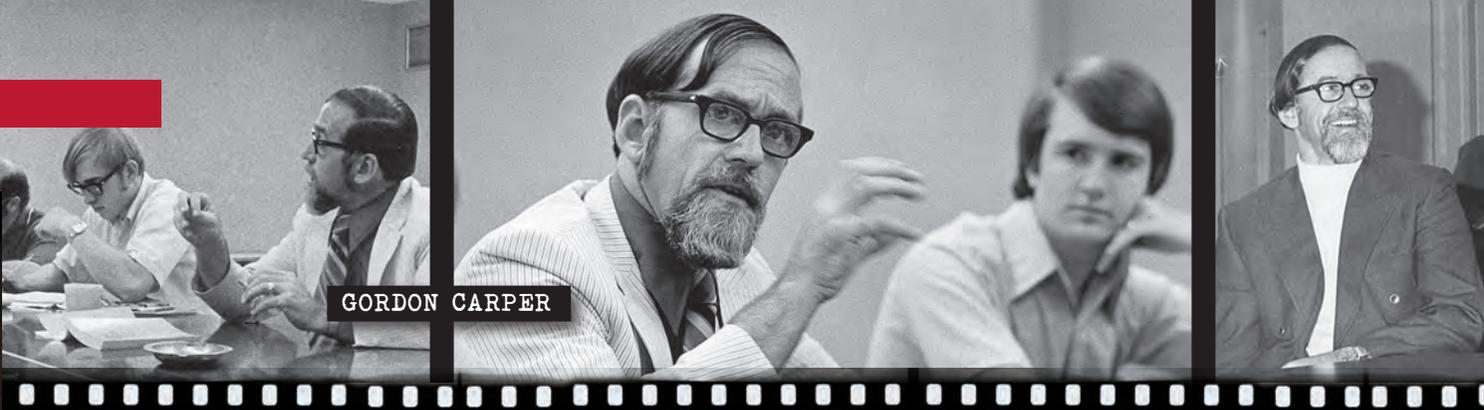




Dr. Stephen R. Briggs



A high calling

WHEN DR. GORDON CARPER, ONE OF BERRY'S LEGENDARY FACULTY MEMBERS, passed away September a year ago, four former students returned to speak at his memorial service in the Berry College Chapel: Bert Clark (82C), Greg Hanthorn (82C), Tim Howard (82C) and William Pence (76C). All four have been active in leadership at Berry, with Clark as a member of the Board of Trustees and the other three serving on the Board of Visitors or the Alumni Council. As I listened to their tributes in those consecrated moments, I found it remarkable how each had remained in touch with Carper in the decades following graduation, enjoying a relationship with him defined by mutual respect and devotion. Something profound and lasting happened during their college years with Carper, something that is the essence and epitome of a Berry education.

What is it that causes highly successful professionals to look back at their lives and credit a college teacher as being pivotal in their development as whole people? What makes a faculty member, as Clark described Carper, "a teacher in the finest sense of the word ... a teacher outside the classroom and inside ... a teacher for our entire lives, not just our formative years"?

Gordon Carper would no doubt be amused to find himself highlighted as an exemplar in this column given his sometimes vexing and volatile relationship with Berry's president in years past. In the tumultuous 1970s, he stepped to the center of controversies related to college decision making and academic freedom. As Clark described it, lest we canonize him, "Gordon was sometimes, shall we say: difficult.

Whatever word you want to use, no one can deny that Gordon was boldly self-confident in the expression of his opinions. And, let there be no doubt, he ALWAYS had an opinion. Feisty is just a great word to describe him ... an animated person who is full of energy, courage and spirit."

While that feistiness could be deliberately disruptive, when directed toward his students it was also magical. Here again are the words of Bert Clark:

"Many of us (like me) probably arrived at Berry with no particular major in mind. Many of us (like me) had no real academic discipline when we arrived, certainly not enough discipline to justify any particular professional aspiration. Many of us (like me) needed to learn how to learn. ... And by God's grace, at that particularly sensitive point in our lives, when so much hangs in the balance, each one of us met an incredible man who changed the course of our lives, entirely and forever. Every one of us can look at the arc of our lives and attest to how Gordon moved us forward."

Carper was a famously hard teacher, but his rigorous grading was a means to move students toward more rigorous reasoning. Students understood that he was demanding intellectually because he wanted them to succeed.

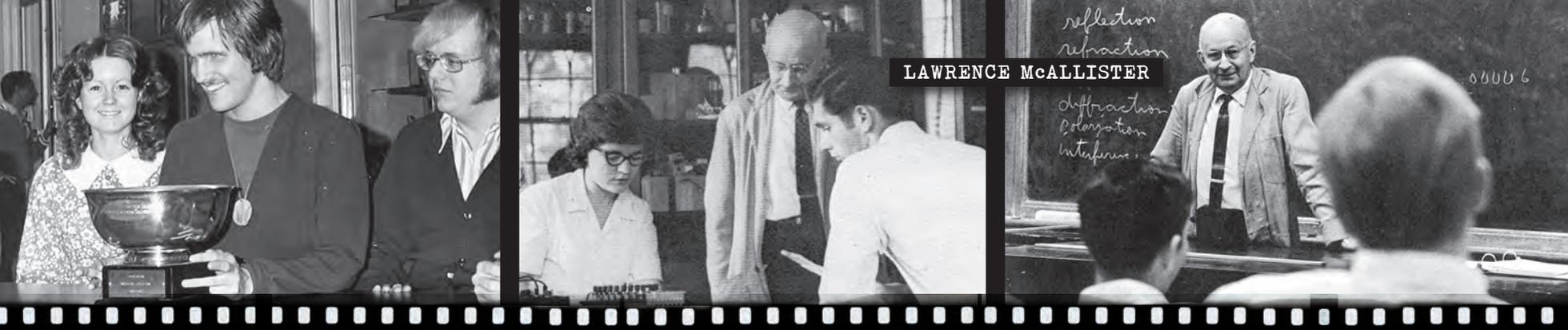
"After a C+ on my first paper in my first class with Gordon, I realized there was much work to be done if I were indeed to fulfill my dreams of becoming a lawyer," Pence said. "Gordon ... made it clear that he was there to ensure that I achieved that dream. ... Without his guidance and personal commitment, I would not be where I am professionally today."

