

Memorial Statement for Jim Barbour.

We are writing to let you know that Associate Professor Emeritus Faculty Member James “Jim” Russell Barbour, 87, of Winooski, Vt., died on March 15, 2026, and to recognize and honor Jim’s contributions to the Human Development and Family Studies (now Science; HDFS) program at UVM. Jim came to UVM in 1974 to join the Human Development Program in the School of Home Economics. He had been a sexually transmitted disease investigator in the Army, and a high school English teacher in New Jersey. He completed a doctorate at Fairleigh Dickinson University with dissertation research on husband-coached childbirth which was becoming more available at that time

At UVM, Jim developed several different courses in Human Development and Family Studies. He was mentored by Armin Grams who pioneered the very popular Human Relationships and Sexuality course. When Jim took over this course, he made it his own and made it even more popular. As Associate Professor Emeritus Dale Goldhaber, a long-time colleague of Jim’s recalled, Jim’s passion for improving this popular course was strong:

Jim and I had lunch together for years and of course talked about many things. But what was always foremost in those conversations was his constant desire to improve his human sexuality course and his concern for students’ welfare. It was ironic that here was a person who was already teaching what was arguably the most popular course at UVM and yet he still wanted to make it better. I don’t think that UVM students had a better friend than Jim Barbour.

One key way Jim improved this already popular course emerged from his belief that students in large courses –and especially in a course on human relationships and sexuality—needed personal contact and opportunities to discuss course content. With this belief in mind, Jim worked with his wife, Marilyn Gillis, to create and offer a companion course on teaching human sexuality for advanced undergraduate and graduate students, training them to conduct small group discussions for undergraduates in the large lecture course. In this way, he assured that every student in the large course had a knowledgeable contact person and skilled small group discussion of the material.

Another key contribution of this course emerged from Jim’s knowledge and understanding of the importance of recognizing and honoring diverse sexual practices as well as a wide diversity of sexual identities. For example, long before there were any courses available at UVM focused on sexual and gender identity diversity, Jim regularly included a panel in his course composed of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adult representatives who shared their stories and responded to students’ questions. He integrated LGBTQ issues into his course in various other ways, and also was instrumental in hiring Associate Professor Jackie Weinstock into the HDFS Program, in part because of her intention to create and teach LGBTQ focused courses as part of the HDFS Program. As Jackie Weinstock put it, “Jim was a strong ally to me and supported me in my desire

to serve as Faculty Advisor to the Free to Be GLBTA Student group, and in my desire to make an “Introduction to Sexual and Gender Identities” class a regular part of the HDFS Curriculum.”

After teaching human sexuality for several years, Jim published a book based on his conversations with students, titled *Becoming a Sexual Person*. But of most importance to Jim was the impact the course had on the students themselves. Marilyn Gillis reports that everywhere they travelled, they would run into former students who would come up to Jim with great joy and share how important that course was to their personal development as well as academic learning.

Jim’s engaging style as a lecturer and his commitment to quality teaching led to him becoming an important resource on teaching large lecture courses, providing workshops for faculty through the UVM Center for Teaching and Learning.

In his last year of teaching in 2001, Jim’s lifelong interest in contemporary fiction and memoirs and the development of the authors and of the characters in their novels led him to develop an advanced seminar on human development in memoirs. Students in the course read a memoir each week and each week featured a telephone conversation for the students with the author. While small in size (25 students or so), this course also demonstrated Jim’s deep and caring approach to teaching undergraduate students.

In his personal life, Jim’s innovative and progressive thinking about sexuality and gender was also evident. As Associate Professor Emeritus Lawrence Shelburne shared, “When he and Kay divorced, they petitioned the court in Chittenden County for shared custody, which was denied. They appealed the denial through the courts to the Vermont Supreme Court, which approved it, establishing a precedent for Vermont Family Court.” Jim also served as an early board member for OutRight VT, an organization whose mission is “building a Vermont where all LGBTQ+ youth have hope, equity, and power.”

Jim was a lifelong craftsman, creating furniture, and designing and building a house in Jericho for the family and later one in Shelburne for Marilyn and himself. When they moved from that house, he donated his extensive woodworking shop to Shelburne Farms, with the condition that he could continue to work in it.

Jim retired from UVM in 2001 but remained an important contributor to the Program and to students for several years beyond that time. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that there are likely ten thousand students around the country and the world who benefited from Jim’s relationships and sexuality course and who learned to better understand their own and the diversity of relationships and sexualities because of taking Jim’s courses. We have no doubt that many of those who took the Teaching Human Sexuality course that was a companion to “Human Relationships and Sexuality” are out there fostering positive attitudes towards sexuality and supporting developing individuals in understanding their own sexualities and learning effective ways to communicate about their desires to their partners.