Norman Scotch, Founding Dean of SPH, Dies

Created a successful model of part-time education for working professionals

By Michael Saunders

Norman A. Scotch, the founding dean of the School of Public Health whose strong belief in the importance of public health education helped shape the school’s emphasis on excellence in teaching, died on November 25, 2014. He was 86.

Scotch (CAS’51, GRS’52) was driven by the principle that people working in public health should have opportunities for additional training so that they could be more effective—and do the most good. With that in mind, he helped create a practice-based curriculum, led a core group of academics and administrators through the accreditation process, and pushed to establish the school as a separate institution in 1979.

“Founders of an institution leave a set of values to the institution, not just an organizational structure,” says Glantz. “The school’s emphasis on teaching and on students is a reflection of the founder’s values.”

Robert J. Master, chief executive officer of Commonwealth Care Alliance, was a young faculty member during the school’s early days. Scotch established an academic environment that valued creativity and new approaches to teaching, says Master. “There
was an accountability that I hadn’t seen in other institutions,” says Master. “You had to be able to teach, because this was real tuition money being spent by real people, and Norm planted the stakes firmly in the ground that this will be a place of teaching excellence. The school was this laboratory of innovation and new ideas. It was a phenomenally creative place. We could do things and try things that we wouldn’t be able to do in most places.”

In honor of Scotch’s dedication to teaching, SPH presents the annual Norman A. Scotch Award for Excellence in Teaching to an individual who has made outstanding and sustained contributions to the school’s education program.

Scotch’s role in the creation of today’s SPH, and in the successful model of part-time education for working professionals, was little known to those outside the school.

“It’s very characteristic of the way he lived his life,” Glantz says. “If someone came to him with a good idea, he would do what he could to see it happen. He didn’t really care about credit, he cared about doing good.”

During his 40-year teaching career at Boston University, Jack Aber became known as a devoted leader and an esteemed mentor among his colleagues. To his students, he was an enthusiastic, caring professor whose lessons had a major influence.

Aber, a Questrom School of Business professor emeritus and longtime chair of the finance department, died on January 12, 2015. He was 77.

As a testament to his impact, one of his former students, Douglas Chamberlain (MET’74, Questrom’76), established the Jack W. Aber Scholarship Fund in 2013. “Jack’s ability to interest and engage the classroom is legendary,” says Chamberlain, president of Appleton Partners, Inc., in Boston. “His enthusiasm is electric and he undoubtedly influenced thousands of undergraduate and graduate Boston University students over the years. Our friendship began in the classroom in 1975, and we remained closely linked for nearly four decades.”

Chamberlain says Aber was invited to join the advisory board at Appleton Partners in 2001, “where he was a brilliant and dynamic contributor to our firm’s growth and success. Jack truly inspired his fellow board and business colleagues, in addition to generations of BU grads. So very approachable, likable, and committed, his radiance as a teacher, colleague, and friend will carry on for all of us so privileged to have crossed his path.”

An Inspiration to Generations

Jack Aber taught finance at BU for 40 years

By Tom Vellner