

Retirement Speech for Stu, Bill and Peter

As Marianne mentioned, Stu, Bill and Peter have been at UB for over 30 years. So it is fitting to acknowledge and celebrate their contributions to UB at this retirement event.

This event is not exactly one where we say “So long, farewell, auf wiederzahn, good-bye”. Stu, Bill and Peter will continue to remain happily with us giving us their wisdom and experience in the years to come with none of the downsides. They will enjoy being with students and interacting with faculty with none of the hard tasks such as committees, grading and course schedules.

They say that becoming a grand-parent is something like that. No responsibilities but all the pleasures of parenthood. So Bill Stu and Peter, you were always great professors, now you will be great as well as grand professors. I suppose the term for that is emeritus professors.

Since it is indeed a time to mark a milestone, let me share with you a few thoughts about each of these three dedicated individuals. All three were part of the AI group in the department and so I got to know them fairly well through common research interests. I will speak about them in the order of the longest time I have known them.

After being at strong computer science departments at MIT, Wisconsin and Indiana, Stu came to UB in 1978. Stu has probably taught every programming language there is to be taught since computers were invented. From Fortran and Pascal to LISP to C to FP to Java to every latest programming system introduced to this day.

He always took to the latest Apple gadget or app like a fish to water. His interest in AI is deep. The current strength of the department in AI related subjects is probably due to the passion he always had for AI

I heard Steve Jobs say to new graduate students “Choose to do something you love. If not keep looking”. I think Stu knew exactly what he loved doing quite early.

Stu had no patience for those ran main-frame computing centers. My favorite quote from Stu is his analogy that the computer science department is to the computing center as the law school is to campus security.

Stu was way ahead of the computing world. He was working with semantic networks long before neural networks or Bayesian networks or social networks or the semantic web.

Stu also has other deep leadership interests. He served as department chair in the computer science department and as the first chair of the newly formed CSE department. He is on the Amherst Town Board and active in the Democratic party. Quite a remarkable career.

Now onto Bill Rapaport. Bill also came to the department during the Ridge Lea days. He also has amazing credentials with degrees from the Universities of Rochester and Indiana.

Bill is my favorite logical thinker, philosopher, editor and language specialist. He is the one who found that the string of four words “Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo” is a legal sentence in the English language and not a weather-put down meaning “snow snow snow snow”. Bill also has a nice parse that a sentence with any number of “Buffalo’s” is still a legal sentence. Quite amazing.

Bill is famous for a couple of things other than philosophy, computer science and language. He came up with a restaurant guide which is wildly popular in the Buffalo area. The only time I wrote a restaurant review was for Bill. I am sure there many first time writers in his collection. That is a remarkable talent to encourage people to write. He and I also co-wrote a paper on how Sanskrit could be used as an inter-lingua for machine translation. Again, an intellectual foray that I would not have entered into without his enthusiasm.

As a computer scientist Bill Rapaport built a cognitive Agent of SNePS called CASSIE. It analyzed sentences such as “Young Lucy petted a yellow dog”. Guess why he chose Lucy rather than a more standard linguistic name such as John or Mary. Preservation of Lucille Ball ‘s memory is something Bill has dedicated a lot of effort to. For those of you not familiar with Lucille Ball she was very funny. Among her funny lines is this one: “Secret to staying young is to work honestly, eat slowly and lie about your age”. As Bill is a devoted follower of Lucy we will not ask Bill as to how old he is. Knowing Bill, he will continue to work honestly. I would be surprised to see him in a fast-food joint such as McDonald’s.

Peter Scott is an engineer. He came to UB with an ivy league PhD from Cornell where he had many famous fellow graduate students such as Riseman and Hanson. He is probably the only faculty member in the department whose student is now a university president. Not to be too carried away by university

presidents, I understand that at that time, Peter had two Greek PhD students, one who was really bright and the other quite average. The brilliant one is now a hard-working professor in Greece.

Among other things, digital cameras, and signal processing are among Peter's main interests. He probably taught image processing to every student who needed it as a subject in the department. There have been quite a few. Peter was always ready to serve on dissertation committees of my students when others said they were not interested or too busy. He always had worthwhile comments for my students to improve their work.

I understand riding motorcycles is his hobby and he is now getting back to it. Several memorial day weekends I ended- up in Washington DC. There is always a national motorcycle festival called rolling thunder. I wouldn't be surprised to see Peter there next year in his helmet on a Harley-Davidson or a Kawasaki making the good times roll.

Let me conclude by saying that above all Stu, Bill and Peter are dedicated professors but they also made an impact on the university and community. In this they are exemplary to those of us who are in academia.

So I would like to propose a toast to three great professors who are now onto becoming grand.