Celebrating Grant Russell

Grant Russell, SAF’s longest serving faculty member will be retiring June 30, 2016. He has been a good friend to student and colleague alike. He has had a hand in virtually every major SAF development for four decades. He was present at the creation of the original “Accounting Group” at Waterloo, and since then has developed, collaborated on, facilitated and enhanced a host of SAF initiatives in education, many of them wide ranging and transformative. All embody his deep commitment to the School and to the accounting and financial management professions, and his tireless engagement with, and concern for, students. He has contributed ideas, insights and energy to virtually every aspect of SAF’s mission and mandate, has served as an indefatigable catalyst and animator, has helped guide colleagues at SAF through many ups and downs, and has seized new opportunities and anticipated new challenges. Selected highlights from Grant’s many contributions from 1975 to the present appear below.

There’s something very satisfying when a student says, “You had an impact on my life.” – Grant Russell (2009)

Founding the Accounting Group
On a Sunday afternoon in 1979, Russell brought Waterloo’s Dean of Arts, Robin Banks, to the RIA convocation in Toronto. Eager to introduce Banks to a colleague with revolutionary ideas for accounting education in Canada, Russell steered him over to Jack Hanna, who was destined to head the School of Accountancy at Waterloo. Russell, Banks and Hanna became catalysts for path-breaking developments, and Russell joined the initial “Accounting Group” in 1980-81.

Establishing Centre for Accounting Ethics
Russell and colleagues Sally Gunz, Morley Lemon, Efrim Boritz, David Carter, and Gordon Richardson set up the Centre for Accounting Ethics at Waterloo in 1991. The Centre’s mandate then and now is to improve the teaching of ethics, conduct applied research, and enhance professional judgment.

Renewing Undergraduate Curriculum
Russell served on the team that developed “A New Introduction to Accounting” (ANITA), a curriculum renewal initiative aimed at making Canadian accounting education “competitive with the best internationally” and at educating “the ideal professional.” Introduced in 1994, ANITA placed accounting in a global business context, integrated communications and technical skills with ethics and values, and made students take responsibility for their own learning.

Receiving Distinguished Teacher Award
Russell is one of six SAF professors to receive this prestigious University recognition, presented to faculty members having a favourable, lasting effect on students and epitomizing intellectual vigour and superior communication skills. In 2000 Russell was cited for devising computer games for classroom learning, presently course material effectively, stressing application of concepts; and bringing smiles to students with his warm, but thought provoking, humour.

Creating a New Degree Program
Russell took a lead hand in crafting a new professionally oriented degree program focused on accounting and financial management. After several years of planning, the AFM program was launched in 2007. Grant has observed that moving to this enhanced tuition professional program was the single most important step ever taken by SAF.
Developing AFMAA
With SAF and other UW colleagues, Russell developed and prepared a rigorous new admission assessment tool that was introduced in 2007. AFMAA (the Accounting and Financial Management Admissions Assessment) soon became an integral part of the highly competitive admission process, and now utilizes an online interview format.

Establishing Fellowship Program
In 2003 SAF launched its Fellowship Program, the brainchild of Russell and another instance of his desire to create a rich educational environment for students. The program, now an honoured SAF tradition, brings together distinguished alumni and keen students in a mentoring relationship that lasts for the duration of the student’s time at Waterloo.

Championing the “Professional Student” Concept
As SAF’s Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs, Russell championed the “the professional student” concept as a vital way for students to see themselves and their future careers. Permeating all undergraduate programs since 2005, the concept stresses integrity, positive attitude, courtesy, fitness, organizational skills and adaptability.

Co-organizing the Professional Futures Conference
Russell and SAF colleague Lynn Graham organized the initial Professional Futures Conference in 2005. Now held each September before classes begin, the conference opens a window on the business world, features top-flight speakers and workshops, and sets students firmly on the path to professionalism.

Mentoring the Living-Learning Community
Russell and SAF colleague Bob Sproule acted as mentors to SAF’s Living-Learning Community during its first iteration in 2007. This multi-faceted program continues to offer a support network for first-year students, equipping them to perform well in their courses, improving their core competencies, and helping them acquire tools for success in the workplace.

Creating E-portfolios
In 2003 Russell was the prime mover behind the introduction of student e-portfolios, which use an electronic medium to preserve, organize and present academic assignments, work term reports, and other materials. The aim is to help students take a holistic view of their university career that transcends merely passing courses and getting a high average.

Conclusion
“An institution is the reflection of the people who guide it,” observed industrial giant Walter P. Chrysler many years ago. Today’s SAF reflects the efforts of many people, none more so than Grant Russell, whose significant contributions have been essential to building SAF’s enviable reputation. “Who you are, and what you are capable of – these are important questions,” said Russell some time ago, when promoting the professional student concept in SAF classes. The ability of every member of SAF to answer this question well and with pride has been immeasurably strengthened though Grant’s many contributions.