

In Memoriam: David Hamilton (1918-2016)



Emeritus Professor David Hamilton (right) pictured with Professor Richard Santos.

Emeritus Professor David Hamilton passed away December 2016, at the age of 98. He taught in the Department of Economics at University of New Mexico (UNM) from 1949 to 2009, and was a much-honored teacher and scholar in institutional economics, with a focus on protecting consumers, empowering community self direction, and fighting poverty.

David was born in Pittsburgh, PA in August 1918. He began his studies during the Great Depression and New Deal Era. While trained as an economist, he was widely read across many fields. He attended the University of Pittsburgh earning a BA in Economics in 1940 and MA in Economics in 1941. He served in the US Air Corps 1941-1946, with three years in the Pacific Theater in WWII, and attaining the rank of Major. He was also later recalled and served in US Air Force, 1951-1952, in the Korean War.

He appears to have begun teaching economics in about 1946. After WWII, he was hired as an economics instructor at University of Pittsburgh, and then went to the University of Texas where he pursued his PhD, and also taught as an economics instructor. In April 1949, he accepted an offer of employment from UNM, and joined the four-person Economics faculty in Fall 1949. While teaching at UNM, he completed his dissertation from University of Texas in 1951.

As an outgrowth of his dissertation, his influential book, *Evolutionary Economics* was first printed in 1953 by the UNM Press under a different title. The book came out in various revised editions, was still in print more than 55 years later, and was published in multiple languages.

Of more than 100 scholarly publications, his last research article was published more than 50 years after the publication of his dissertation.

He taught a wide range of courses including: Introduction to Social Sciences, Introduction to Economics, Business Cycles, Consumer Economics, Philosophical Foundations of Economic Thought, and History of Economic Thought. The latter, he only took up teaching in his retirement.

Professor Hamilton published work on consumer protection legislation in NM in 1958 (*Consumer Protection in New Mexico*). In the 1960's he published a textbook, *The Consumer in our Economy*, for classroom use. Notably, his work on consumer protection laws so angered select elements of the local business community that in 1962 they asked then UNM President Tom Popejoy to dismiss Professor Hamilton for being dangerous to young minds. The letter requesting his dismissal was widely distributed across the state, and was front page news in Albuquerque in March 1962. And it was not an isolated incident in the early 1960's at UNM. Later that year, President Popejoy sought and was granted opportunity to defend academic freedom in a now famous address to the NM American Legion. Thankfully, Professor Hamilton was not dismissed from UNM and kept right on influencing young minds for another forty plus years.

Professor Hamilton officially "retired" in 1988 after 39 years at UNM, but kept on teaching part time. In the mid-1990's he was diagnosed with macular degeneration in his eyes. He likened the world he saw to that of being in an art gallery and looking at French impressionist paintings. Refusing to view his loss of vision as a negative, he kept on teaching for another 15 years – ensconced in that art gallery.

He studied culture and institutions, or the rules of an economy (both formal and informal), and how they affected economic opportunity. He also studied the role of technological change. And on that note, in 1949 he accepted an offer of employment from the Department of Economics at UNM with a *Western Union Telegram* (which simply read: "I accept your final offer. Thank you."). He was still teaching long enough to receive just one rating - 50 years later - on the "*Rate My Professors*" website (which simply read: "Very nice professor. Is personable and is very caring for his students.").

Outside of academia, he was active in the community and politics over the arc of his life. He fought against McCarthyism in the 1950's, and was a petitioner in a 2013 NM State Supreme Court case to protect state retiree benefits and cost of living adjustments.

Proud of his economics training, Professor Hamilton sought to apply it in ways that improved the lives of others, especially those in poverty. His was a life well lived, and he will be missed. But we remember him for his joy for learning and teaching, which remains an inspiration to all of us.