

"I was a bit of a dork and she was the head cheerleader, so she was one of the popular ones. We still laugh about the one time we remember interacting. She came up to me in biology class to ask me a question, and I just blew her off." — Randy Hagerty, Professor of Political Science

All Eyes On: Randy Hagerty

BY ANNE REBAR
Staff Reporter

When Randy Hagerty graduated with his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he joked with his dissertation adviser that he wanted to work at a small teaching school with lots of bass fishing ponds nearby.

Not long after, he took a job at Truman, and at the end of this month he will be awarded at the Service Recognition Banquet for his 20th year at the school.

Although he admits he hasn't done as much fishing as he once thought he might, Hagerty has been active in both the Truman and Kirksville communities. In 1999 he was chosen as Truman's Educator of the Year.

"I think it's just the neatest honor I've received in my entire career because it's the students who make the choice, and that's really something else," Hagerty said. "That's the one that's always meant the most to me."

Along with his duties as a professor and as chair of the political science department at Truman, he also is involved in the community outside the classroom.

"You have the obligation as someone who's had a lot given to them, to give some back in whatever small way that you can," Hagerty said.

He has been a member of the city planning and zoning commission for the past 16 years and a member of the local Kiwanis club for the last 13. More recently, he became planning and zoning commission chairman and Kiwanis club president and lieutenant governor, serving as the regional coordinator for all Kiwanis clubs in this part of the state. Through Kiwanis, Hagerty has become involved in the Reading is Fundamental program, which gives books to disadvantaged children.

"About four years ago, during one of the Reading is Fundamental program events, there was this little girl — she came about halfway up my legs — and I asked her how many books she had at home," Hagerty said. "She said they had two books, and we'd given both of them to her. It's a way to give these disadvantaged kids something of a head start from where they otherwise might begin."

Although he's busy with work and in the community, Hagerty still makes time for one of his favorite pastimes: watching Dallas Cowboys football. For the final two seasons in Texas stadium he had season tickets to the games — 50-yard line, 30 rows up. They were

great seats, he said, but when the new stadium was built, high prices made him decide not to keep his season tickets.

"Last year I was able to go to road games instead, in Tampa, Denver and Kansas City, along with four games back in the Dallas stadium," Hagerty said. "So if you see me most Mondays in the fall, I'm dragging a little bit more because I've flown halfway across North America to see my favorite team play."

Next fall, Hagerty said he's not sure if he will be traveling as much to see the Cowboys. That's because he recently became engaged and plans to marry on May 23 in his hometown in Littlefield, Texas. Hagerty and his fiancé, Elizabeth Harlan, met in high school, but it was hardly love at first sight.

"I was a bit of a dork and she was the head cheerleader, so she was one of the popular ones," Hagerty said. "We still laugh about the one time we remember interacting. 'She came up to me in biology class to ask me a question, and I just blew her off.'"

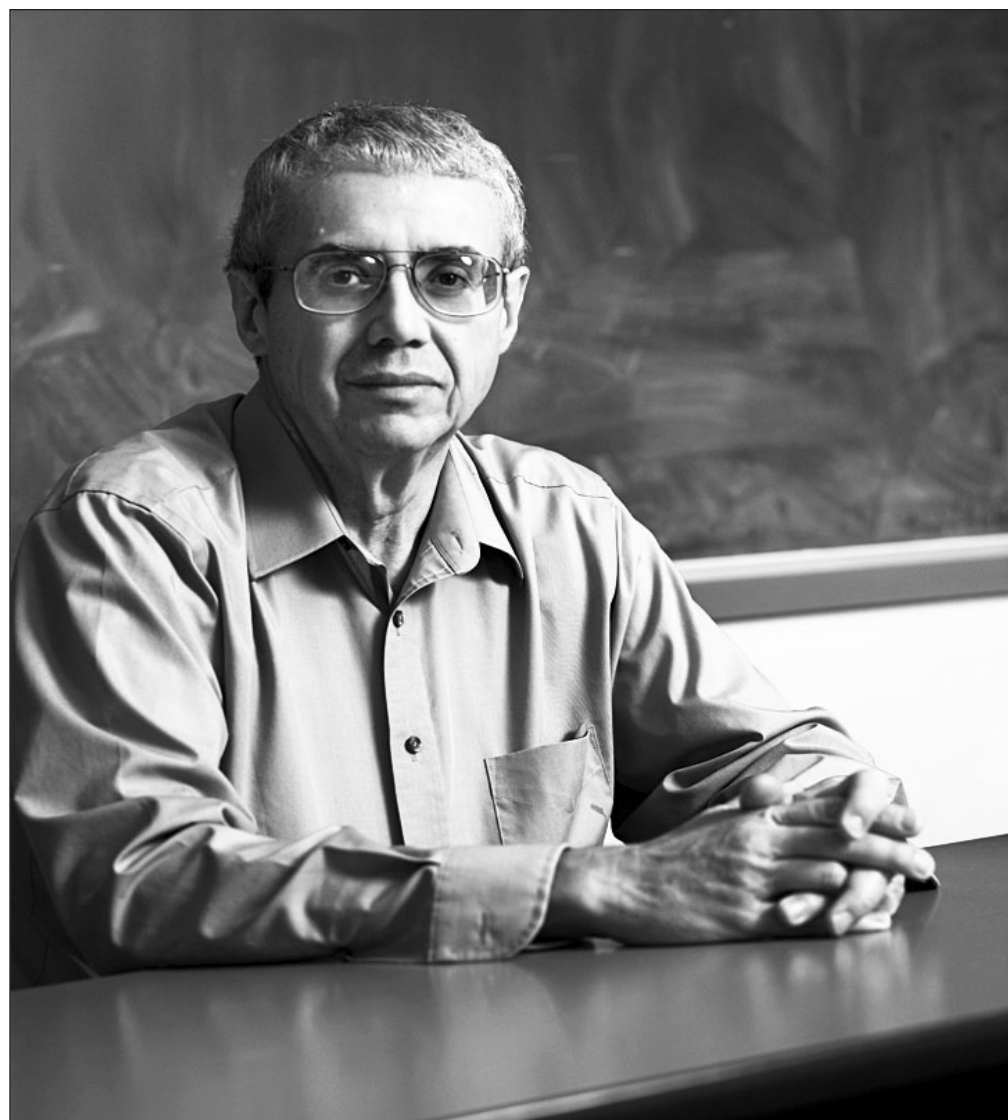
Midway through high school Harlan transferred and the two didn't meet again for 20 years until their high school reunion, Hagerty said. They lost touch again and another 10 years went by until they met at the 30-year reunion.

