



Seymour Smidt

November 2, 1928 – May 16, 2017

Professor Seymour Smidt (Sy) was the Nicholas H. Noyes Professor of Economics and Finance in the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell. Professor Smidt earned three degrees from the University of Chicago, studying social psychology, economic theory, and econometrics. He received his Ph.D. in 1954.

Soon after his honorable discharge from the U.S. Army, Sy joined the faculty at Cornell in 1956 as a newly appointed Assistant Professor of Managerial Economics in the Graduate School of Business and Public Administration (B&PA). He was promoted to associate professor in 1959 and to professor in 1965. In 1978, he was appointed to the Noyes Chair. On his retirement from Cornell in 2005, he became Professor Emeritus. As a tribute to his legacy up to that time, a seminar room in Sage Hall was dedicated in his honor by his colleagues, friends and former students.

Sy Smidt arrived at McGraw Hall and Ithaca in September 1956. The office was small, drafty and without a fire escape. Sy and his wife Rita rented one-half of a house in Collegetown on Dewitt Place. The street was half way up the hill and was difficult to get to in the nice weather and even worse in the bad weather so common to Ithaca. In spite of their initial settings, Sy thrived personally and professionally and came to love the Ithaca area and Cornell.

His contributions to the intellectual life of the school and to the successful careers of his students over the next decades would be invaluable. From his first day, Sy engaged intellectually with his colleagues and students in research and teaching. He was intelligent and curious. His longest collaboration was with Professor Emeritus Harold Bierman, Jr. Together they significantly influenced the field of finance. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the American Finance

Association, the AFA commissioned 19 videos on the history of financial thought. Professors Bierman and Smidt were interviewed in the following video:

<http://www.afajof.org/details/video/6982451/The-History-of-Financial-Thought-Hal-Bierman-and-Sy-Smidt.html>

Sy and Hal were in good company; eleven of the 19 videos featured Nobel Laureates. The AFA interview was based on the impact that Sy's (and Harold's) career had on financial analysis in academe and in the business world. The essence of the contribution is captured in *The Capital Budgeting Decision*, originally published by Macmillan in 1960 and coauthored Professor Bierman. The book has been published in nine editions and ten languages.

Sy authored or co-authored many other influential articles in corporate finance, market microstructure, commodity futures markets and electric-rate regulation. He also authored books in finance and decision theory. Most of all, he enjoyed working with colleagues on any research topic. Sy had a breadth of knowledge and curiosity that allowed him to contribute across the business disciplines. Lunch discussions and random meetings in the hallways were both an enjoyable and fruitful aspect of his collegiality.

Sy also enjoyed teaching, and he influenced MBA and Ph.D. students for over 50 years. He taught a spectrum of required and elective MBA courses, and he supervised many Ph.D. theses. One of his Ph.D. students, Scott Stewart, is now a clinical professor at Johnson and a co-author of this memorial statement. For a recent Cornell Chronicle article, Professor Stewart said "Sy Smidt was instrumental in maintaining and building Johnson's culture, which encourages professors to promote very high standards and give students strong support. ... He helped me hone my research techniques and showed me new ways to think through the theoretical side of a problem. ... The opportunity to study with Sy Smidt was a great gift."

In addition to his scholarship, Sy held many academic and government leadership positions. When Cornell was looking for a volunteer family for an assignment with METU in Turkey in 1962, Sy and Rita packed up their young family and headed out ...always interested in a challenge. Later, from 1993 to 1995, Sy organized a graduate management program and served as the founding dean of the School of Business at Koç University in Istanbul, helping hire much of the new faculty.

In 1969, Sy accepted an invitation to work in Washington DC with the SEC on a market research study and was associate director of the Securities and Exchange Commission's Institutional Investor Study. Sy recognized that this experience would enrich his understanding of economics and the markets and make him a better researcher and teacher at Cornell. Locally, when asked if he would be the nominee and stand for election, he helped form the Village of Lansing in 1974 and was the first mayor, from 1975 to 1981.

After moving from Collegetown, Sy and Rita's house in Lansing was filled with two children along with many colleagues and friends who were always happy to join in the festivities and enjoy Rita's superb cuisine. Rita predeceased him. He is survived by his children Tammi Tolentino (Ernest) and Stan Smidt, by three grandchildren, Sean Smidt, Omar Tolentino and Eliana Tolentino, and many close friends. Sy was a critical part of the culture of the Johnson

School for over fifty years. He stayed engaged in teaching, research and with alumni years after his retirement. He was generous with his time for both professional and personal activities. Sy radiated a warm smile, good humor and great ideas. He will be sorely missed.

Thanks Sy.

Written by Harold Bierman, Jr., Thomas R. Dyckman, Scott D. Stewart and L. Joseph Thomas