

THE PERENNIAL BUD SAXBERG

THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL'S FACULTY
FOR 50 YEARS, AND STILL GOING STRONG

by NANCY GARDNER

When Borje “Bud” Saxberg started teaching at the UW Business School, tuition was about \$100 per quarter, assistant professors made \$6,000 annually, and the School was located in the Quad.

Much has changed since then, but things generally do over the course of half a century.

Saxberg, a professor of management and organization whose career began here in 1957, was led to the United States from his native Finland by way of a scholarship he received from Oregon State University.

“After learning I’d received a scholarship,” he says, “I quickly sailed for New York, bought a bus ticket to Portland, Oregon, and as I got off the bus five days later, the United States map had become a reality for me.”

Opportunities opened up for further study at the University of Illinois, and the years went by swiftly, including marriage to his wife Margaret, a Norwegian student, and the birth of a son. Then in 1957 he ventured west, to the University of Washington where a number of fellow Illinois graduate students had become members of the Business School faculty.

A Ford Foundation Faculty Study Fellowship at Cornell University between 1960-61 in the Department of Sociology, Social Psychology, and Anthropology briefly took him away from the UW. He says this fellowship sparked his interest in his academic work that has ever since focused on the application of behavioral sciences to management.

Saxberg, who is 79 and has no plans to retire anytime soon, says he thinks it’s important to maintain a balance of academic work and “practical” opportunities like consulting and hosting “Entrepreneurs and Innovators,” a business interview program that airs twice-weekly on Seattle Community Colleges Educational Television. He says he’s allowed to live vicariously through the people he interviews.

Saxberg tries to make several annual trips to Norway, where his wife, a retired realtor, lives about half the year and

manages their second home, a family farm. The farm, situated about 60 miles northeast of Oslo, produces rye and barley, and has a timber operation.

He says that losing himself in several hobbies—including a collection of bygone stereo cameras that produce 3-D images—helps keep him continuously curious about life.

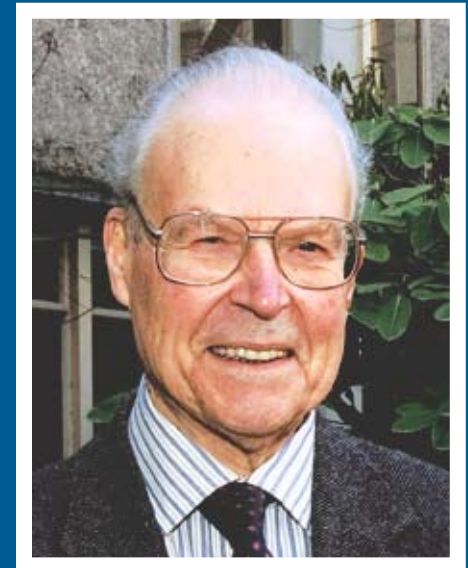
His focus on teaching provides the same effect. “Indeed,” he says, “I’m surprised myself that 50 years have gone by.”

In the past half-century, business education has undergone a number of changes, he says. For instance, the deeply structured student-teacher relationship of the 1950s loosened dramatically in the 1960s. Students were invited to share their views with faculty, and eventually student evaluations went from being a private communication between students and faculty to a university-required procedure open to public inspection. Faculty became more accountable, and more responsive to adopting innovative teaching methods.

“Today, in my subject area of management, topics have to be presented in a way that creates student interest,” Saxberg says. “Our current students are very good, but they need more opportunity to be involved in their own learning, such as group projects, individual and team reports, field work, shadowing executives at work, and case study analyses.”

Beyond the classroom, Saxberg has forged a sterling reputation among faculty, administrators and deans across the UW and the country. He served as chair of the UW Faculty Senate during a tumultuous period in the early 1980s. After several years of budget cuts necessitated by the nation’s deep economic recession, tensions between UW administration and faculty were approaching a boiling point. But former UW President William Gerberding, appointed in 1979, says that Saxberg’s equitable demeanor was instrumental in diffusing the conflict.

“Bud was from beginning to end a statesman with a humane and tolerant view of our problems,” Gerberding says. “He was a deeply sensitive and constructive man and,



IN 1957, WHEN IT ALL BEGAN FOR BUD...

Russia launched Sputnik 1, the first Earth-orbiting satellite

Dwight D. Eisenhower was president

Elvis Presley’s “All Shook Up” was #1 according to *Billboard*

A first-class stamp cost 3 cents

The Milwaukee Braves defeated the New York Yankees (4-3) in the World Series

“Leave it to Beaver” premiered

Jack Kerouac’s “On the Road” was published

Dr. Seuss’ “The Cat in the Hat” was published

The Ford Motor Company introduced the Edsel

The laser was invented by Gordon Gould

The Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station was established

Balmer Hall wasn’t even a glimmer in its architect’s eye

as a somewhat new UW President, I was extremely grateful for his kind presence and broad view. The administration and the faculty worked together, not as adversaries but as colleagues who respected each other and needed to deal with wrenching problems. Bud was perfect for this unwelcome role.”

While his roles at the UW have continued to expand and evolve over the past five decades, Saxberg’s genuine interest in students has remained constant.

“He has the ability to motivate students to think about the situations an individual, or groups of individuals, might face from a number of different perspectives and to question every assumption,” says Kaler Body (BA 2006), a financial risk analyst at Seattle’s Fund of Hedge Funds. “He

has a friendly personality and casual demeanor yet always remained committed to ensuring that I challenged myself in order to gain an invaluable experience.”

In addition to teaching undergraduate courses in strategic management and business policy, Saxberg advises German track students working toward their Certificate of International Studies in Business. Other duties tend to accumulate, he says. He actively supports the School’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and has just become faculty director of the School’s International Exchange Alliances.

“I’ve learned over the years that you need to learn to love teaching and creating your own approach so your students feel rapport with you and a willingness to learn.” ■