

Steve Rouse Is in the House: A Festschrift for Steve From Friends, Colleagues, Students, and Loved Ones

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ABSTRACT. Given that there is a need to foster a stronger culture of belonging within higher education and that the festschrift, as a genre, is a “survivor of a more collegial academic age” (Richetti, 2012, p. 237), we dedicate this festschrift to Dr. Steven Vay Rouse or “Steve,” a psychology professor whose life mission was to ensure that everyone he met felt like they belonged, especially those from historically marginalized communities. Steve was a psychology professor who did not conform to the culture of rugged individualism widespread within academia but who instead believed in cultivating the collective good. Therefore, in this article, students, friends, colleagues, and loved ones share their memories of and thoughts about the impact of Steve’s vibrant life. Our aim is to keep Steve’s legacy alive through these words by showing how small acts of care can make a big difference, and to inspire the reader to care for others in their own lives, classrooms, and universities. The need to cooperate and to value each other is important, now more than ever, when authoritarian policies are being instituted to divide those inside and outside of U.S. academia. Steve knew the importance of these principles better than anyone; he was able to accomplish the true mission of higher education, which is to live life as a whole person and to foster the flourishing of students, friends, colleagues, and loved ones, leading a life of joy and fulfillment until the very end.

William James, the Father of American Psychology, once said: “The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated” (Wallace, 2026, p. 24), and he was right. Appreciation or the feeling of being valued by others has played a crucial role in the survival of humans, who evolved to live in communities and who needed to be able to depend on each other to survive (Wallace, 2026). While researchers have given this phenomenon a variety of different names—the need to feel appreciated, to belong, to matter, to feel included—every year social scientists demonstrate how belonging, or the lack thereof, impacts physical and mental health outcomes

(Allen et al., 2022; Haslam et al., 2018; for information on the new *Belonging* journal, see Almarode et al. 2024). In fact, the U.S. Surgeon General in 2023 declared a national “loneliness epidemic” (Weill Cornell Medicine, 2024). Everyone needs to feel valued, so there is an urgent need to foster stronger bonds between people to improve our collective health and well-being.

The need to feel included and appreciated applies in academic and work contexts as well, and yet this need is often overlooked. At the faculty-level, research has shown that university professors desire collegiality within their departments, in a time when rugged individualism is eroding meaningful cooperation

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within academia (Macfarlane, 2016). In fact, collegiality within university departments was the most cited issue by professors in a study of workplace (dis)satisfaction (Dawson et al., 2022). Professors are typically hired and promoted based on their research, teaching, and service, but it is *meaningful* collegiality that allows faculty to “work collaboratively in order to achieve common purposes and assume equitable responsibilities for the good of the unit as a whole” (Dawson et al., 2022, p. 2). Therefore, the growing movement to bring meaningful collegiality to academia is likely rooted in professors’ needs to feel adequately valued and supported within their departments to confront the growing pressures of academic life, such as job insecurity, publishing pressures, and sociopolitical threats to higher education.

At the student-level, several articles are published each year attesting to the stress and burnout of psychology undergraduate and graduate students (Kourea et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2025; Rico & Bunge, 2021). This is, in part, due to a lack of appreciation by those in power, such as psychology professors. Historically, our field has not always emphasized horizontal relationships between students and professors. Wilhelm Wundt, the Father of Psychology, was described by his students as “humorless, indefatigable, and aggressive” (Hunt, 2007, 147). His disregard for the nearly two hundred psychology PhD students whom he supervised over the course of his life was so blatant that in the beginning of each academic year, Wundt would line up his students randomly. He would read from his list of pet projects, and he would assign the first item to the first student in the row, the second item to the second student, and so on. “No one dared to question these assignments,” said one student, lest their careers in this budding new discipline would end (Hunt, 2007, 147). Because Wundt is the father of psychology, he may also inadvertently have become the Father of the (Stereotype of a) Psychology Professor, influencing people’s perceptions of what it means to be a psychology professor today, the perception of a research psychologist as a hard-nosed empiricist “who cares more about p values than people” (H. Haas, personal communication, March 7, 2026).

Not all psychology professors fit that mold, though, and it is possible to be a good researcher and a supportive mentor and teacher too. This festschrift honors one of those people, in part because of his long-term service as an editor for the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*.

Steven Vay Rouse, was known as “Steve” to his students, friends, colleagues, and loved ones. He was born on December 18, 1966, and passed away due to pancreatic cancer on February 5, 2026. Steve was committed to his students, to his discipline, to mentorship, and to the communities in which he lived and worked.