"Recently, within the last year, we connected again," Hagerty said. "Things got better and better, and over spring break back in west Texas, where we're both from, I drove her out into the country one starry night, dropped to my knee and proposed to her beneath the bright west Texas stars. She said yes, and that's made all the difference in my life."

Hagerty said their long-distance romance grew through interaction on Facebook and trips they took together. After being a lifelong bachelor, he said he's lucky he's finally going to marry the head cheerleader he should have talked to when he was 14 years old.

"I just thought about the way we'd interacted in the past and every time it's like, 'well that was stupid blowing her off when I was a sophomore, well that was stupid blowing her off at the 20th reunion,'" Hagerty said. "This time I decided, well, finally it sunk into my thick skull, 'Stop chasing this woman off. She's wonderful. She's fabulous. So I decided this time, hey, marry this woman.'"

The couple plans to live in Kirksville and Hagerty said he plans to continue teaching at Truman as long as he can. His favorite thing about being a teacher, he said, is watching his students graduate and become successful in



Bo Burasco/Index

Randy Hagerty will be recognized at the Service Recognition Banquet for his 20th year as a Truman professor of Political Science.

their respective careers. He said he has many former students now working in Congress, as elected officials in the state legislature or for agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency or non-profits.

"It's living vicariously, perhaps, but I think that's the joy of being a teacher, when you see all the great things your students have gone on to do," Hagerty said. "That's the neatest part, taking these very bright young people and maybe helping them, just a little bit, to do the things that they want to do in their lives."

Hagerty was the first professor senior Phil Raine had at Truman. Raine said he had Hagerty for his Truman Week class and his enthusiastic lecturing set the bar high for Raine's whole college experience. During his first semester, Hagerty helped introduce him to the major as well as the city of Kirksville.

"He's a great teacher," Raine said. "He always has the most entertaining lectures, and we always kind of know that there are some of these jokes that he's been doing for the past 20 years, but at the same time everyone still laughs in his class, they're still funny."

Shana Marchio graduated from Truman

in 1999 with a degree in Political Science, and she is now the communications director for Sen. Kit Bond in Washington, D.C. Marchio said Hagerty was her mentor while at school, and he really got her interested in politics. She took as many of his classes as she could because she loved his intensity in class and how he pushed his students.

"You always had to be paying attention in Dr. Hagerty's class," Marchio said. "He is one of those teachers that pushes you and has really high expectations but still wants you to succeed. If you didn't have a paper turned in when it was supposed to be, he would call you at home and ask you where it was. His encouragement really pushed me to succeed."

Marchio said she and Hagerty still keep in touch through e-mails and that he has made a big impact on her life.

"He is probably the toughest and fairest and most talented professor that I've ever had as a teacher, even including teachers I had in high school," Marchio said. "He's involved both in and outside of the classroom, and it's because of him that I really developed such an interest in the field, which led me toward the job I have today."

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