IN HONOR OF ALLAN MATTHIAS

This issue of SWES Sounds is dedicated to Dr. Allan Matthias, a beloved SWES faculty member who died at home in Tucson, Arizona, on January 14, surrounded by his family.

Dr. Matthias was a faculty member for 31 years at the University of Arizona’s Department of Soil, Water and Environmental Science, where he will be sorely missed. There he had many wonderful colleagues and friends. The classes he taught included Careers in Environmental Science, Fundamentals in Environmental Science and Sustainability, SWES Seminar, The Earth and Its Environment, and Environmental Physics. He also served as an adviser to thousands of students over the years. In this issue, some faculty members and many of his most recent students express their feelings about his teaching, and how he affected their lives.

Dr. Matthias was born April 22, 1948 in Waterloo, Iowa and was raised on his family's farm near Denver, Iowa. He was preceded in death by his parents, Arnold and Dora Matthias and by his beloved first wife of 28 years, Sharon, who died in 2001. He leaves behind his loving daughters, Kathryn and Anne of Tucson. He is survived by his loving second wife of three years, Angie; her son, Rene and her daughter, Veronica. He was a member of Faith Lutheran Church in Tucson where he enjoyed the fellowship of the church.

The family wishes to thank the doctors and staff at the University of Arizona Medical Center and the Arizona Cancer Center. A Memorial Service to celebrate his life is scheduled for Saturday, February 23, 2013 at 1:30 p.m. at the Faith Lutheran Church, 3925 E. Fifth Street, Tucson. The family asks that those interested in sending flowers instead make a donation to the Arizona Cancer Center or other organization of your choice.

To do the former, please write a check for the “Arizona Cancer Center” with “In memory of Allan Matthias” in the subject line. Mail the check to: Arizona Cancer Center, 1515 N. Campbell Avenue, P.O. Box 245013, Tucson, AZ 85724-5013.

WALKING ACROSS CAMPUS

By James J. Riley

Dr. James Riley wrote this piece about his longtime colleague upon hearing the news of his illness.

I just got off the phone with my colleague of over 15 years, Dr. Allan D. Matthias. I am sitting on a bench near Old Main looking up the mall at The University of Arizona. It is 10:30 a.m. on the 27th of November 2012 and the sun is shining. Students are walking, mostly in groups, between classes and to and from The Allan Matthias Memorial Student Union. I am in a daze.

Allan has a serious disease, cancer, and he plans to have chemotherapy, but he expects that this treatment will only extend his life for a short time. He tells me he has made a drawing of his office for his daughters so they can find files and books that others may need. A chill runs through me as I realize that he is intimating that he won’t be back to campus — ever.

I am in shock. I knew he was ill and that it could be serious and that he wanted me to take over several of his courses for the remainder of the semester, which I did with the help of Tom Wilson, Joan Curry and Charles Gerba. But it never occurred to me that he may never come back to campus. I think of the hundreds of times that we met outside the Shantz Building and talked and joked as we walked to class by ourselves or sometimes with Bob Frye or Tom Wilson and now we may never do that again.

I still can walk the campus paths we took, but Allan will not be there. I am on the verge of crying, but no one stops to notice. They continue walking and talking, taking no notice of the old man on the bench by Old Main.

I sit and glance at the yellow sticky pad where I wrote what Allan had said on the phone. He first mentioned his students and his advisees. Even when he is facing the end of his life, he is thinking first of the students.

Allan is a special man. He is brilliant, shy and unassuming; always ready to accommodate others without thinking of his own goals or feelings. The list goes on: who should get what grades; what should be done with his box of advisees’ files; how the seminar class should be completed; which students have excuses for missing class; etc.

As I thumb through the pages, I finally get to the last page where my notes record his prognosis in a brief few lines. He is looking at the end of his life and he is still thinking of others — amazing!

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Allan Matthias meets with faculty and students for the traditional SWES gathering at Zachary’s Pizza at the end of the academic year in 2012.

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We first taught laboratories for an introduction to environmental science, then a reformulation of the course guided by Bob Frye converting the course into a general education course which had several iterations. Once Bob left, Tom Wilson joined us as we walked across the campus to and from class. We developed other courses like Careers in Environmental Science, Environmental Physics, Teaching Workshop (for Preceptors) and others.

Allan was always willing to adjust his program to fit the needs of the department or really the needs of the students. In the last few years, we began teaching different courses and we did not walk across the campus often. I sometimes gave guest lectures at his Fundamentals of Environmental Science, Environmental Sustainability and we met to walk to class again. It was on one of these occasions this semester when we walked together for the last time.