Steve maintained high levels of meaningful collegiality within his department, and he was a caring, humorous, empathic, and appreciative psychology professor. He cared for everyone in his life, human and nonhuman, and made many feel like they mattered, inside and outside of his classroom. This empowered those he fellowshiped with to realize their fullest potential and to also cultivate belonging in others. Thus, given the need to promote a stronger culture of belonging within higher education, and in society more broadly, in this festschrift we celebrate Steven Vay Rouse and recount the many ways that Steve made his students, friends, colleagues, and loved ones to feel like they mattered throughout his life.

Our hope is that by presenting diverse glimpses into Steve’s life and work, from his classroom to his neighborhood to his living room, we can remind the reader of the importance of using one’s privilege for the common good to foster stronger communities of trust, appreciation, and support. While we know that these words fall short of truly capturing the exemplary human being that Steve was, we hope that at the very least, they bear witness to the life of a psychology professor who knew as well as anyone that cooperation and valuing each other is the only way that psychology can truly be a force for good in the world, and most importantly, that a life in service of others and in pursuit of knowledge is a life of joy and fulfillment.

FIGURE 1

Picture of Dr. Steven Vay Rouse



In the following sections, we introduce Steve's life in loose chronological order. First, we present words that Steve himself penned before his passing on February 5, 2026. Second, we offer early accounts of Steve's life from his loved ones, friends, and colleagues. Thereafter, students offer insights into Steve's life as a teacher and mentor, inside and outside of the classroom. Finally, we shed light into Steve's role as the Editor of the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, and finish with a conclusion.

A Word From Steve

By Steven Vay Rouse

(Printed with permission by Stacy Rouse)

Twenty-five years ago, on Dominic's first birthday, I learned that I had lymphoma. Now, there were two primary types it could be. One type had a survival rate of zero. The other one, Hodgkin's, used to have a survival rate of zero, but now has an amazing survival rate of 80%. And I had to wait to find out which one I had. Keep in mind that Dom was just 1, and Ian wasn't even born.

I'm not saying I made a deal with God—I'm not sure he does that kind of thing. But I told God, "I really want to live long enough to see Dominic become an adult." And then, I got good news; I had the one we knew how to beat. Because of that, I have had 25 years of watching Dom and Ian become people I am so proud of and inspired by. And I have had 25 amazing years with my favorite person, Stacy. 25 years of great friendships. 25 years of making a difference. I have had a great life.

There's a simple prayer that is really meaningful to me from an unusual source; it reflects two important values for me. In the Tom Hanks movie *Joe vs. the Volcano*, the main character is confident that he's about to die, and there is nothing he can do. As he feels himself slipping into death, the full moon rises over the calm ocean, and he has a moment of complete transcendence. He whispers, "Oh God, whose name I do not know, thank you for my life. I forgot how big." Two beautiful values there: Gratitude (thank you for my life) and Awe (I forgot how big).

I have tried to keep those two values in mind—even getting a tattoo to remind myself of them every day—and I believe that those values guided how I treated others (at least on my best days).

Words From Stacy Rouse About Jan's Artwork

By Stacy Rouse

Long story short, we got to see Jan in October 2025 when she was here visiting family and Steve showed her his tattoo and shared what he would change about it if he could. Unbeknownst to us, she decided to paint what he

shared, and sent it in December 2025. She didn't know it, but it arrived right around his birthday and when he was in the hospital. It was amazing timing and Steve loved the painting (see Figure 2). We had it in the hospital room for almost his entire stay (it arrived just days after he went in) and then up in our room once we got home.

Who Is Jan the Artist?

By Jan Obenhaus

I have been creating Art in many forms for over 40 years: from Sculpture, Jewelry, Portraits and Nature Paintings. My favorite works are the personal ones inspired by the spirit of a person or place that I have known. I connect with them, I think about them, and that transfers to the finished artwork. In essence allowing others to see what I see, truly inspired work.

These things I have described are all very much true

FIGURE 2

Picture of the Painting Titled "Steve vs. the C"

Reprinted with permission from the artist,
Jan Obenhaus, a lifelong friend of the Rouse family



of the painting “Steve vs. the C.” I was admiring Steve’s tattoo as he told me the meaning behind it. He started explaining what he would change about it if he could. I could picture all the changes he was describing. I thought to myself, “That would make a beautiful painting, and what a cool tattoo!” So I painted “Steve vs the C” with great meaning behind it.

For myself, working on the painting was a very moving experience. I thought about Steve and Stacy while I painted. I rewatched Joe vs the Volcano. I painted the figure holding up the moon thinking about Steve fighting his cancer.

