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Remarks on the Occasion of the Retirement of Distinguished Professor Guillermo Owen

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The conclusion of this year's summer quarter brought with it the retirement of Distinguished Professor Guillermo Owen, and the end of an era at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS).



Guillermo received his PhD in mathematics from Princeton University in 1962 under the supervision of Harold Kuhn. He came to the Naval Postgraduate School in 1983, after having served over two decades as a professor at Fordham University, Rice University, and the University of the Andes.

I first met Guillermo in the winter quarter of 2007 when I signed up for his linear algebra course which was a required component of my master's degree program. I recall being impressed by, among other things, his mental math abilities; in particular his knack for solving square roots. Other students in our class also recognized this talent of his, and I remember several of us, aided by calculators, quietly trying and failing, to perform calculations quicker and more accurately than he did in his head. When I was later selected for the US Navy's Permanent Military Professor program and returned to the classroom in 2014 to begin work on a doctorate in applied mathematics, I was again fortunate to have Guillermo as one of my professors. I remember with fondness his first lecture in MA4400 - Cooperation and Competition. He entered the classroom, made a beeline to the front of the class, said "ok, let's begin with a quick review of game theory," and then began feverishly writing on the blackboard. As students, we found

this somewhat amusing albeit a bit disconcerting, given the fact that none of us had previously taken courses in game theory.

Over the course of my doctoral studies, I took a two-course sequence in real analysis from Guillermo, and he later served on my written and oral PhD qualifying exam committee. As a Navy Cryptologic Warfare Officer, my experience and interests primarily lie in discrete mathematics, combinatorics, and abstract algebra, and while I can appreciate the beauty of real analysis, I must admit that measure theory is not among my mathematical strong suits. I was therefore pleased when Guillermo told me not to focus on this material when I went to him to discuss what I should concentrate on in preparation for my oral qualifying exam. My relief was however short lived. On the day of my exam, Guillermo, either having overestimated my abilities or perhaps having forgotten the advice he previously gave, began his examination by posing a question on Lebesgue integration. Needless to say, my answers left something to be desired. However, thanks to his patience, hints, and a bit of coaching, I was able to muddle through that portion of the exam. After about an hour of questioning, the committee took a ten-minute recess, and I recall Guillermo coming up to me and whispering "relax, you are doing fine." I will never forget this kindness. It epitomizes Guillermo as a teacher. He is always compassionate and supportive of his students. Despite being a brilliant mathematician and an eminent scholar who has been nominated twice for the Nobel prize in economics, he never makes you feel dull or inadequate in his presence. He is one of the most humble and respectful people you could ever have the pleasure of meeting; a gentleman in every sense of the word.

During his forty-year tenure at NPS, Professor Owen taught 194 classes and educated over 2500 military officers. Many of his students became faculty members in their own right, going on to serve as math instructors at the service academies at Annapolis, West Point, and New London. Several of his students achieved flag rank and subsequently served our nation in key positions of significant responsibility. Guillermo has an

unparalleled legacy of teaching and scholarship achieved throughout an academic career that spans over six decades. Generations of military officers, along with the people and commands they later led, have benefitted from the critical thinking skills and mathematical knowledge Guillermo

imparted. He will be sorely missed by NPS faculty and students alike. It is an honor to have been a student, and later a colleague, of Distinguished Professor Owen. On behalf of a grateful Navy and Nation, we thank Guillermo for his long and dedicated service and wish him fair winds and following seas.