

Felician F. Foltman

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In certain respects, Felician Foltman was different from most Cornell professors. Those differences helped him contribute importantly to his colleagues and to the School and University he loved and served. For example, he was a first generation American from a working class background. Born sixth in a family of eleven children, his Polish immigrant father was a skilled worker in the Amsterdam, New York carpet industry. From his family, Fel (pronounced Phil) learned to get along with others, to work hard and to respect work done well.

Academically outstanding in high school, he was encouraged to attend college. He enrolled at Oswego State Teachers College in 1936, majoring in Industrial Education. Like most first-generation in-college youngsters, he worked his way through. He spent two summers as a production worker in carpet mills. His last summer, he managed a service station/garage, an unusual responsibility for one so young. After graduating, Foltman taught Industrial Arts for one year at Mineville (New York) High School. Part of his job assignment was to supervise a “work experience” program for disadvantaged youth at the National Youth Administration’s Resident Work Center at Mineville.

Fel joined the Army in July of 1941 as a private in the Ordnance Corps. After basic training, he went to Non-commissioned Officer’s School, and later to O.C.S., served in the U.S., North Africa, and Europe as company officer, company commander and Battalion Training Officer. He was discharged in February 1946 with the rank of major, a truly extraordinary achievement in four and a half years. Another difference! Energized by that record, he raised his career goals from high school to college teacher.

To sum up, Fel Foltman approached graduate school with: a spectacularly successful military record; a wide knowledge of occupations and how to analyze, perform and teach about them; great respect for competence; and the conviction that he could achieve excellence in anything he attempted.

As luck would have it, he was admitted to the Industrial Education program at Cornell, where the subject had just moved from its “natural habitat” in the Education Department to the newly established School of Industrial and Labor Relations. In this new setting, the I.E. program was less concerned with training high school shop teachers, and more with how work organizations should train working adults to perform the job demands of plants, mills and offices. Although not what he had expected, it fit his aptitudes and interests very well.

Adaptation to Fel's novel situation was helped by two faculty mentors, Lynn Emerson and Kenneth Beach. While taking a "cram course" in labor economics, statistics, theory, collective bargaining, and trade union history, he got insights about job training from two experts in that familiar area. In return, Foltman had much to offer the School. As a grad assistant in Industrial Education courses he helped undergraduates. Even more, as an experienced teacher (another salient difference), he helped fellow assistants get a handle on *their* new tasks.

Each mentor left a lasting impact on Fel's career. Expertise in applying Emerson's training methods to a variety of work settings and technologies helped him as a management consultant and later as adviser to work-readiness programs of the War on Poverty. Skills in small group-discussion teaching, learned from Beach, affected his own development as a teacher. (Beach called Foltman, "the best student I ever had.") Throughout a long teaching career, Fel's students of all ages, in the university and in adult programs, agree that he excelled as teacher, and, where appropriate, as mentor.

Upon receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1949, he was appointed to the ILR faculty. Along with teaching duties he was made undergraduate Placement Counselor. He developed a co-op work program, placing students in summer training jobs with unions, businesses, and government agencies around the state. This project succeeded so well that for many years, ILR required students, as a condition of graduation, to have one summer's experience each, in a trade union, a business, *and* a government agency. He taught students about job search behaviors to good effect.

While teaching and counseling in Ithaca, the fledgling Professor Foltman was used extensively by the ILR's Extension Division to teach classes of practitioners around the state. Capable and congenial, he made a great hit with adult audiences. He enjoyed working with practitioners, "where I can teach and learn at the same time". For more than thirty years, he was *the* major contributor from the resident teaching faculty to ILR's Extension program.

Early in his career, Foltman inherited Ken Beach's course, "Industrial Occupations and Processes", which introduced freshmen to the work world by busing them weekly to work sites close to Ithaca, where they observed workers at their jobs, learning which tools and machines they used, and what the end products looked like. His background was ideal for transmitting this kind of instruction to the uninitiated! And to the graduate assistants watching Foltman teach this course, he gave master classes in how to excel at the job.

Early in his teaching years, Fel entered on the other serious preoccupation of his life, his family. Early in 1951 he married Christina Steinman, a fellow worker at Cornell. By that summer, he began building their house. As his

own contractor, he did all the skilled work (carpentry, wiring, plumbing, painting etc.), but cajoled kin and friends into contributing occasional help. First, a daughter, Laurie, and then two sons, Philip and Michael, joined the household. Fel was admired by his colleagues for being both family-oriented, and a father figure who could pass on useful domestic skills.

