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TOP STORY

Capps remembered for 'wide-ranging influence' at WKU

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Randy Capps

Submitted

Western Kentucky University has lost a trailblazing former faculty member and administrator whose influence on countless business and education leaders is still being felt.

H. Randall “Randy” Capps, who established WKU’s Department of Speech and Theatre (later renamed the Department of Communication) and then transitioned to the Gordon Ford College of Business, was active with his Leadership Strategies Group consulting firm up until his death last week at age 85.

His colleague at Leadership Strategies Group and a newly formed nonprofit called Kentucky Center for Leadership, Michael Trivizadakis, said Capps demonstrated his love for sharing his skills and knowledge until the end of his life.

“He came to the office last Wednesday morning and was laughing and happy,” Trivizadakis said. “Then he had a heart attack and passed. That’s the way he would have loved to depart.”

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Countless leaders in business and education count Capps among their mentors, with that list including WKU President Timothy Caboni and Murray State University President Bob Jackson.

“I was saddened to learn of Dr. Capps’ passing,” Caboni said in an email. “We had a special relationship as he was the reason I came to WKU as a graduate student in 1993 and provided good counsel to me and five other WKU presidents during our tenures. He exemplified the WKU spirit and the

commitment of our faculty to students. The entire community will miss his presence and leadership.”

Among those influenced by Capps was Jody Richards, who taught at WKU with Capps before starting his four-decade career as a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives.

“He and I shared an office at WKU,” Richards said. “He taught speech and I taught journalism. He developed the speech department at Western when it was still part of the English Department. It became one of the hallmarks of WKU, especially the debate team. His influence was wide-ranging.”

That influence extended beyond WKU’s campus as students went on to successful careers in business and education.

In addition to influencing Caboni and Jackson, Capps served as a mentor to former University of Tennessee Chancellor Beverly Davenport and to

business executives who have made their mark nationally and internationally.

“He was a great individual and a mentor to many during his time on the Hill,” said Donald Smith, president of the College Heights Foundation. “I talk to so many alumni who say they have been influenced by him.”

Among those is Dan Pelino, a two-time WKU graduate who went on to a 36-year career as an executive with International Business Machines.



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Pelino, who will give the eulogy Saturday at Capps' funeral, credits Capps with launching him on that career path.

He recalled how Capps encouraged him to pursue a graduate degree at WKU that he said "changed my life."

"He encouraged me to go to work for IBM," Pelino said. "He would come visit me and help me with my business strategy."

Pelino, who returned to WKU as a guest lecturer in Capps' classes, remembers his mentor as "an amazing listener."

"He had a way with few words to be very encouraging, and always with respect, dignity and kindness," Pelino

said. “We were very close. He’s someone I’ll miss dearly.”

Capps spent nearly 20 years as head of the department of communication before joining the Gordon Ford College of Business, where he taught organizational leadership and management courses.

In addition to his work in the Potter College of Arts and Letters and the Gordon Ford College, Capps also helped create and develop the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences.



His impact on WKU continues through the Randall Capps Scholarship Fund he helped establish

and fund to award financial aid to communication and business students.

Another scholarship fund established in Capps' honor, the Zuheir and Susan Sofia Scholarship Fund, helps international students at WKU.

Capps' funeral will be Saturday at 2 p.m. at State Street United Methodist Church in Bowling Green. Visitation will be Friday from 4 to 8 p.m. at J.C. Kirby & Son Lovers Lane Chapel and will resume Saturday from noon until the time of the service at Street United Methodist Church.

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