A Dedicated Teacher, and a Perennial Student

James Cormier's joy at being at MET was contagious

By Cynthia K. Buccini

For James Cormier, joining Metropolitan College as a part-time faculty member in 1991 marked a turning point.

Cormier had been working in information technology, at jobs that required extensive international travel, says MET Dean Jay Halfond, and the idea of becoming part of an academic community appealed to him. As it turned out, he was well suited to his new career. Over the next two decades, he became known as a dedicated teacher, committed to the college, his fellow faculty members, and his students. In 1997, he was honored with the Metropolitan College Part-Time Faculty Member of the Year Award at MET’s graduation ceremonies.

Cormier (MET ‘85), who became a full-time senior lecturer in administrative sciences in 2004, died on October 13 after a brief illness. He was 65.

Halfond says the college has lost “somebody who cared about the core mission of Metropolitan College and cared about his colleagues and his students. And he really was a perennial student himself, because he was an expert in project management, a key area of instruction for us now. He was an all-around dedicated member of the academic community.”

Cormier was a highly engaged faculty member as well, according to Halfond. “Whenever we held a social event with students, we could always count on him to be there. I think, for him, this was a second career he always wanted to have.”

Cormier earned a BS in business administration as a part-time student at MET. In his faculty profile on the college’s website, he offered a recollection and some words of advice to new students: “When I started, it looked as if the road to that degree was without an end. I can remember thinking as I entered my first class that ‘a journey of a thousand miles is started with a single step’ (Chinese proverb). Get that first step out of the way and we’ll do everything possible to see you make the shorter journey across the stage at Commencement to accept your degree.”

He went on to earn an MBA from Northeastern University. He spent more than 20 years working at Digital Equipment Corporation, starting as an engineering services supervisor and holding several senior-level positions before joining IBM in 1995.

At MET, Cormier developed and taught a range of courses in marketing management, operations management and data analysis, advertising, electronic commerce, and management. He became a full-time faculty member in 2004.

“He was a born-again teacher, in a sense,” Halfond says. “He was dedicated to instruction here and in North Carolina, where we offer courses on several Marine bases. He would go down there and teach, mostly officers, and he loved it.”

Kip Becker, a MET associate professor and chair of administrative sciences, knew Cormier for nearly two decades. “He was an excellent instructor,” says Becker, who points to Cormier’s enthusiasm and his strong business background.

Becker says he particularly appreciated Cormier’s flexibility. “You could always turn to him and say, ‘I need somebody to teach this class or go to this place,’” he recalls. “He’d make the sacrifices necessary to make things work. And personally, he was a great friend. His joy for being here was contagious.”

When Becker spoke with Cormier’s wife following his death, she told him that “she wanted MET to know he valued his time here,” Becker says. “His goal was to be a teacher. He just felt it was the best job in the world. Being here made him the happiest he’d ever been.”