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Smith leaves enduring legacy of wisdom, optimism

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Smith leaves enduring legacy of wisdom, optimism

GARMON BROOKS SMITH was a man who lived his profession — education.

He was a role model for the students he taught and a legend even to those he did not teach. He was ever optimistic and would greet everyone with a “Good morning!” no matter the time of day or night. He embraced every hour as an opportunity to be awakened to new experiences and insights, and he opened the world of education to his students by asking them, “What’s new in education today?” — and then telling them.

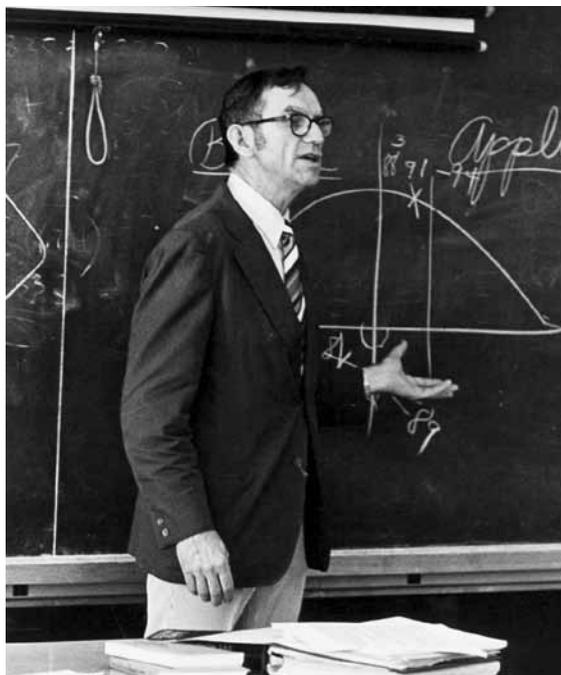
He was a man for whom the adage “What you see is what you get” was most apropos. He was straightforward, even blunt at times, and opinionated. He was wise and caring in his relationships with students and colleagues, but he never hesitated to tell someone when he thought they were on the wrong track.

A person of routine, Garmon arrived at his office in Furman Hall each day at 8 a.m., went home for lunch to eat and take a nap, then returned until 5 p.m. — unless he was teaching a night graduate class (which was every fall and spring term). He believed in wearing a tie and jacket as an example to aspiring and experienced teachers that professionalism begins with one’s attire.

Born in 1921 in Pinehurst, N.C., Garmon was educated in the public schools. He received his B.S. degree from Western Carolina University, and his master’s and doctorate from the University of North Carolina. After serving as an Air Force officer during World War II, he returned to the public schools as a secondary teacher before beginning his doctoral studies in educational administration and supervision.

From 1956 to 1968 he taught at Austin College in Sherman, Texas, where among other duties he chaired the education and psychology department, directed the graduate program, reorganized the placement bureau, and directed the summer school. In 1968, Furman students (undergraduate and graduate) became the beneficiaries of his wisdom and expertise in preparing them to become the best teachers they could be. He had high expectations, and he was always proud of his former students’ accomplishments.

In addition to his work at Furman, Garmon enhanced the spiritual



understanding of young people by teaching Sunday school at Buncombe Street United Methodist Church for many years. He also served on the board of trustees at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) as an extension of his interest in arts education and at the behest of a former student, Richard Rowan '71, the school’s founder.

When he retired from Furman in 1991, Garmon became certified as an arbitrator with the Better Business Bureau and also was trained to prepare income taxes — thus putting his “spare” time to work for the betterment of others. His avocations were gardening and fixing anything in or around his home, or those of others. His vegetables were always the most delicious and his roses the most regal one could find locally.

His death on December 12 elicited many memories and accolades from former students. One said, “I had the honor of Dr. Smith’s tutelage in his educational statistics course in the late 1970s, and now have the honor of teaching

that course myself. I refer to Dr. Smith often in my own teaching. His positive influence has impacted, and will continue in legacy, to impact thousands of students.”

Another former student stated, “He had a keen eye for character and for those in his class who were ‘characters.’ I value the lessons that he taught us, but more importantly I value the life he modeled for us. He is one of the reasons that I still enjoy going to work each day — this being my 36th year working in public education in South Carolina.”

And from another student: “The advice he shared with his students was some of the most valued and useful words of wisdom I ever received. Often while teaching I would hear Dr. Smith’s voice in my head. He was an asset to Furman, and a kind and caring professor to all of his students. He will be missed.”

Garmon Smith is survived by three sons, four grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, and a sister. Memorials: Open Arms Hospice, 1836 W. Georgia Road, Simpsonville, S.C. 29681.

— LESLEY QUAST

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