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Author(s): Michelle L. Steinauer and Charles D. Criscone

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## INTRODUCTION OF WILLIAM F. FONT, RECIPIENT OF THE 2012 CLARK P. READ MENTOR AWARD

Michelle L. Steinauer and Charles D. Criscone\*

Department of Biomedical Sciences, College of Veterinary Medicine, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon 97331. e-mail: michelle.steinauer@oregonstate.edu

Being his former graduate students, we are thrilled and honored to present the 2012 Clark P. Read Mentor Award to Dr. William (Bill) F. Font.

Bill is a native of New Orleans, where he obtained a B.S. from Tulane University in 1966. He served honorably in the U.S. Navy from 1966–1970 and is a Vietnam Veteran. In 1970, he began his academic career at Louisiana State University under Dr. Kenneth Corkum. He earned an M.S. in 1972 and then a Ph.D. in 1975. His first appointment was as an Assistant Professor in 1975 at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire (UW–Eau Claire) and became an Associate Professor in 1983. In 1985, he moved to Southeastern Louisiana University (SELU) where he obtained the rank of Professor in 1988. In 2010, Bill retired from classroom teaching but remains a Scholar in Residence and Professor Emeritus at SELU.

Presenting ASP's mentor award to Bill speaks volumes to Bill's mentoring impact in the field of parasitology. You see, Bill is the first recipient of this award to have been at institutions where there were no Ph.D. programs. At both UW–Eau Claire and SELU, there is a greater emphasis on classroom teaching and fewer resources available to establish and maintain a large-scale research program. Nevertheless, Bill's mentoring has reached far and wide to many students and colleagues at all levels. He has mentored 14 students in an M.S. degree, served as an external committee member for 10 students in a Ph.D. degree, 3 students for an Undergraduate Honors Thesis, and 46 undergraduate students in scientific research. Bill is a natural, thoughtful, and dedicated mentor and, today, we recognize and celebrate his mentoring contributions.

Bill has stated on several occasions that the best part of his career was working with students. He is a gracious and giving person and outwardly expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to work with students. Upon his recent retirement, he wrote a heartfelt letter to his students stating, "I am writing to let you know that I have retired. I think that this is a good time to thank you all for what you have meant to me. Both teaching and research have been enjoyable parts of my career, but I would have to say that the very best part of the past 25 years at Southeastern has been getting to know, and doing research with, my graduate students. Working with you has been absolutely great!"

When we requested letters for Bill's nomination for this award, there was overwhelming enthusiasm by his past students to support his recommendation. We would like to share several themes that are common throughout the support letters. Bill has had an enormous impact on each of our professional and personal developments. His role has been integral in helping us determine our career paths, and for many this guidance came at pivotal

times in their lives. Bill is a truly caring and supportive mentor for both professional and personal matters, and this support has been extended far past our graduation days. Also, Bill held up the highest expectations for each of us and truly believed that we could meet them. He expected us to put in the same long hours and dedication as he did. Bill is also very talented at inspiring students and he could easily maintain his faith, support, and encouragement to live up to his high standards even through what felt like trying times for his students. Part of what made him such a great mentor was that he had an "open-door policy" and, thus, was never too busy to mentor. We could walk into his office at any time and he would put down what he was doing to talk with us. This unique mentoring quality is one we took for granted then, but now, as overbooked faculty members ourselves, we realize the time sacrifices he made to help us. Another insight gained from reading these letters is that Bill was able to tailor his mentoring style to be what each of us needed. This is the hallmark of a good mentor: that one can understand and appreciate the differences among students and how to best guide them. For Sarah Brock, it was encouraging her that she could do more; for Amanda Vincent it was challenging her to think critically and guiding her to discover links between biology and policy; for Chrystal Kain it was his faith in her to succeed as a graduate student; for Ashleigh Smythe it was patience and faith in her ability; for Ricky Fiorillo it was "tough" love, honesty, and continued support.

Speaking from a personal experience (CDC), Bill possessed several traits that made him a great research mentor. He was patient, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, supportive, and inquisitive. He often led by example rather than dictating how one should conduct research. Indeed, it is said that imitation is the greatest form of flattery. I must say that Bill's methodological (and often "anal") attention to detail in his research is probably one of the most important skills I have taken with me in my own career. I cannot state with more sincerity that Bill's mentorship has greatly influenced my career and he deserves much of the credit for where I am today. From the very beginning, he was responsible for my current academic path. I recall when I applied to SELU, I wanted to work with a herpetologist who ended up not taking students. Bill called me out of the blue and offered me a chance to work with him. I said yes, and ever since am indebted to the opportunity he provided me. As with all his students, Bill continued to look out for our future interests. Indeed, I remember when he came back from a meeting in England, where he saw a talk by Dr. Mike Blouin. Bill made it a point to direct me to Mike's papers. A year later, I was starting my Ph.D. in Mike's laboratory. Even through my Ph.D., I often relied upon Bill for research advice. Mike was a population geneticist, but not a parasitologist. Thus, I would often call Bill to get his guidance on parasitological methods. Bill always provided me with the time, even though I was no longer his responsibility. Today, Bill's research continues to inspire me and we continue to work

\* Department of Biology, Texas A&M University, 3258 TAMU, College Station, Texas 77843-3258.

