

Bob Tollison to me

Bob had a defining impact on my life. I met Bobby McCormick when I first came to Clemson on an interview. We instantly became fast friends. Bobby went to TAMU for his PhD and hooked up with Bob T. After that it was a threesome. I remember when Bobby was back at Clemson for a year's visit right out of grad school, Bob came for a weekend. Bobby and I were working on a paper. Bobby said, "Let's bring Bob in." Paper was finished by Sunday morning, The phrase was coined, "Publish no paper before it is typed." Almost a joke because Bob's wife, Anna, can probably type 120. I never understood how she could read his writing.

Bobby went to Rochester and I drifted down to Emory on the basis of meeting one of Bob's UVa classmates, Matt Lindsay, at Southern meeting in NO. Then lightning struck. Clemson landed some money for a chair and courted Bob. Bob brought Bobby and myself in with him.

Those were wild times. We had a suite on the third floor. There was a construction trailer out below the window. So when boredom overtook scholarship, we pitched pennies. Closest to the spot won \$20. A countless ritual that I dropped out of quickly because I could never win against the B boys.

Bob left, Bobby and I stayed, but the connections never changed. Finally, Bob came back which was a joy. Brilliant, insightful mind. Never caught up in emotion. Just objectively assessing the world. There is no doubt to me that Bob produced more top-ranked journal publications than anyone in the profession. He had an uncanny knack of knowing what editors wanted before they did. Great with students; maybe better than me.

Great sport, too. I admit I could never beat him in tennis singles. Over the years, we played a lot. I could win against him in doubles or racquetball or golf, but in tennis singles he was just too cagey. Terrible form but played to deceive. Against superior fire power he just answered with finesse. That was his way in most things.

From department webpage:

In Memoriam

Robert Dewitt Tollison

Robert D. Tollison's life began and ended in Upstate South Carolina. After attending Spartanburg High School and graduating Wofford College, Bob began a career that carried him to great international academic acclaim and all across the country. However, to those of us at Clemson who had the great privilege and delight of interacting with him as friend, colleague, and student, Bob's most welcome career choice was to return to his home state for good.

As scholar, Bob played a key role in the development of the emerging fields of public choice, the economics of sports, and the economics of religion. Early in his career he was a

leading contributor to the study of the organization of industry. In each of these fields his research was innovative, important, and frequently seminal. He contributed to the academic enterprise not only as one of the profession's most prolific authors ever, but also as a long-serving journal editor and as a mentor to generations of students. He served as President of the Southern Economic Association and the Public Choice Society.

Bob's influence extended well beyond the academy. Early in his career he served as a senior staff economist on the President's Council of Economic Advisors, followed a decade later by his appointment as Director of the Bureau of Economic Analysis at the Federal Trade Commission. In Washington he interacted with policymakers as a scholar, bringing his characteristic independence of thought and expression to a realm that was not entirely accustomed to candid and penetrating policy analysis. In turn, his practical experience informed his research, which was never detached from the world beyond the campus. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that his research helped his fellow academics understand far better a world that was otherwise unfamiliar to them.

Bob's influence extended past academics and government. He was engaged with the real world on a regular and powerful basis. His active role and legal testimony helped shape our business environment. He played a critical role, for instance, in partial dismantling of the NCAA cartel on wages so abhorrent to virtually every economist. It is almost certain that the NBA would not have added a third referee when it did without the research, advice, and opinion of Bob Tollison.

Bob saw economics everywhere in everything. His vision, insights, and creativity combined with his intellectual capacity and memory made him a rare bird in the halls of the academy. You could never guess what was going to come next, but you were confident it would be interesting, thoughtful, and stimulating. And, you were almost sure to say both "wow" and "why had I never thought of that?" Simple yet elegant.

To know Bob Tollison was to appreciate not merely his intellect, but his character as well. He was, in every interaction with colleagues or students or anyone else, kind, considerate, helpful, and patient. As one of his friends and colleagues said upon news of his passing, "Bob was the favorite professor of many students, including two of my kids. Although he had a huge intellect and was highly accomplished he never talked down to anyone." His humility and presence made him an inspirational teacher of graduate students and undergraduates alike, from his days as a teaching assistant at the University of Virginia to his years at Clemson as the J. Wilson Newman Professor of Economics. He was kind and gentle, even when you were stupid and arrogant. But it wasn't just his intellect and easy going nature that made you want to walk into his office. Bob taught us that hard work was a virtue not just on the farm but in our offices as well. He believed in structure and discipline and that whether you were picking blackberries or developing a massive new database you should get to work early and often, but it was okay to take a break to play basketball at lunch. Bob's educational tree is long limbed and many leafed, having signed more than 150 PhD and Master's theses.

