

Remembering Professor Hoekstra

As James Madison College mourns the loss of Professor Douglas Hoekstra it is also healthy and appropriate to remember his contributions to the development of individual students and to the institution as a whole. These personal stories are merely a snapshot of what Professor Hoekstra offered to the Madison Community, but I believe they are illustrative of the important role he has played in the lives of hundreds of students.

I vividly remember the first day I met Professor Hoekstra. It was our first MC201 lecture after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. He gave an appropriate lecture regarding executive authority and The Federalist Papers, one of his favorite topics and one that had relevance to the situation at hand.

Two years later I was fortunate enough to take The Presidency and Congress, Professor Hoekstra's trademark class. As we circled the room introducing ourselves I mentioned my involvement in the MSU Democrats and Students for Howard Dean * Hoekstra quickly acknowledged that he too hoped to see Dean do well * because if Dean won the nomination the general election would surely go to Bush. Little did I know that an all too short, but formative relationship had begun.

As class progressed I became a mainstay in Professor Hoekstra's schedule. Once or twice a week I would stop by his office and we would chat for hours. We would discuss class topics, the current political news, and numerous personal issues. It was here where Professor Hoekstra left his greatest impression. Although we often disagreed on issues we always discussed them in the most collegial fashion.

When I applied for the Truman Scholarship I shared my thoughts on the process with him and he, more than anyone, mentored me through the application proceedings. He also wrote the most touching letter of support for my nomination, the letter was the ultimate compliment from the man who was always cautious with his praise.

As my senior year approached I was determined to write an Honors Thesis on the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Professor Hoekstra was the only person I considered to select as my primary reader. Despite taking great pride in being called "the last Federalist" by his friends and colleagues, Professor Hoekstra agreed to study Thomas Jefferson with me for over a year. I am forever grateful to Professor Hoekstra for gritting his teeth and dealing with my incessant Jeffersonian admiration for such a long period of time.

When I graduated from James Madison College last year I had a lot to look forward to. I was preparing to go to William and Mary to study Public Policy, appropriately at a school named after Thomas Jefferson. Although I was eager to move to Virginia and continue my education I also realized I was leaving a lot behind. See, in this way my relationship with Professor Hoekstra epitomizes the college that he played such a formative role in developing. I was leaving behind not only great professors, but close, life-long friends and mentors who taught me how to think critically, learn, and how to live. Thank you, Professor Hoekstra, not only for your impact on my life, but for helping create the special place we all know as Madison.