

JAMES ROBERT CHARLES LEITZEL (1936-1998):
Teacher, Leader, and Esteemed Colleague

James Leitzel was born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Upon receiving Baccalaureate and Master's degrees from Penn State and a doctorate from Indiana University, he joined The Ohio State University Mathematics Department in 1965.

As vice-chair of The Ohio State University Department of Mathematics, Professor Leitzel created a sense of community among mathematics faculty and graduate students; he worked toward creating the Master of Arts in Teaching degree program and he served as chair of the M.A. committee from 1980 until his retirement in 1992. He also provided exemplary leadership as Secretary of the University Senate from 1984 to 1987. From 1990 to 1992, he was a visiting mathematician and director of special projects for the Mathematical Association of America (MAA).



Upon his retirement from The Ohio State University in 1992, Professor Leitzel joined the mathematics faculty of the University of Nebraska and later the University of New Hampshire, where he remained until his death after a five-month battle with cancer.

Professor Leitzel devoted himself to the enhancement of mathematics education on a national level. He served on numerous national committees involving recommendations to improve the standards of mathematics education. While at the MAA, he chaired the Committee on Mathematical Education of Teachers (COMET) and is particularly remembered for his work in the development, writing, and editing of a 1991 publication, "A Call for Change: Recommendations for the Mathematical Preparation of Teachers of Mathematics.

At the time of his death, Dr. Leitzel was co-director of the widely recognized national Exxon Project NExT (New Experiences in Teaching), providing professional development opportunities for young mathematics faculty. To date, it has provided opportunities for 1400 NExT fellows.

In a tribute to James Leitzel, following his death, the University of New Hampshire community remembered him as a wonderful friend, an outstanding colleague, and a great teacher. Though he was with UNH for just over a year, his contributions were substantial.

It is doubtful that Jim's students realized the extent of his organizational efforts to improve standards for teaching. He held a vast amount of experience serving on committees to improve mathematics education, the most outstanding of which included: the Committee on the Undergraduate Program in Mathematics—the most prestigious college mathematics education committee in the country, which he chaired; the Committee on the Teaching of Undergraduate Mathematics, which he also chaired; the Task Force of the Mathematical Association of America, and the NCTM *Curriculum and Evaluations Standards for School Mathematics*.

His students did, however, recognize his dedication and skill. His memorial address by Dr. Kenneth Appel, UNH Mathematics Department chair, included these student tributes:

"Professor Leitzel is one of the best professors I have had in my three years here. His curriculum was both focused and interesting, and the assignments were well related. He had a very relaxed manner with students that made him easy to approach. In my opinion, this is an extremely valuable characteristic for a professor to possess. The more comfortable a professor is in front of the class, the more comfortable the learning environment will be for the students. Professor Leitzel exemplified this.

— Paula LaFrance, UNH undergraduate mathematics major

“Mr. Letizel is one of my favorite professors. He maintains a high standard of scholarship while making the material accessible to the average student. He brings an enthusiasm to the class, a sense of history, humor, and a respect for the pursuit of mathematics. He conveys a sense of purpose to all of the material and has the ability to make plain the ideas behind the manipulations... — the man is an ace.
— *Adam Hopper, student of Professor Leitzel*

Of Jim Leitzel’s extensive work with the Mathematical Association of America, his colleagues write:

“Simply put, in my opinion there is no one who has made greater contributions to the collegiate mathematics education in this country than Jim Leitzel.”
— *Prof. Alan Tucker, State Univ. of NY, Stony Brook*

“I had a short list of reliable wise colleagues on whom I would call for advice. Jim Leitzel was at the top of the short list.”
—*Prof. Kenneth Ross, Univ. of Oregon, President of MAA (1995-96)*

“In my opinion, there are few in our community who have made as many contributions to collegiate mathematics in its myriad dimensions as Jim Leitzel.”
—*Marcia Sward, Executive Director of MMA*

Those contributions of Professor James Leitzel, through the lives he touched and the standards and programs that he established, continue on today, in an ever-expanding way.

“As a result [of Project NExT], the professional careers of many young faculty members have been launched along a trajectory concerned with issues and innovations in teaching. I estimate that most of the recent Ph.D.s in academic positions have a ‘Leitzel number’ of 1 or 2 — meaning that they or someone they know has had their career directly influenced by Jim Leitzel.”
— *Young Mathematicians Network newsletter*

“I have no doubt, with Jim’s big heart, that he has performed a million deeds of kindness, but by itself, the one simple act of creating Project NExT gives me cause to marvel — Jim has not only touched hundreds of lives but has changed the way mathematics is lived out and taught across the country.
—*Project NExT fellow*