My eyes glisten with tears as I sit on the bench watching the students going to and fro and pray for Allan always made me feel welcomed and comfortable. He treated everyone with respect and dignity. I am so sad he is gone. – Virginia Rich

In the past month, as I’ve been thrown into undergraduate advising, I’ve met with many students, most of them Allan’s advisees. Their comments poignantly express the deep affection they had for Allan and their appreciation for the help he provided. I’ve not once heard, “he was a good adviser” but have been told time and again that “he was a great adviser.” – Jim Walworth

He will surely be missed. He was adored by all of his students. – Courtney McCaughey

Dr. Matthias gave me so much inspiration and encouragement. – Amanda Pfeifer

I did not know Dr. Matthias well. However, the few classes I had with him will forever be a part of my life. He was one of the kindest, most inspirational professors I’ve had in college. I remember how excited he got about teaching, and it made me look forward to coming to his class. I regret not taking the time to get to know him personally, on a deeper level; but he will forever be in my heart and in my memory as the professor who helped me stick with SWES, and I am very grateful for that. Thank you for being a special part of my life, Dr. Matthias. – Dianna Holgate

Thank you for being the type of person, which all students felt comfortable going to for any questions or concerns. You were a man with the biggest and kindest heart. You always had the brightest smile on your face that always put one on mine. Thank you for really trying to get to know many of the SWES students. I loved going to your office and being able to talk about anything and building a more personal relationship than I had with other faculty.

I sincerely appreciate that you were so devoted to your job and students. You would come to class even when you were not feeling well, which was above and beyond with your illness that truly demonstrated your selflessness. I am grateful for the time that I had you as a teacher and adviser! You were very influential in guiding me and the other students in the SWES Department. Your presence will greatly be missed!

– Kaitlyn Elkind

When I first started working with SWES in 2009, Dr. Matthias was one of the first people in the department I met. I was struck immediately by his kindness. He expressed an interest in my work from the beginning. As I began attending the seminar course that he led, I could see that he offered the same sincere interest to his students. When I would come into the session, he would enlist me to provide feedback for the students speaking. You could see that he wanted to help them learn as quickly as possible. I think the response in this issue testifies to the difference he has made in so many people’s lives— including mine. – Melanie Lenart
MORE COMMENTS ON DR. ALLAN MATTHIAS

Dr. Matthias was a great professor, mentor, adviser, and man. I would have never graduated last semester without his continued mentorship and sound advice through my years as a SWES undergrad. I regret that I never got to tell him how much I truly appreciated his help. I will always hold Dr. Allan Matthias as someone who was more than just a professor, but someone who has had a huge impact in my life. May he rest in peace with our Father in heaven.

—Taebum

Even though I did not know Dr. Matthias for very long, I can honestly say that he made a huge impact on my life. I first met him last summer when I came here for freshman orientation. I was so nervous, but as soon as I sat down with him to go over my schedule, he made me feel a million times better. It was reassuring to have an adviser that truly cared about me.

In addition to that, having two classes with him was such a privilege, and I will be forever grateful for how much he taught me. He not only taught me about environmental science, but also about life. I’ve learned that by being a nice and honest person, you can go far in life. Dr. Matthias was such a genuinely kind person, and I am so sad for him to go. I hope that someday I can live a life similar to his. He will be greatly missed at this university. Rest in peace, Dr. Matthias.

—Samantha Springs

Dr. Matthias was one of my best mentors and a good friend. I remember the first time I had to talk to him, I was so nervous that I barely could talk. He smiled and said, "It is OK, I can slow down so you would be able to understand what I say." He was also aware of my diabetes condition so before I gave a talk to the class, he would ask me how my glucose levels were, trying to prevent a low-blood sugar episode. I learned a lot from him, not only about the contents of the course but about being positive and have a good attitude toward life. From my personal viewpoint, Dr. Allan Matthias’ best values as a human being were honesty, sincerity, loyalty, fairness, and being hard working and a great person.

—Ana Rosa

Dr. Matthias was a very warm and soft spoken man to interact with. He was truly a rare professor and an exceptional member of the University of Arizona family. He is one of only a few professors I know who interacted with his students in a compassionate and genuine manner. He did not care about his title or his experience; he always addressed his students as equals and friends. I only knew Dr. Matthias for a couple months, but in that short period he had a profound effect on me, which should speak volumes for the type of man, educator, and person he was.

—Ocean Tenborg

Dr. Matthias was my undergrad adviser. I’ve said this several times the last couple of weeks in response to people asking me if I knew him. This simple sentence doesn’t begin to explain. Over my time in undergrad and the ensuing time in grad school, I came to know and love Dr. Matthias. He was forever helpful, sweet, gracious, and kind.

He was a considerate teacher, always making sure everyone in the room understood. He was always sympathetic about late work; I feel like some of the words I heard the most from him were "no, no, no, don’t worry about it."

Dr. Matthias was one of the first people I got to talk to when I transferred to the UA from another university in August of 2004. At our first meeting, we sat and planned out every course I’d have to take from then until graduation. It took an hour. This meeting was in stark contrast to my previous university adviser meetings; there, I had to figure out what classes to take by myself, and the “adviser” would just sign off on it without seeming to care. This meeting with Dr. Matthias was the first time I’d felt actually advised in my whole university career.

I grew to know this type of meeting very well; when I tried to sign up for classes for the very next spring semester, one of the classes I was supposed to take was cancelled; two others were held at the same time. Back to Dr. Matthias I went, and we spent another hour together refuguring my schedule.

