award from the Indiana University Chapter of Alpha Lambda Delta. In 1997, 1999, and 2000, he received a Teaching Excellence Recognition Award from the IU Board of Trustees. This award was later replaced with the IU Trustees Teaching Award, which he won in 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2010. In 2017 he received the inaugural David and Cheryl Morley Career Distinguished Teaching Award, which recognizes a lifetime of contributions to the academic mission of the

Chemistry Department at IU.

Peters also won a host of national awards, including the Chemical Manufacturers Association National Catalyst Award in 1988 and the ACS Analytical Chemistry Division Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1990. He was the 2001 recipient of the James Flack Norris Award, presented by the Northeastern Section of the ACS, for Outstanding Achievement in the Teaching of Chemistry and the 2002 winner of the Henry B. Linford Award, presented by The Electrochemical Society, for Distinguished Teaching. Most recently, he was presented the 2020 Roland F. Hirsch Award for Distinguished Service in the Advancement of Analytical Chemistry by ACS Division of Analytical Chemistry.

Peters has had a profound impact on education at Indiana University, and was universally liked and admired by students, faculty, and non-academic staff alike. He taught more than 15,000 students in a classroom setting since 1962. In the laboratory, 43 graduate students, 45 undergraduates, and 31 high school students have studied with him; indeed, many of his publications list undergraduates as co-authors.

Since 1982, Prof. Peters has directed the chemistry component of the Advance College Project, a program in which Indiana University cooperates with high schools throughout Indiana to offer university-level courses in general chemistry. These courses are taught by superior high school teachers to qualified high school juniors and seniors, who earn college credit. Thousands of high school chemistry students have benefited from this program. In addition, Prof. Peters served for more than 26 years as a lecturer and research mentor in the IU NSF-supported summer science institute for high school students.

In 1986, Peters invited 26 high school chemistry teachers to Indiana

University to discuss problems centering on the curricular content of high school chemistry courses, the operation of laboratory courses, the selection and procurement of textbooks and other materials, and laboratory safety. One year later, he organized a meeting in Indianapolis attended by more than 200 high school and college chemistry teachers from Indiana. On the basis of that meeting, Prof. Peters, with assistance from three other educators, founded the Indiana Alliance of Chemistry Teachers (I-ACT).

For many years, during the IU Chemistry Department celebration of National Chemistry Week, Prof. Peters conducted an extremely popular program of demonstrations, called the "Magic of Chemistry," attended by several hundred elementary, middle, and high school students and their parents. On other occasions, he performed this program for groups such as the Boy Scouts and the Indiana Science Olympiad.

Peters was the principal author and driving force behind the highly regarded text "Chemical Separations and Measurements: Theory and Practice of Analytical Chemistry", one of his five textbooks that in total have sold more than 120,000 copies.

Research pursued by Peters and his 119 graduated research-group members centered on organic electrochemistry, most recently involving metal-salen complexes. These studies resulted in more than 215 publications, which were recognized by The Electrochemical Society in 2012 with the Manuel M. Baizer Award in Organic Electrochemistry.

Seemingly mild-mannered and physically unimposing, Peters possessed a booming voice and a lecturing style that could not fail to win students over. He was also surprisingly competitive, especially on the racquetball court, where his aggressive style usually resulted in victory. He was generous with his time

and knowledge and assisted many of his junior colleagues in the most effective style of writing lectures, journal articles, and research grant proposals. Each year, he voluntarily prepared and presented a multi-lecture short course on effective scientific writing, a series that was routinely attended by both faculty and students. Generous also with his personal resources, he was named for the 2019 Old Crescent Award from IU, intended to celebrate individuals whose exceptional philanthropy creates a lasting impact, empowering students and faculty of today and tomorrow in equal measure. He was truly loved and admired, and will be missed by so many.

Prof. Peters is survived by his nephew Ruben Portugues, living in Germany, and by his niece Iliana Portugues who lives in the UK. Both became scientists, in no small measure, due to the interesting stories and demonstrations from their uncle, his kindness and genuineness, his passion for research and teaching and their summer visits to Bloomington and IU Chemistry.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory, 4155 S. Old State Road 37, Bloomington, have been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences, photos, and memories may be shared with family and friends at www.allencares.com

Tribute Wall

MS

“ *Dr. Peters is a well-remembered teacher and mentor from my education at Indiana University. He was instrumental in helping to set curriculum for us teachers to get better educated in the newer developments of chemistry that had occurred since many of us had graduated and been teaching more than 10 years. Things had changed so much and he recognized that teachers needed re-education and should receive credit for taking courses that we had passed many years ago because the information had changed so much. He was innovative in helping teachers mostly because he was such a good, dedicated teacher himself. Fondly remembered. (Class of '64 and '69)*



Mary Taylor Short - May 24, 2020 at 09:18 AM

SC

“ *I worked with Dennis as IU faculty from 1989 to 1995. He was a kind and thoughtful man, always putting others and especially students first. I'm sure he will be missed. Steve Creager*

stephen creager - May 04, 2020 at 07:55 AM

JR

“ *My heart-felt sympathy goes to the family of Dennis Peters. I retired from the Chemistry Department at IUB in 2018 and during my tenure there, Dennis was always kind, thoughtful, had a great sense of humor and one of the best teachers I had ever witnessed. He had a gift of making chemistry exciting even to the non-chemistry people. His love for his profession and for his co-workers was second to none. I feel honored to have known Dennis; he made the department a better place to work. I will never forget him.*

Judi Roberts - April 16, 2020 at 11:54 AM