

Robert F. and Clare M. Banks Endowment for Academic and Teaching Excellence in James Madison College

Dr. Robert F. Banks had a long and distinguished 40-year career at Michigan State University, which began as a faculty member of the burgeoning James Madison College. He earned his doctorate from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1965; during his studies in London he met his wife, Clare M. Banks. They came to MSU pursuing a position in the well-known labor and industrial relations program for Dr. Banks. Instead, he found a home as a faculty member at the newly established James Madison College and was instrumental in its early formation.

“The college was recruiting faculty and developing new programs, and it was exciting to think that I could build something from the ground up, make connections and be part of a small undergraduate liberal arts college,” Banks said.

He became more than a faculty member in the college – he succeeded Herbert Garfinkel as dean and served in that post from 1971 to 1979. Banks’ philosophies about teaching, learning and leading by example have influenced and guided the lives of thousands of MSU faculty, staff and students throughout the world. His leadership in mentoring emerging faculty and his support of professional development for new and existing faculty are well-known throughout the higher education community. His former students, including Theresa Sullivan, the new President of the University of Virginia, hold academic positions in colleges and universities throughout the country.

From Madison, Dr. Banks went on to serve in many capacities at MSU, most recently as Associate Provost and Associate VP for Academic Human Resources. His connections to JMC have remained strong. He even returned to Madison to serve as Acting Dean when the college needed him. Their daughter, Sarah Banks, is a 1995 graduate of JMC. Dr. Banks has worked with nine presidents of the university and is well-known as a mentor, advisor and for his commitment to the university. He is a jazz aficionado and is a strong advocate of the jazz studies program at MSU. His fine taste is the reason Madison commencement ceremonies have traditionally featured jazz bands for musical entertainment.

“I have enjoyed all aspects of my career at MSU. It’s gratifying to have been in on the ground floor for the development of James Madison College,” Banks said. “Also, I’m happy to have been instrumental in helping faculty and administrators recognize the importance of faculty development at MSU. I guess you could call me a cheerleader in that respect.”

This endowment was established by James Madison College after a leadership gift from Arthur A. Busch. Mr. Busch is a 1976 graduate in Urban Studies from JMC. He was one of the many students who benefited from Dr. Banks as a teacher and mentor. He will never forget Dr. Banks’ teaching, encouragement and advice. Art hopes this gift will assist future generations of students and faculty to advance the academic and teaching excellence of James Madison College. Please consider sending your most generous gift to advance the legacy of Dr. and Mrs. Banks and their service to the college.

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