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FEATURED

Lifelong learner Dean Emeritus Louis Pol holds legacy of philanthropy

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Jun 6, 2024



Professor and Dean Emeritus Louis Pol.

Manali Kate/MaverickPR

Dean Emeritus Louis Pol's remarkable journey is one of resilience, determination and an unwavering commitment to lifelong learning. His story unfolds as a captivating tapestry woven with threads of uncertainty and growth.

Pol looks back at the young boy of Italian and French descent who would grow up to become a sociology professor, later rising to the position of dean of the UNO's College of Business Administration. Now Pol embraces a new direction, "repurposed" yet still a lifelong learner.

Born in the Bronx of New York City, Pol is the child of Italian immigrants with family roots that trace back to Sicily. His family immigrated to the U.S in the early 20th century and settled in New York, where Pol said they found a sense of belonging in a supportive community.

"My family came to New York, which was a place that they felt comfortable because there were a lot of people who, like them, did not speak English," Pol said. "They were able to find jobs and build a family. They became valued members of society."

Once Pol's family became acclimated to life in the U.S., they ventured away from New York City. As a result, Pol moved constantly between schools, attending 10 different schools in a span of 12 years across Oklahoma, Ohio, Texas, Illinois and New York. He struggled during his high school years to excel in academics.

Pol recalls a pivotal moment in his freshman year at North Texas State University. Influenced by his biological father's French heritage, Pol enrolled in a French class, a decision that not only allowed him to explore his French roots but also facilitated connections with peers who aided a significant improvement in his academic performance.

"I took a class in French and met students there who helped me to become a better student," Pol said.

Later in his second semester, Pol discovered his passion for sociology, which he pursued as an undergraduate major. He later earned a Master of Arts in Sociology from North Texas State and then completed a doctoral degree in demography at Florida State University.

He began his career in academia as a sociology professor at Memphis State University. Despite not having a business degree, Pol found himself teaching marketing classes.

"It is interesting because I wasn't thinking at all about a career in a business school when I first went to Memphis State," Pol said, "I taught graduate classes in demography and research methodology."

The university introduced a new doctoral program in business administration, and a number of business students in that program started taking Pol's classes.

"Typically, I would talk to them about their backgrounds and goals, and before long, I found that I was interested in some of the work they were doing," Pol said. "I could see myself fitting in. I didn't think this was going anywhere beyond my curiosity, but the more time I spent talking with the students, I started to think this might be an option for me."

Soon enough, Pol met with the chair of the marketing department at Memphis State who offered him a joint position as marketing professor while he still maintained his faculty appointment in the sociology department. Eventually, Pol made a career switch from sociology to marketing.

"My educational background was not in business, but my perspectives were very much based on collaboration across disciplines," he says. "I took a risk. I decided I was going to chase a job in business, which was a good decision both professionally and personally."

In 1984, Pol joined the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he built a legacy that extends far beyond the walls of Mammel Hall.

"Several years later I met Bob Miles, who at that time was thinking about moving his Value Investor Conference from California to Omaha," Pol said. "Bob's ideas were great, which fueled our friendship and partnership. After several conversations, we agreed to work together and have the conference move to Mammel Hall."

Pol says he saw this shift as a good opportunity to connect to people who were already in Omaha for the Berkshire Hathaway shareholder meeting, and a way for the College of Business to gain publicity by being associated with the conference.

"Then Bob had this other innovative idea: teach a course on the Genius of Warren Buffett," Pol said.

Miles pitched the GOB course to Pol for both CBA's Executive MBA students and lifelong learners who planned to attend the Berkshire Hathaway shareholder meeting.

The concept of the course embraces lifelong learning, with a notion that education never stops.

"When I finished my Ph. D., the chair of my department at Memphis State told me, 'Do you realize that the half-life of your degree is about seven years, so if you don't get busy continuing to learn, you're not going to have much to show after a while?'"

"He was absolutely right," Pol said.

Since then, Pol has been a true believer in the value of lifelong learning.

"I see the Genius of Warren Buffett course as an important element of lifelong learning," Pol said.

Reflecting on the GOB course and its influence on learners, Pol highlights that one of his most memorable takeaways is meeting with and learning from people from different backgrounds and diverse interests, who are brought together by one course.

"During the GOB Sunday night dinner, Bob has each person talk about their background and investment experience." Pol says. "These stories are truly fascinating because I learn something from each of these reflections. There is a tremendous amount of geographic diversity in each class, which makes the thoughts even more interesting."

In honor of Dean Pol, Miles established the Dean Emeritus Louis Pol Scholarship Fund, which awards need-based scholarships to CBA students. Proceeds from the recent CIO and Omaha Value Dinner raised \$40,000 for the scholarship fund, which now totals \$340,000.

After more than three decades of dedicated service to the College of Business, Pol made the conscious decision to redirect his skills and talents toward new endeavors. Today he embraces a new direction in his life, one he describes not as "retirement" but as "repurposing."

"I don't use the term 'retired;' I am 'repurposed,' which means still using your energies, experience, talents and interests but in different ways. If you were retired, then you wouldn't be doing very much," Pol says. "A lot of people who are around my age are still engaged in many ways. Most are still working, just not in the same professions that they did before."

These days, Pol enjoys creative writing and exploring his family's history that led his great grandparents to America. His passion for education and service remains steadfast as he continues to serve on numerous nonprofit boards, sharing his knowledge and philanthropic spirit to make a

positive impact on the community.

“I believe in these organizations and I think that I can contribute positively to their missions, which is rewarding,” Pol said. “It’s not your typical nine to five job, but I am always learning something new about the incredible nonprofit community in Omaha. I’m just in constant admiration and often think, ‘Wow, how can you not feel good about supporting the important work being done?’”

Pol announced his "repurposing" in 2019 and stepped down as dean of the College of Business Administration when Michelle Trawick took the helm in 2020. Pol teaches marketing part-time.