

Ned Garvin, Eloquent and Enthusiastic Philosophy Professor, Dies at Age 57

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By [Morris Arvoy](#)

ALBION, Mich. – Ned Garvin, a professor of philosophy at Albion College since 1974, died at his home last night (June 14) in Albion following a battle with cancer. He was 57.

Garvin taught logic, epistemology, philosophy and cognitive science, and a seminar on Bertrand Russell, as well as introduction to philosophy. In recent years, he turned his academic interests toward neuroscience. He was instrumental in developing the College's neuroscience program and held a joint appointment in psychology.

"It's such a tragedy," said Bindu Madhok, professor and chair of philosophy and a 16-year colleague and friend of Garvin's. "He is irreplaceable in our department. I have said again and again that Ned is one of the brightest, funniest and sweetest human beings. He was so eloquent and fun to listen to—he would get us converted to many of his causes."

"The art of philosophy and of life was what Ned was all about," Madhok said. "He would have such eloquent philosophical frames to discuss his interests. His enthusiasm for life was so contagious."

In a campus-wide email, Albion College President Peter Mitchell said, "Ned was and always will be a remarkable person--passionate about life and learning, clever--even winsome--in his sense of humor, eclectic in his interests, a true friend, wonderful mentor and trusted colleague who embodied the best of the liberal arts tradition, honesty tempered with compassion, loving father and devoted husband, Renaissance man."



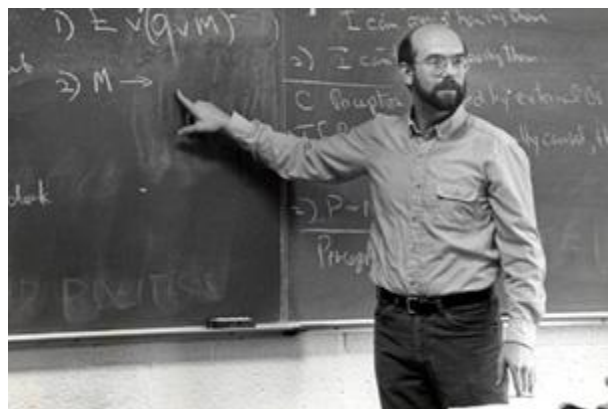
Garvin with student Rose-Anne Meissner, '03 (photo by Dave Trumpie).

Remembering Ned Garvin

A website has been created for the Albion College community to share their fond memories and remembrances with Ned's family. All visitors are welcome to submit feedback/comments to the posts on this site. To post your own remembrance and/or photos of Ned, please visit www.albion.edu/nedgarvin.



Garvin (above and below) in undated photos from the Albion College archives.



"Ned shared with family and friends how rich, full, and rewarding his life and relationships with colleagues and students and especially with his family had been," Mitchell continued. "He approached the end of his life with the same dignity and grace that marked the way he lived his life, looking for the best in every situation, constantly discerning the meaning of existence. His impact on individual students, faculty, and staff has been profound, embodying the best of the ethos of Albion College. He will be greatly missed, yet his legacy of kindness, intellectual rigor and risk taking, a deep and abiding affection for students, and a love of learning will remain to inspire all of us."

Professor of biology Jeffrey Carrier recalled professional collaborations and fond adventures with his longtime friend.

"Ned and I, of course, worked closely as colleagues at the College," Carrier said. "But what defined our close friendship was our shared passion for nature, something expected of a biologist but perhaps not so characteristic of a philosopher. Ned was as eclectic in his interests and love of the outdoors as he was in his pursuit of knowledge. Our many fishing and camping trips with Gene Cline, our motorcycle adventures, our endless hours in quest of tying the 'perfect' fly, and the times our three families spent together were treasured moments.

"Fleeting though they were, they defined a man who was gentle of spirit, meticulous in his handiwork, deeply respectful of the interests of others, and profoundly devoted to his family and friends."

Garvin earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in 1970 before moving to Boston to get his master's and Ph.D. from Boston University, completing his studies in 1974. He joined the Albion faculty the same year.

Madhok said Garvin was passionate about integrating his research on the theory of knowledge with his findings in neuroscience.

"He was interested in the whole issue of how the mind processes knowledge, and, for him, you couldn't do that without studying the brain," Madhok said. "He was one of the early forerunners of the new field as it is developing now. Ned was bringing in neuroscientific findings and shedding light on epistemology in ways that are so important in the study of the field. The field is growing already more and more in that direction, and he was doing it before anyone else. He had the vision."

On his Web site Garvin wrote, "I'm interested in naturalized epistemology and especially in the way neuroscience can (and should) constrain and inform theory of knowledge. To this end, most of my research over the last several years has been in neuroscience."

Students were always a big part of Garvin's teaching and his research, according to Madhok. He strived to involve them in research and encouraged them to develop projects of their own. Madhok noted that Garvin was one of the primary developers of the College's nationally respected Foundation for Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (FURSCA) because "Ned had done it all his life without any name on it."

“It was so natural for him to talk about what he was doing. He was always so enthusiastic and so eloquent, that he always got students involved in the classroom and in research,” Madhok said.

Garvin’s seminar on Bertrand Russell included a research trip to McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, home of the Bertrand Russell archives. He and his students conducted original research there and published some of the results of the research together in the "Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives."

“Ned was an incredibly rich guy with his amazing array of talents and interests, from neuroscience to Zydeco music to weapons to Harley Davidsons,” said Douglas Goering, professor of art and a friend of Garvin’s. “He was a great storyteller and a warm individual. Ned was such a good thinker—he was really helpful to many of us on the faculty and in the administration in thinking about issues in a systematic order. This is very tough to integrate.”

Garvin is survived by his wife, Jennifer; his sister, Laurie Banks of Sacramento, Calif.; children David Garvin of Ypsilanti, Sara Garvin of Chicago, Laurie Rowley of Albion, and Chris Rowley of Chicago, and his mother, Shirley Garvin of Albion. He was preceded in death by his father.

To honor Garvin's memory, the College and the Garvin family have established the Ned S. Garvin Scholarship in Philosophy at Albion College. Memorial gifts may be made to Albion College noting "Ned S. Garvin Scholarship in Philosophy" and mailed to Albion College Office of Institutional Advancement, 611 E. Porter Street, Albion, MI 49224.

The Garvin family is planning celebration of Garvin’s life in the form of a traditional Irish wake at their home (910 S. Superior Street in Albion) on Saturday, June 17, from 4-8. A tribute for Garvin will be held in the fall when classes resume and students return to campus.