Bob was slow to judge, and rarely if ever cared whether you judged him or not. A devout libertarian he earnestly believed that unchained human capacity was virtually unlimited and that free thinking, free people, acting responsibly (most of the time) and working hard (all of the time), could solve or fix almost any problem, human or physical. He was the consummate rational optimist.

Perhaps above all else, Bob was fun and funny. In so many ways, he never really ever had a job. Everything he did, and asked you to do, he did or wanted you to do because it made

life easier, fun, and most especially exciting. When he called you on the phone, or met you in the hall, or came to your office, you put down your work because you knew you were either about to learn or laugh, and usually both.

Bob was not just a student of sport, he was too an avid athlete. He was a basketball star at Spartanburg High (#40) and loved to play not only hoops but tennis and golf. In sport as in life, he was cool and objective. In many ways, tennis showed his character best. He did not have great form or a powerful game, but he was cagey and played with finesse. He quickly recognized his opponent's weakness and played to capitalize on it. He never gloated in victory, nor was he particularly dejected in defeat. He loved to play but knew there would be a game the next day.

Bob Tollison's passing leaves a void in the halls of Serrine and in our lives not to be filled, but our memories of him will endure as his inquisitive spirit, love of life, peaceful pleasantness, and smiling presence reminds us how just how wonderful economics can be when lived to its fullest. RIP.

From friend Jim Miller:

Through false and deceptive advertising, I was able to persuade Bob Tollison to take on the job of directing the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Economics. Every morning we'd have a senior staff meeting around a long table, with Bob and one end and me at the other. I'd opine about some notion and state my proposal. "Good reasoning, Mr. Chairman," would say one office head. "Very insightful," would say another. "Right on the mark," and so on. Until it got to Bob, who frequently would look up from some manuscript he was writing or editing and say, "Jim, you are full of s....!" Just shows the importance of having colleagues who will tell you when you are full of yourself.

Bob not only took over the Bureau of Economics, but agreed to serve as acting director of the FTC's Office of Policy Development. At one morning meeting I asked Bob, "How's the Office of Policy Development coming along?," to which he responded, "What Office? I abolished it." Now, there was a government official who knew how to subtract as well as to add!

Bob was not only a prolific writer, but one of the most generous co-authors imaginable. While he was at Texas A&M, one of the prizes offered at a social event was to "co-author a journal note or article with Bob Tollison."

Bob Tollison was a mentor to me as well as thousands of scholars with whom he was a colleague, student, and/or friend. He will be succeeded, but never replaced!

From "Rate my Professor":

"Dr. Tollison is the man. He can put anything I care about on a supply and demand curve and show me how to analyze it. Tells you what you need to know, and why its true. He loves Clemson sports, so that will start the class off each day.""

"Absolutely my favorite professor of freshman year. He loves football and talks about it every chance he gets."

"This guy is a badass, he doesn't take attendance but he is so helpful if you see him after class."

"This guy can make the most boring Econ class entertaining. Funny guy... lots of sports analogies and stories about his dogs. Gets off track with stories in a funny way."

"Tollison is the man. Keeps classes short and to the point--hardly ever uses all the time allotted."

"Dr. Tollison is quite possibly my favorite professor at Clemson. He is an incredible teacher."

"My favorite economics professor at the entire school. He is one of the most helpful and laid back professors you can have. I would recommend taking any class he is teaching. Class requires research, but is totally doable and he is always glad to look at drafts and provide comments. Take anything he teaches!"

Tollison is unparalleled in his ability as a lecturer, as his experience reflects a quality that is quintessentially unique to great storytelling. He is, not only extremely intelligent and wholly knowledgeable about everything (yes, everything,) but also, inspiring in the way he evokes interest in seemingly deathly dry topics in public choice.

One of the best professors at Clemson (highest paid too). Incredibly smart man with great sense of humor. Do yourself a favor and take him while you can. WORLD Class teacher.