

Colleagues Fondly Remember Physics Professor Michael Gorman



The sudden death of University of Houston physics professor Michael Gorman stunned friends and colleagues, who lauded Gorman as an outstanding scientist, teacher and friend.

Gorman collapsed suddenly the morning of Dec. 17 near his office in the Science and Research 1 Building and was later pronounced dead. He was 62.

"Dr. Gorman was a very conscientious, excellent teacher and faculty member, a strong supporter to his department in all respects," said John Bear, former dean of the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

Physics professor Gemunu Gunaratne, a friend and colleague of Gorman's for more than two decades, described Gorman as a wise and helpful mentor to younger physics faculty. In fact, when Gunaratne was hired Gorman informally advised him on the ins-and-outs of the tenure process, Gunaratne said.

"Michael was very good about taking a new faculty member under his wing and helping to guide them towards tenure," Gunaratne said. "He could be brutally honest, and we appreciated that."

Gorman also had an energetic, animated teaching style that made him popular among undergraduates, Gunaratne added.

"Mike was a very funny, dynamic person," he said.

The devoted scientist and teacher showed no signs of slowing down. Just days before his death he chatted with Gunaratne for an hour, excitedly sharing some new research developments. Gorman had also taken an interest in alternative energy and energy policy and planned to teach a new energy course in the fall.

Gorman's funeral was held in St. Louis, where he was born. An on-campus memorial service was held Jan. 16 at the A.D. Bruce Religion Center.

He joined the UH faculty in 1981 and was promoted to full professor in 1999. He was a leading researcher in the experimental study of flame and chaotic dynamics. Gorman was also active in campus affairs, previously serving as associate chair of the physics department and as a member of the faculty senate.

Gorman received a doctorate in physics from the University of Chicago, as well as undergraduate and master's degrees from Boston College and Purdue University, respectively.

"He was a very well-liked teacher, colleague and friend, and we'll miss him very much," said Larry Pinsky, chair of the physics department.