

feature story

WRITTEN BY DAWN MARTIN



# A FOREST OF KNOWLEDGE

**Dr.** Vidyaranya Gargeya has been shaping minds and impacting students for 30 years. And it is a calling that may have always been his destiny – in Sanskrit his very name, Vidyaranya, means

“forest of knowledge.” He has lived up to that moniker as a much beloved and revered professor at the UNC Greensboro Bryan School of Business and Economics since 1993. Now retiring, Gargeya gave his “last lecture” during Alumni All-Access Weekend and received a standing ovation from a nearly packed auditorium at the School.

The crowd included fellow faculty, university staff members, recent graduates, and long-time alumni who are now business owners, executives, and professors themselves. For Gargeya, the outpouring was both moving and humbling. “I had no intention to make an impact on others,” he said. “I see myself as a facilitator of learning, an academic coach; I coach the mind.”

“My goal is simply to add value everywhere. When I get up in the morning, that’s what I’m thinking about.”

In the moments before his final lecture, Gargeya ran up and down and across the auditorium, shaking hands, sharing jokes, and hugging attendees as they arrived. “Karen, Karen,” he told one retired colleague, “Have you not had enough of me yet?”

## ‘He’s the Benchmark’

Gargeya is an institution at the Bryan School, having served twice as head of the Department of Information Systems and Supply Chain Management, director of the MBA program, co-director of the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan process, and a member of the Senior Leadership Team for UNCG during a key credentialing process.

Originally trained as a chemical engineer, he spent years as a manager in the petroleum industry before bringing that knowledge to UNCG, routinely visiting businesses across the state to consult and conduct research.

Over the years, he has visited every college in North Carolina, taught in every classroom of the Bryan building and presented in every lecture hall at the university. Working under seven provosts, six chancellors and six university presidents, Gargeya estimates he has taught close to 5,800 students.

One of them was David Effren, who is now an executive with a New York-based data analytics firm in the automotive industry. “The passion that you saw from him today was every day,” Effren said after Gargeya’s last lecture, which was co-sponsored by the Bryan School Climate Committee. “Few people can ‘bring it’ for 30 years at that energy level. But Dr. Gargeya lives and breathes education every day. He’s the benchmark.”

Jason Goddard, another former student, is now a vice president for Wells Fargo and an adjunct business professor for both UNCG and Wake Forest University. He remembers that Gargeya always set a high bar for students and even seemed to have a sixth sense about who



was prepared for class. Those who had not read the assignment would usually be called on first for discussion. When students would admit they hadn’t read, Gargeya would direct them to the course syllabus, which he called the “memorandum of understanding.” That contained a section about coming to class prepared. They wouldn’t make that mistake twice, Goddard said with a smile.

## ‘Learning Should Be Uncomfortable’

“Deep thinking and learning should be uncomfortable, provocative and ‘shake the very ground you stand upon,’” Gargeya says. He strives to build creative thinkers and risk-takers, rather than simply students who earn 4.0s by playing it safe. And he believes universities should not only broaden students’ knowledge and skills but also instill key attributes such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and many others – all of which are needed for success in business and in life.

Fellow faculty members credit Gargeya with mentoring them as well. Dr. Channelle James, a lecturer in the department of Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality & Tourism, joined UNCG in 1996. “I was young, and I didn’t know much,” she said. “But he looked at me like he expected that I knew something – that I was a faculty member just like he was a faculty member. That meant so much to me.”

Jim Weeks, former dean of the Bryan School, said UNCG did not know what it was getting when hiring Gargeya all those years ago. “We knew we were getting a good faculty member, but we didn’t have any idea how good,” Weeks said. “We did not know we would get this person with so much passion and energy and positive attributes. Very few people can cite the kind of service he has given to our university system.”

For three decades, shaping students has been Gargeya’s driving force. It is what he thinks about when he wakes at 4 a.m., when he walks to the University’s statue of Minerva, and when he recites daily a Hindu chant that is over 4,000 years old. “May we all be protected,” he translates. “May we all be nourished. May we walk together with great energy. May our intellect be sharpened. May our learning be effective. Peace in me. Peace in nature. Peace in the universal forces that govern us all.” ■

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*Those size 20 shoes are going to be hard to fill!!*

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