Most of his hobbies had a domestic aura. He became a finished cabinetmaker. He raised grapes and learned to make wine. As befits one who grew up near the Adirondacks, he became a deer hunter, but with a special twist—using bow and arrow rather than gun. In these pursuits, he symbolized the “good provider/” combining practical with mythical/romantic aspects of paternity. More down to earth was his passion for golf. He was founder and “guru” of ILR’s golf team which competed for many years in the University league. After retiring, he traveled the U.S. enthusiastically sampling of the nation’s links.

An important theme in Foltman’s personal history was upward mobility, e.g. moving from his skilled worker origins, through high school teaching to university teacher. Another mobility “dimension” is *lateral* crossing over from one branch of activity to another one.

His mastery of American research about highly skilled manual workers made him a pre-eminent scholar in this field. Emblematic of this is a major review monograph: *Apprenticeship Research: Emerging Findings and Future Trend*, (co-edited with Cornell colleague Vernon Briggs, Cornell/ILR Press, 1980). This was a first and lasting interest of his. But his academic career contains successive “crossovers” into other areas, each one denoting growth.

An early crossover was into *management* Education. He became a key figure in ILR’s ambitious management development program for American Airlines’ senior managers in 1953. In 1955, he took a one-year leave to work for Shell Oil’s management training program. Returning from Shell, he played a major role in a joint Business School/ILR “Executive Training Short Course”. In a few short years, Foltman was a nationally recognized leader in executive training. *Effective Supervisor of People* (Dun and Bradstreet, 1971) testifies to this. Even more significantly, two ‘leading edge’ monographs: *Collecting and Managing Employee Information*; and *Skills Inventories and Manpower Planning* were pioneer treatments of computing applied to human resource management.

Moving from workplace problems to concern with public policy issues is another major “crossover”. Community concerns are treated in his *White and Blue Collars in a Mill Shutdown* (Cornell Press, 1968). At the *state* level, his *New York State’s Economic Crises: Jobs, Incomes and Economic Growth* (Cornell ILR Press, 1977) addresses problems still plaguing his birthplace. At the *national* level, one would put all the special reports, conference minutes, and published testimony submitted to various Congressional Committees, growing out of his membership on

presidential committees and task forces, and assignments to AID (the Agency for International Development), Federal and State Labor department committees and the ILO (International Labor Office).

Some of the latter dealt with apprenticeship and other programs at the high end of the skill ladder. Increasingly, however, they dealt with serious national problems of underprepared, virtually unemployable, youth facing a labor force no longer hospitable to unskilled job candidates. An expert on training manual workers, Foltman was asked by state and Federal agencies to advise them how to think intelligently about these complex issues.

Back home, he was busy persuading academic colleagues to study these issues. Rather than publish extensively in this area, he became a “teacher of teachers”. Due to his efforts, the Department name of Human Resource Studies continues this emphasis on social policy.

A further comment on Foltman “crossovers” deals with his moving beyond departmental boundaries. He joined Professor Donald Cullen from the Collective Bargaining department to co-teach “Manpower and Collective Bargaining in the Construction Industry” several times. He also taught a course in “Plant Shutdowns and Job Loss” with Professor Robert Aronson of the Labor Economics department. When he co-taught courses, it was usually in addition to his normal teaching load. He was always experimenting with teaching. Well into his career he started courses based on “field studies”, a new modality for him. And as late as three years before his retirement, he developed a new course, based completely on case studies, once more a new approach for him.

Finally, a personal/professional crossover that still astounds his colleagues. At first, Fel’s consulting related to his departmental specialty: training; management development, and personnel practices. Mediation and arbitration “belonged” to other ILR departments. In the 1960s, Foltman took a course offered by the School to train professionals to implement the Taylor Act (which regulated labor relations in public sector employment in New York State). After completing the course, he established himself as a “third party” who could work with union and management representatives of school districts, prisons, fire departments, etc., around the state. He then “crossed over” into *private* sector union management dispute settlement, including the most competitive and lucrative activity, *arbitration*. Emblematic of his approach to life and work, he not only entered a new challenging field but took on its most demanding aspects.

We can say finally that Fel was first and foremost a teacher. He showed love and respect for his craft by excelling at it. True to his roots, he followed the credo of a skilled worker: “Be a journeyman in everything you do, in the *important* things, be a master.”

Loved and respected by his family, liked and respected by his colleagues, admired and respected by his students, he left a mark on all of us. He will be remembered.

Vernon Briggs, Lee Dyer, Frank Miller