Then, in what seemed like a recurring theme, when I went to sign up for classes for the fall semester, I found that two classes had been moved to spring. Two more were, once again, at the same time. Another hour and a half later, Dr. Matthias had once again me set on the path to graduation. I count this as one of the best things anyone has ever done for me, as it meant I was able graduate. But I want to share my favorite memory of him now.

At this time I was just heading into my fourth semester at the UA. I went into Dr. Matthias’ office for our semi-annual pre-class registration meeting and handed him the hard-worked out plan. He looked up at me and said, “Oh, I’m so sorry Hazel, but they’ve moved two of these classes back to fall, and cancelled this other one! We’ll have to do this all over again.”

“Wha – nooooo!” I replied, shocked that this had happened yet again. In my head I start trying to figure out what this meant, if I’d even be able to graduate on time. Then my wild mental reeling was interrupted by Dr. Matthias saying in his calm voice, and with a twinkle in his eye, “No, no, I’m just kidding, you’re fine. You can sign up for everything.”

Dr. Matthias, I will never forget your jokes, the mini heart attack you almost gave me. I will never forget your advice, your kindness; I will miss you sincerely.

—Hazel Cox
One April Fools Day, in the spirit of “Poisson D’Avril,” Dr. Matthias received a dorky little origami fish, a fish folded as I waited for the meeting. He grinned like a child, and for a few hilariously charming moments, he danced about his office, deliberating what to do with the little paper fish—finally settling on tucking it into his shirt pocket. It’s a fond memory, so adorable and dear, of a truly beautiful human being.

Four years ago, Dr. Matthias welcomed me to the SWES Department. Ever generous, kind, and supportive— he walked with me through my undergraduate career—through every major decision, academic hoops and hurdles, studying abroad, scholarships and internships. He always went out of his way to help and to be there for his students. He knew us by name, and would stop to smile and to talk when passing on campus. And even as he started to feel unwell last semester, he would be ready at the front of the class.

He was an adviser, a professor, and a mentor who truly cared. Now four years later as I gear up for graduation, I wish I could say thank you, just one more time, to the man who guided me through this stage of my life, to the man whose heart inspired us all.

— Irene Liang

Below are some of the anonymous comments students shared about Dr. Allan Matthias’ fall courses, in response to the question: What did you especially like about this course?

- Dr. Matthias is one of the best teachers I’ve ever had and he truly cares about environmental science, as well as his students. A GREAT professor.
- Matthias is a fantastic teacher and he really cares.
- Teacher was amazing.
- Matthias is a phenomenal educator.
- Teacher was the best!
- He made the course very interesting and he is such a kind guy.
- Dr. Matthias is the best!
- Just wish Dr. Matthias was here to finish the semester.
- Dr. Matthias is very attentive to students. He is very informative.
- I also enjoyed Dr. Matthias, I thought he was an outstandingly kind teacher.
- Matthias. He’s great.
- The teacher was incredible.
- Dr. Matthias is a great professor and the nicest person!
- Dr. Matthias was extremely caring about every student individually.
- Dr. Matthias was always helpful!
- Dr. Matthias always treated everyone with respect and I learned so much. GREAT course and awesome professor!
- Dr. Matthias was so sweet and cool!
- Dr. Matthias is amazing too. Very respectful
- The awesomeness of Dr. Matthias.
- Dr. Matthias is a sweet professor.
- I always feel very comfortable talking to Dr. Matthias. He really demonstrates a caring for the needs of his students!
- Awesome teacher.
- Dr. Matthias was very caring and helpful as well.
- Dr. Matthias is a very passionate professor and his enthusiasm added to the enjoyment of the class.

In honor of Dr. Allan Matthias: A poem

By Amanda Pfeifer

caterpillar eyebrows
a voice like my Grandpa Trujillo
shelves with physics atmospheric jackets – lots of books, lots of jackets

notes and drawings from his family posted on his walls - a colorful collage
an exposed heart in an architectural office chest

I look out his window while he pulls out my file
always impressed with the miracle – an A in differential equations
a smooth black gel pen pins next semester’s classes like unruly livestock

the gentle tone of a father
my college kid anxiety evaporates like water on the sidewalk
I hear he’s left the earth, floating up above our heads
like water from the sidewalk

when water leaves, it comes back
raining humble smiles, academic graces, a legacy of presence
in a family’s, friends’, and students’ faces
love and joy, his molecular essence.
SWES REPORT CARD

DEPARTMENT NEWS

Markus Tuller was appointed Associate Editor of the Soil Science Society of America Journal.

PUBLICATIONS


Stories about the above Santa Rita Experimental Range project results can be found at: http://bit.ly/ZqrHAA and http://l.usa.gov/YlsGir .


PRESENTATIONS


The University of Arizona and Pima County are entering the global water-energy sustainability arena by establishing the Water and Energy Sustainable Technology Laboratories at Pima County’s new Water Reclamation Campus. For more information, go to: http://uanews.org/story/ua-pima-county-unite-on-water-energy-sustainability.


Second place, poster competition.


GRANTS

Shirley (Kurc) Papuga.