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Master Mentor: Robert Schuellein '44 Leaves a Lasting Impression

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When University of Dayton biology professor Robert

Schuellein '44 got an offer to work at the National Institutes of Health in 1963, he had to make a difficult choice between two things at which he excelled: teaching and research.

Research won; Schuellein left the University and the Marianist order, took the job at NIH and stayed there until his retirement in 1983.

But he never forgot UD and the legacy he started here: With his faculty colleague and fellow Marianist Paul Machowicz '41, Schuellein helped create the first master's program in the College of Arts and Sciences. When Schuellein died in 2011 at the age of 91, he added to that legacy — with a bequest totaling \$2.5 million for a faculty research endowment in biology.

A questionnaire for his 50th class reunion in 1994 gave an indication of the pride he took in the work he did. Asked to name his most significant experience at UD, Schuellein answered, "Attending the defense of my graduate student for the M.S. degree in biology — the first M.S. degree conferred at UD."

That student was Henry Maimon '64.

"There aren't enough adjectives in the English language to describe what a fine and wonderful gentleman Robert Schuellein was," said Maimon, who later earned a medical degree from the University of Cincinnati and ran the gastroenterology department at St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Dayton for 26 years. "I feel I owe him a debt of gratitude in helping me get through that degree."

Maimon had already earned a bachelor's in English from Princeton University, but he

chose to pursue medicine or research instead. Schuellein became both a mentor and a role model.

"He worked hard to make very difficult subject matter clear," Maimon said. "He tried to cultivate the best in whatever abilities a student had. He could evoke your brain to

think a little more and work a little harder."

George Noland, who came to UD's biology department in 1955 and became chair in 1963, said Schuellein took measures beyond what was typical to ensure that his students grasped the material.

"But he was a born researcher, and with a born researcher, you'd have to cut off his hands to keep him from it," Noland said. "Teaching a full load and getting a research lab established at the same time is a horrendous burden. It's almost impossible to do both, but a born researcher will do it."

Schuellein knew that funding would make a major difference, Noland said.

"With the teaching load and everything he did for the Marianists, there were just not enough hours in the day for the research," Noland said. "When Schuellein came in, there were no laboratory assistants. The faculty members had to do all the prep work themselves. A little money makes it possible to maybe teach one less course or hire a student assistant for a class or hire research assistants in the lab."

Schuellein's gift also included more than 2,000 projection slides.

"I remember when he started that collection," Noland said. "You can't believe what we worked with in those days. My budget for materials in 1963 was \$50. If you had a slide projector in the department, it was a big deal. In those days, people didn't just order slides. They were expensive. He was serious enough about his teaching that he assembled these materials because he knew it would help the students learn."

Patricia S. Bryant, a retired program director at NIH, worked with Schuellein during the 1970s and '80s.

"He was a very warm and giving person, a very humble guy," Bryant said. "His passion was training researchers for the future ... building a pipeline of scientists who could make the important breakthroughs."

It's fitting, she said, that his legacy gift is now supporting scientists and research.

"If you'd say he was an advocate in his own quiet way for anything, it would be that."

—Maureen Schlagen

Additional sources for this story included Renate Myles, acting chief of NIH's news media branch; Brother Bernard Zalewski, S.M. '58; Eliot B. Spiess; Dr. Marie Nysten; and George McGowan '63. See bit.ly/UD_Schuellein for additional quotations about Robert Schuellein.



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