Yale University

From the Selected Works of David Mayhew

May, 2015

Yale Retirement Tribute to David Mayhew

David R Mayhew

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/david-mayhew/243/
Retirement Tributes
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
May 15, 2015
the teaching craft and to the mentoring of students and younger scholars in the academy. Your graduate students now occupy professorships and chairs at leading institutions of higher learning across the globe. The respect you have garnered among your peers is reflected in your service as president of the International Association for Coptic Studies; series editor of the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Series Coptica; and member of the editorial board of the Journal of Coptic Studies. At Yale, you have served two departments with great distinction, having spent time as the director of graduate studies in both. As a member of the Egyptology Advisory Committee, you have also played an indispensable role in promoting archaeological initiatives, and indeed for the past decade, your unflagging scholarly energy has underwritten annual fieldwork seasons in Egypt documenting the architecture of the fifth-century church at the White Monastery.

You have been a model scholar, teacher, mentor, and friend to the University and to the international academic community. At your retirement, the Yale faculty joins together to honor you, to offer its heartfelt thanks for your illustrious career, and to wish you continued productivity and happiness in your ongoing life of research and intellectual inquiry.

David R. Mayhew
Sterling Professor of Political Science

David Mayhew, B.A. Amherst College, Ph.D. Harvard University, faculty member at Yale since 1968: You are your generation’s leading scholar of Congress. Your work combines the deepest knowledge of particulars and effortless abstraction. Your landmark study of our national legislature, Congress: The Electoral Connection, organized scholarship in legislative studies for subsequent generations of researchers, explaining the key features of congressional behavior and structure from the most parsimonious of assumptions, the individual member’s reelection motive. By demonstrating how much explanatory power can flow from a simple initial assumption, your work provided an analytical template for all those who would follow. The influence of your research led Douglas Arnold, the leading Congress scholar at Princeton, to write that your account of Congress was “the political science equivalent of plate tectonics theory, which had revolutionized geology.”

During graduate school, you developed some of the habits that contributed to your success as a researcher and teacher. For more than five decades you have read two nonfiction books on politics or history every week, week after week. Four times a year you examine the table of contents of 100 journals from across history and the social sciences and work your way through all the articles that catch your eye. As a consequence, your work is deeply informed and unusually broad. You also always have excellent book recommendations for your colleagues; please keep those coming!
You overflow with enthusiasm about political history, and your knowledge of the fine details of your subject is legendary. One former student, who later served as dean of social sciences at the University of Chicago, has recounted a car trip to a conference during which each time the car crossed a congressional district line, you began a brilliant and thoroughly impromptu history of the district, including precise accounts of the changes in the district lines, and the politics, socioeconomics, and ethnic makeup of the relevant communities.

Your scholarly distinction has been recognized at Yale, where you are Sterling Professor, and beyond. You have been elected to the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society. Along with erudition, integrity is your middle name: when you inquire, it is to get at truth; when you speak, it is in its service. Your students are among the leading scholars of American politics and have served as department chairs at Princeton, Chicago, and Berkeley. Now as you retire from active teaching, your colleagues salute you for your contribution of exemplary scholarship, teaching, and mentoring, and look forward to many more instructive conversations and even more book recommendations!

Brian J. Skinner

Eugene Higgins Professor of Geology and Geophysics

Brian Skinner, B.Sc. University of Adelaide, Ph.D. Harvard University, faculty member at Yale since 1966: You have made landmark contributions to mineralogy and economic geology, led the international geological community, and conveyed the excitement of geology to legions of students and the general public. Many of your scientific publications focused on the crystallographic and geochemical properties of the ore minerals that contain the valuable metals we use constantly in our everyday lives. But your contributions didn’t stop there; you have deepened our understanding of the geology of the ocean floor, the surface of the Moon, the Australian outback, and nearly everywhere else in between. Indeed, your work has been so fundamental that a mineral – Skinnerite – was named in your honor.

You were promoted to chair of the Department of Geology and Geophysics within a year of your arrival at Yale, a testament to your extraordinary interpersonal and leadership skills, which had been well honed at the U.S. Geological Survey. These skills, coupled with your world-class science, propelled you into decades of service to the international geological community at the very highest levels. Your terms as president of the Geological Society of America, the Geochemical Society, and the Society of Economic Geologists helped shape the geological sciences as we know them today. You were also highly influential as an editor of journals and books including Economic Geology, the leading journal in the field. As a teacher, you were widely