



SCHOLARS
STRATEGY NETWORK

A Tribute to Dave Robertson

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(Photo by August Jennewein)

The Scholars Strategy Network has lost one of its brightest stars: David Robertson, a distinguished scholar of American politics and co-founder of the Confluence SSN chapter. A beloved teacher, valued mentor, and remarkably warm and kind human being, Dave passed away on October 7, 2020 at the age of 69 from complications of pancreatic cancer. He and his wife Cathie had recently moved to Arizona after Dave retired from the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

As one of SSN's original 50 members, Dave has been a part of the SSN family from the founding period. Together with his colleague David Kimball, Dave's leadership helped create a community of scholars from institutions on either side of the Missouri and Illinois border – hence the chapter name “Confluence” – and also fostered a true confluence of ideas, the explicit goal when the chapter was first named. The monthly meetings at the local pub brought scholars from various departments across institutions together to discuss how they, as researchers, could best engage in the policy process and contribute to public debates on the issues that mattered the most to the people of St. Louis and beyond. By creating such a close-knit, active, democratic community, Dave helped make the Confluence chapter a model for the entire network.

As friends and colleagues learned of his passing, they have shared fond memories of Dave. Story after story recounted his kindness and generosity of spirit. Dave was known to many as a much loved and admired teacher and mentor, giving freely of his time and wisdom to his students and junior scholars. At gatherings and conferences, his infectious smile was always there to make others feel welcome.

Amongst his peers in political science, Dave was renowned for his scholarship. He was a nationally recognized scholar of American political development, and one of the very few in the country with the expertise to put current developments into historical context. He authored many well researched and often cited books, including *Federalism and the Making of America*, *The Original Compromise: What the Constitution's Framers Were Really Thinking*, and *The Constitution and America's Destiny*. More than anything else, Dave loved the U.S. Constitution and the story of its creation. Every Sept. 17th, he "gave a mean Constitution Day lecture" while wearing a sweatshirt with the Constitution and popping a James Madison doll on his podium. All who ever heard it should consider themselves very lucky.

A longtime public commentator, Dave became an invaluable resource helping journalists and fellow citizens understand political moments big and small. He regularly contributed to the pages of newspapers across the country, and provided political analysis on his local KSDK Channel 5 from 2000-2018. He encouraged hope for America's system of checks and balances, governing institutions, and democracy, and expressed faith in the American people. He did it all while making space for emerging scholars and marginalized voices, really for anyone who needed a friend in public scholarship.

David Robertson was the Curators' Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science at the University of Missouri St. Louis, where he taught for 37 years. He retired this fall, a year earlier than he'd originally planned, so that the university could honor two job offers made before the pandemic and the resulting budget crisis.

To honor him, the University of Missouri St. Louis has established the **Dr. David B. Robertson Memorial Scholarship in Political Science**. Donors can make a gift to the scholarship fund [online here](https://scholars.org).