Six alumni share a common thread. Joe Moreland, B.A. ’74, J.D. ’77, Pat Hayes, M.A. ’96, Paul Schmidtlein, B.A. ’72, M.A. ’77, J.D. ’86, Russ Dameron, B.A. ’81, J.D. ’84, Jerry Lonergan, B.A. ’80, and Gary Sage, B.A. ’83, represent five different graduating classes spanning three decades, but they have formed a special relationship that brings them together several times a year to talk about economics, politics and social issues. While they may not always share the same position on these matters, they always agree on one thing: Dr. Gene Wagner, professor emeritus in the Department of Economics, changed their lives.

“Professor Wagner opened his students’ eyes to the fact there really is no gray in the world,” says Lonergan. “The world is perfectly black and white: There is the enlightened Wagner-way and the way of all lesser mammals. It was a joy to spend time in Wagner’s classroom.”

To honor Wagner’s impact on their lives and service to the university, these six College alumni have created the Gene Wagner Honorary Scholarship in Economics.

Wagner has taught at UMKC for more than 40 years, his research interests covering a range of issues. He currently teaches the economics of health and medicine, but he is perhaps best known for his classes on labor economics.

“Gene Wagner is an inspiring economics instructor,” says Sage. “He motivates his students to study economics from the perspective of how people currently make their living, with an eye to how working people can improve their economic position. He embodies the best of an intellectual tradition of commitment to helping the less fortunate, with an immense curiosity that has been contagious to several generations of UMKC students. His teaching was a tremendous motivation for his students and the broader labor movement in the Kansas City area.”

The alumni didn’t have Wagner’s classes together, but they developed fast and strong bonds because of their similar experiences with Wagner and their shared belief in the importance of unions. The Gene Wagner Honorary Scholarship in Economics will provide financial aid for deserving undergraduate students who have family, personal and financial backgrounds supportive of organized labor, and who are pursuing a degree in economics at UMKC.

If you would like to support the Gene Wagner Honorary Scholarship in Economics, contact Karen English at 816-235-1139, e-mail englishk@umkc.edu, or visit www.umkc.edu/give/genewagner.
To know Charlotte Hill is to know the human potential. As a community activist and a leader in the nonprofit sector, Hill lives a life dedicated to helping people. Motivated by the positive impact that competitive speech had on her as a youth, Hill’s life of service started when she began teaching high school speech after graduating from UMKC. She says she “hoped to help just one person out of a million.” That hope came true. In fact, during her teaching career at Kansas City-area high schools, a local community college and UMKC, she helped scores of students realize their ability to be confident, articulate and persuasive orators.

One such student is Michelle Lapointe, B.A. ’80, vice president of the UMKC Alumni Governing Board and past president of the College of Arts and Sciences Alumni Board. Lapointe remembers deciding taking Hill’s speech class initially, but her anxiety quickly turned to appreciation. “Professor Hill challenged her students,” Lapointe says, “but she also instilled confidence in us. Sharp, witty, and not one to hold back, her instruction was the right combination to bring out the best in each of us.”

Lapointe’s reflection matches perfectly Hill’s recent remarks about how she approached students and teaching. “What you expect of your students is what you get,” Hill says. “I always expected that my students were going to be successful and could achieve whatever it was they wanted to achieve, and rarely was I ever disappointed. Education should be about giving students the opportunity to show they have value and worth.”

Hill carried the same unswerving belief in the human potential into other endeavors after she left teaching. She has served on several nonprofit advisory boards and political campaigns, and was instrumental in starting a church and a nursing home in Kansas City. She also serves in the board chair for Renaissance West, Kansas City’s oldest drug and alcohol prevention and treatment organization, and helps with fundraising efforts for Paws to Freedom, a nonprofit organization that trains Labrador Retrievers to be service dogs for people with disabilities.

Hill has also enjoyed a successful career in business. A partner at Pemberton Whitman & Hill, she was named Woman of the Year by The National Association of Professional Women. While Hill enjoys her service work, she says supporting students remains especially rewarding. Individually and as director of the Kenneth C. Hill Foundation, she has established a number of educational scholarships. The College is thankful to be the home to one of them.

“For many highly promising students, scholarship support is absolutely essential to their ability to attend college,” says Nathan Shatto, UMKC Director of Stewardship. “The support these students receive from Ms. Hill and the Foundation helps to ease their financial burdens so that they are able to focus on academic and service goals. The impact she has made on UMKC students is immeasurable.”

Chad Shearer's goal was to be an architect. He decided on that career objective when he was just a kid, pursued it through the College's Architecture Studies Program, and had almost achieved that dream when he made what turned out to be a very fortunate turn: he accepted an internship at the Brooks Institution in Washington D.C. When his internship was complete, the prestigious think tank offered Shearer an internship and eventually, a full-time research position.

When he arrived at the College, Shearer began the coursework for a degree in architecture. But his late father had been an urban planner, so Chad also enrolled in an urban planning course taught by Professor Michael Frisch.

“That class and the study of cities caused me to fall in love with design,” Shearer says, “and I changed my major to Urban Planning and Design (UPD) then and there.”

The College's small class sizes and UPD's excellent research opportunities were exactly what Shearer wanted from a university. But he says it was the faculty that had the largest impact on him. “Professor Frisch, Sung-Nop Kim and Jacob Wagner are the reason I am where I am today,” he says.

As a research assistant at the Brooks Institution, Shearer's research focuses on metropolitan issues, particularly those related to making urban areas better places to live and better engines of economic growth. He and his colleagues determine such sites based on a variety of factors, including current events and policy debates.

“The state and local economic crisis is dominating conversations at Brookings these days,” he says.

Shearer says the research on economic development he did at the College helped him solidify his career choice and prepared him to work at Brookings. And, although he enjoyed living in Kansas City, Shearer confesses that living in D.C. is a unique experience that no other city can duplicate. “You never get over the awe and inspiration that our nation's capital or the Washington Monument sparks by even just a glance from the sidewalk. It's just cool.”

Shearer goes from the College of Arts and Sciences to the Brookings Institution.

Chad Shearer (B.A. ’97)

UMKC
College of Arts and Sciences

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