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together. In fact, Bill is a Co-PI on my NSF grant, which aims to examine the evolution of changes in parasite life cycle complexity in the digenean genus *Alloglossidium* (a genus Bill studied earlier in his career). Some of Bill's primary duties will be to assist me in training my Ph.D. students in parasite systematics and, of course, to mentor his own undergraduate researchers. Even though Bill is retired, his participation in an NSF research project speaks volumes to his devotion in training future parasitologists.

I (MLS) felt that, as a student, Bill treated me with incredible respect and support. When we met, we both shared passion for parasitology, and he helped guide me to turn my love for cutting things open and looking for parasites into a Master's Thesis and now a career. Bill taught me valuable skills in parasitology, science, collecting, and writing and has helped me develop into the scientist that I am today. I always felt that he treated me as a colleague, and he showed interest in discussing the ideas I was thinking about and the research I was doing in the laboratory. I also felt that Bill was very intuitive about what I needed for my development as a scientist and personal development. Bill was always available to talk with me for whatever I needed; his door was always open. I remember coming to him upset about something that seemed so important at the time (although I can't remember it now) and asking for his advice. He looked at me, smiled, and said "follow me." He took me through the maze of his laboratory to a map and pointed to a specific spot saying, "Here. I want you to go here and collect." I was hesitant and listed all the other things I needed to be doing, and he just replied that it did not matter. He thought I needed to just get out and do something I love to reset my mind. He was right. His mentoring still continues to this day. In a recent phone conversation, I mentioned an upcoming job interview. Bill asked when it was and said he would put it on his calendar. Sure enough, when I opened my email the morning of the interview, there was a letter of encouragement and support waiting for me.

We also solicited personal statements from other mentees that were not Bill's direct students, but he nevertheless provided invaluable mentorship. Alistar Dove, now at the Georgia Aquarium Research Center, noted Bill's passion and enthusiasm for parasitology and that it was just plain fun. "Bill was on my Ph.D. committee when I was at the University of Queensland and, despite the tyranny of distance, he provided endless encouragement and the benefits of his experience and wisdom, always with enough of a dash of Font humor to calm an anxious grad student and remind me that we were there to HAVE FUN and DO GOOD SCIENCE. Since those days, I have always been impressed by how many excellent grad students in different labs across the country can cite a start with Bill at SELU or some other Font interaction (usually through ASP) that got them going on the right path. This legacy of successful parasitologists who were touched by his tutelage is a testament to the power of effective mentorship in non-Ph.D. granting institutions."

Jessica Light, now an assistant professor at Texas A&M University, shared the following, "I oftentimes felt that Bill treated me like a peer. I also felt that my relationship with him was easy; Bill was easy to approach, easy to talk to, etc. I

respected him instantly and never felt awkward asking him for help and advice. Bill was always available and never made me feel like I was asking a silly question (even though I'm sure I often was). Bill also was the ideal mentor at scientific meetings, introducing me to his colleagues and checking in occasionally to see how I enjoyed the meeting. Bill created a congenial environment where it was easy to learn from him."

Bill's research mentorship extended beyond students to also assisting colleagues. Anindo Choudhury, a Professor at St. Norbert's College, described how Bill made him feel welcome and helped him acclimate at his first ASP meeting. In addition, he remarked on how Bill was free with his help and advice regarding research on an introduced Asian fish tapeworm.

While the aforementioned statements exemplify Bill's mentoring capabilities in research, he was also an excellent teacher in the classroom. At SELU, where he spent most of his career, he taught 9 classes. These courses included General Parasitology, Medical Parasitology, Invertebrate Zoology, and two field courses, Invertebrate Ecology and Ecological Parasitology. Most of these classes were very "hands on," and Bill taught both the lectures and labs which melded together into a single course. He was the type of teacher that knew all of his students by name and has been described by his students as having high expectations, fair, caring, enthusiastic, and passionate. His courses have been described as challenging, rewarding, clear, and organized. During my (MLS) time at SELU, I volunteered to be a teaching assistant for the medical parasitology course. I attended many of the laboratory classes and saw first-hand how Bill taught the material. He always gave extremely thorough explanations which now, as an instructor, I strive to replicate. One of his former undergraduate students, Amanda Vincent, has said that he "has the ability to relay complex information to students in a very straightforward and understandable manner." Another common theme in the support letters for this nomination is that we model our teaching styles around the style of Bill Font.

We hope our brief and incomplete introduction has given you a glimpse into why Dr. William F. Font is most deserving of the Read Mentor Award. Bill has touched the lives of all of us in a very significant way and has taught us all valuable life lessons that have stayed with us. The appreciation and respect that Bill's former students have of him were exemplified in a plaque that was presented to Bill at his retirement party, in which all of his past SELU M.S. students participated. This plaque was engraved with a line drawing of *Alloglossidium greeri* (which was described by Bill) and the quote "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." As a mentor he is dedicated, patient, intuitive, respectful, sincere, and kind. His mentorship has led to the development of faculty members at higher learning institutions from medical schools to R01 institutions to community colleges and also those involved in government and industry. Moreover, Dr. William Font has spread his love for parasitology to his Master's students, Ph.D. students, numerous undergraduate students, his community, and his colleagues!