On the Retirement of Bill and Margaret Hrezo
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(College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences Newsletter, September 2014)

Most of the people in and around Radford University who know Bill, know Margaret. Most who know and work with Margaret, know Bill. But while they are in some ways inseparable professionally, there are personal differences that those of us who know them well will recognize as illustrations of their individuality. As these two exemplary professors face retirement, and more importantly as the university contemplates its future without them here, some reflection on their personalities and immense contributions to the well being of thousands of students and the integrity of this institution is in order.

During their long tenure at Radford University, together spanning more than 50 years, Bill and Margaret both served as Chair of the Political Science Department. As chairs they were expected to hold and attend many meetings. Their individual tastes and styles, particularly in food choices, reflect something of their personalities and their approach to leadership. At chairs meetings in the early 1990s the Dean provided a lunch that was heavy on salads but light on Bill’s favorite food, meat. I remember he jokingly quipped to the Dean that some bacon would lighten the burden we were all under. At the next meeting there was a pound of cooked bacon waiting for Bill, a comfort to him to be sure. On the other hand, Margaret is fond of bringing healthy snacks, typically whole-wheat blueberry muffins, to comfort her colleagues as they too deal with weighty administrative concerns. Their dissimilar tastes in food are not trivial for this reflects their common respect for differences and their advocacy of civil discussion and thoughtful compromise.

To prepare this short essay on a couple that I have known for over 30 years I asked a number of people to share some of their thoughts about Bill and Margaret with me. I asked a former student who is now a judge, several colleagues who have known them nearly as long as I have or longer, and younger colleagues who have had the pleasure of working with Bill and Margaret for a relatively short period of time. Without fail two themes emerged from everyone’s recollections of this exemplary pair of individuals. One, their absolute and unalterable commitment to teaching within the liberal arts tradition, and two, their absorbing dedication to serving the needs of the university on committees, taskforces, councils, working groups, focus groups, boards, senates, and clubs. To say that they have been in high demand to work in this often-neglected area of faculty life is a dramatic understatement.

In one sense, the guiding philosophy that Bill and Margaret have followed over the course of their careers can be captured in that word service. The work that they have done at this university has been, without a doubt, exceptional and life changing for countless undergraduate students struggling to find meaning in their coursework. Their integrity, wisdom, civility, experience, and willingness to serve was never questioned and they both earned the respect of everyone who ever had the opportunity to work with them, either alone or together. They are both known and widely respected as well for their intense ethical stance on every issue that comes before them. Ethics to them is not a lofty goal or construct that resides in textbooks but rather the map that leads towards an equitable and just solution to problems, in the
classroom, among friends and family, at play, or at home.

It is difficult, in such a short space, to capture the essence of these two role models who are so universally respected by colleagues and students. Perhaps the words of a longtime friend and himself a person who has left his mark on this university says it best. When asked for his thoughts, Steve Lerch remarked that Bill and Margaret, as loyal friends and passionate defenders of a liberal arts education, both demonstrate unquestioned integrity in all they do. All of us whose lives they touched in so many positive ways will remember them fondly as individuals who cared deeply about our institution, their colleagues, and the success of their students.