

In Memoriam: School of Journalism's Jim Patten

School of Journalism
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Professor Emeritus **Jim Patten**, who helped save the UA journalism program from elimination in the mid-1990s, died June 5 in Prescott after being diagnosed with lung cancer less than a month earlier. He was 83.

Patten taught at the UA from 1983 to 2000 and led the program, then a department, from 1991 to 2000. He served as an adjunct instructor from 2006 to 2009.

"He was a pillar of strength when the then journalism department was threatened with closure," Professor Emeritus **Jim Johnson** said. That the school is still thriving "is a tribute to his leadership," he added.

After the UA administration announced closure plans in 1994, Patten led a group of alumni, community supporters, news executives, faculty and students in lobbying then-President **Manuel Pacheco**, the Arizona Board of Regents and the state Legislature to save the program.

"Journalism alums from all over the country flooded the UA president's office with protest letters," Patten said in 2016. "The press was offended and plainly in our corner. ... Current students joined the struggle, organizing pro-journalism protests and events."

The Faculty Senate voted 37-3 in 1995 to save the department, which was designated as a school in 2008 by the Arizona Board of Regents.

"Jim led the department through its most difficult time," said **Jacqueline Sharkey**, who succeeded Patten as department head in 2000. After organizing the effort that saved the department, she said, "he led the rebuilding process that resulted in the department again being recognized nationally as a leader in journalism education."

Patten became the first UA journalism professor to hold a named professorship when he was appointed as the Soldwedel Family Professor of Journalism in 1998. Patten was cited for outstanding teaching by the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. He also was elected to the Hall of Fame of the Arizona Interscholastic Press Association in 2006.

"Jim was completely dedicated to journalism education, as a faculty member and administrator," Sharkey said. "His primary focus was on developing the finest curriculum so the next generation entering the profession would be thoughtful journalists who could provide the public with the information that people need to make informed decisions about their government."

Patten was "a very good and strict teacher on the basics," said Professor Emeritus **George Ridge**, a former department head

He also had a kind side, former students said.

"He encouraged us not only to seek the truth, but also to challenge what we think we know," Jen Duffy, a 2003 graduate and former Arizona Daily Star reporter, wrote on Facebook. "His mentorship and friendship made a lasting impression in my life."

"Jim Patten was a true champion of Big Journalism, and a heck of a nice guy," added Morgan Loew, who graduated from the school in 1996 and is now an investigative television reporter with KPHO-TV, the CBS station in Phoenix.

Gawain Douglas, a 1993 graduate, recalled that Patten hired him when he was a senior to teach Patten how to use his new Mac.

Patten earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and a master's in journalism from Iowa State University.

Patten worked as a reporter at newspapers throughout the country, including The Des Moines Register in Iowa, the Omaha World-Herald in Nebraska and The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Before coming to the UA, Patten taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he won the university's highest teaching award.

Patten co-authored two books for students: "Journalism Today" and "Opportunities in Journalism Careers."

He is survived by three children, Billie Patten Stewart, Mike Patten and Julie Patten, and his life partner for the last four years, Lyone Meyer. Patten's wife, Patricia, died in 2013.

A celebration of Patten's life is pending.

Mike Patten suggested sending a memorial in his father's honor to any organization "related to encouraging a free and vigorous press."

*A version of this story originally appeared on the School of Journalism **website** ^[1].*

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