Hanthorn explained the magnitude of Carper's commitment when it came time for letters of reference to law school in the era before word processing.

"When you applied to law schools you did not fill out the 'unified online application' that exists now," Hanthorn noted. "So any professor writing a recommendation had to type it up, sign an original and deliver it to you in a sealed envelope to go to the specific school. I applied to several law schools, and Gordon did not write me a letter of recommendation. He wrote several separate, highly individualized letters – one for each law school to which I applied – and named students he had taught who were attending or had attended that particular law school and noted what I did or did not have in common with each."

Carper joined the Berry faculty in 1965 as chairman of the social science department, and he served as Dana professor of history from 1969 until his retirement in 2003. In 1970, he established Berry's nationally ranked College Bowl program, which he coached for 33 years. As coach, he spent countless hours with successive generations of students. Carper was passionate about the competition because of the way that it inspired intellectual curiosity and hard work in the midst of irreverent fun and camaraderie. College Bowl provided Carper with a means for creating educational experiences that complemented and supplemented the classroom.

What made Carper so effective and set him apart? According to Clark, it was not only a combination of his intelligence, energy, passion and commitment but also that he showed his students he truly cared



LAWRENCE McALLISTER

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about them and was as interested in their development as human beings as in their academic progress.

For Pence, it was Carper's willingness to become fully engaged with those around him that set his mentor apart.

"Gordon taught me that you can't succeed without help from others and that, upon achieving that success, you have a responsibility to assist others in reaching their full potential," he said.

Of course, Carper is just one of the renowned teachers in Berry's history. Another of the legends, Lawrence "Dr. Mac" McAllister, was profiled in the last *Berry* magazine. As Berry's sole professor of physics for many years, he had an amazing ability to identify talented students in his introductory classes and lure them into becoming majors before sending them on to graduate programs and research careers. Ray Fewell (58C), for example, had no plans to major in physics until his first exposure to McAllister. Out of the 10 physics majors in his class, he said, only two or three were not converted from another major.

McAllister was relentlessly curious. He bought one of the first available color televisions and promptly disassembled it to see how it worked. He ushered Berry into the electronics age by fabricating, installing and maintaining sound amplification and optical equipment on campus. He brought his classes to life using a constant flow of practical demonstrations to illustrate concepts and principles. Even when these demonstrations went awry, he would salvage the moment with his dry wit.

More than 80 percent of the physics majors McAllister taught over his 39 years at

Berry went on to earn advanced degrees. He often worked quietly behind the scenes to help a student receive an unexpected graduate assistantship and, when needed, drove students to interviews in Atlanta or Huntsville. His former students describe him as a humble man – gentle, kind, unflappable and sensitive to individual needs.

McAllister's imperturbable nature was in direct contrast to Carper's vociferous, larger-than-life personality, yet the two shared an unquestionable ability to inspire students. According to Donald Arrington (60C), McAllister possessed a keen intellect that inspired both curiosity and a sense of awe in the unknown areas being pursued in physics.

"He instilled an appreciation for the technological revolution that was rapidly moving upon us in the 1950s and '60s ... in space exploration, advanced electronics, new mathematics and the field of nuclear power," Arrington wrote.

McAllister also shared with Carper a commitment to the success of the individual student. For McAllister, that meant an education of the head, heart and hands.

"He set high standards; he always expected my best," wrote Gwen Jones (56C). "In addition to reviewing classes and lab work, we spent much time discussing Dr. Mac's favorite subject, the value of education on my career and success in life. Much of what I have achieved and the way that I look at life and family can be attributed to the timeless discussions with this remarkable man."

According to Peter Henriksen (53H, 57C), McAllister not only counseled students in academics, but he also counseled them in religion, morality and how to commence a

professional career. He took a personal interest in them that continued throughout their lives.

After a 40-year career with NASA, Jack Jones (57C) described how McAllister chose to see in him something he did not see in himself.

"The day he took me aside while I was taking my first physics course and suggested that I consider majoring in physics was, as I later realized, a life-defining event," Jones remembered. "Until then, I was adrift in indecision and uncertainty with little ambition. With his kind and gentle demeanor, he taught me ... by example to become a better person. Like the good parent, he had a knack of treating all of his students fairly and impartially. Yet, he had a gift of being able to make each feel special. We did not want to disappoint him. I was not his best student, but I can assure you that no one loved and admired him more."

Berry has been blessed over the years to have many renowned teachers. Each generation of students has benefitted from faculty members with an extraordinary ability to see in students what they often could not see in themselves. Like McAllister and Carper, these faculty members have combined a deep commitment to their disciplines with a dedication to bringing out the best in their students.

Today, Berry has many such teacher-scholars, and as we look to the future, we must continue to encourage, nurture and celebrate faculty who understand the potential power of their relationships with their students in a residential learning community. The legacy of this high calling is reflected in the arc of those students' lives. **B**