As I painted the stained glass, I thought of the back wall of the campus chapel and the church community that would be there to support the Rouse family over the coming months.

The “C” felt like the ocean, the cancer looming large. The glow of the moon on the water and covering Steve and ocean around him saying, “something bigger than you!” saying, “I’m here with you!”

The stained glass on the water feels like the recognition of others on a similar journey. And as a whole, it feels like a sense of hope, and beauty, and peace.

I knew Steve since the late 70s in Golden Colorado where we were in Youth Group together. He was like a big brother, with a car!, and I was the little sister in the back seat rolling my eyes because he made us listen to country music.

Steve went to Abilene Christian University (ACU) for college in Texas, and I ended up there a few years later. This is where Steve met and fell in love with my roommate and best friend Stacy. So, you’re welcome!

One thing I have always know to be true about Steve: No matter what fear or anxiety was put before him, nothing ever stopped him from moving forward and seeing the positive side of things.

Who Was Herbert Jinx?

By dominic VAY Rouse

Herbert Jinx was a Colotexaminnefornian trickster, inventor, and all-around fliberdigibbit most famous for his contributions to language and the genre of Car Games. A Christian psychologist by trade, Jinx walked a fine line between deconstruction and antidisestablishmentarianism: a tightrope which he balanced on with the assistance of his often overwhelming self-doubt and infectious sense of fun and humour. Raised in a neglectful household, Herbert Jinx was expected to be a caretaker and peacemaker from a young age. As such, he became very adept at identifying secret rules, so adept that he often ended up imagining them where they didn’t exist.

A common misconception about Herbert Jinx is that he was himself the creator of the Car Game “Jinx,”

a misconception that Jinx himself allowed to fester in the minds of people. Ever the lover of calming peace, Jinx abhorred backseat arguments, especially those that spawned from games. Games, Jinx believed, were supposed to be fun and not cause strife in relationships.

On one afternoon, after the 5th or 6th argument between his kids over the finer rules of the game, which can only be discovered by two brothers trying to hurt each other with a children’s game, Herbert Jinx had an idea. Using his last name as leverage, Herbert claimed to be the man who invented Jinx, and with his newly gained ethos, was able to settle every single argument that came up.

There was a drawback to this newfound power however: and that was that his children fully believed the lie, and began coming to him for insights into all of their Car Games with full faith in their father as the creator of Jinx. Although Herbert loved the power trip, it worried him at how deep his children’s faith in Herbert Jinx ran, so finally he told them the truth: Herbert Jinx was Steven Vay Rouse.

It was worse than learning there was no Santa Claus, but the wound healed and trust remained over time and the Car Game arguments became less and less.

Herbert Jinx was stubborn, stubborn, stubborn, stubborn, stubborn.

Herbert Jinx loved people, people, people: stupid people.

Herbert Jinx was such a loving, caring, sweet man that it would cause problems for himself and others.

Herbert Jinx did not invent the game of Jinx, but he was one of the primary inventors of myself and I am so thankful to be one of the things he was most proud of creating.

Steve as a Thought Partner

By Heather Haas

Steve and I met as PhD students at the University of Minnesota in the 1990s; we shared an academic “parent,” and we shared an office for our first year. We never worked together on any research during our time in Minnesota, though, seldom took the same classes, and I can’t even say that we knew each other all that well. I can’t really explain, then, how Steve and I came to be collaborators, coauthors, and friends.

Perhaps it happened because I have always worked on very small campuses with few colleagues in psychology. If I had a question or wanted feedback on a manuscript, I sent a quick email to Steve. I relied on Steve when I needed a memory check, a fact check, or a reality check. That was the pattern that saw us through job searches, career-related drama, promotion, publication, and rejection letters. In that sense, Steve has been my faculty colleague for more than 25 years, even though our offices have always been at least a thousand miles apart.

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I have only seen Steve a time or two since we graduated, but Steve was so much a part of my teaching, of my research, and of my personal Board of Directors that losing him from my inbox will leave a thousand little holes because reminders of Steve are everywhere in my world. I think of Steve when I use Track Changes, because Steve introduced me to Track Changes, and I think of Steve when I use semicolons, because Steve loved semicolons. Copies of emails telling stories about his kids are taped into the margins of my class notes. My students and I often segue into discussions of Steve's concept of "Universal Worth" when we discuss Carl Rogers. I think of Steve when I receive notices from ResearchGate that someone has cited one of our papers, and I think of Steve when I eat edamame, because Steve introduced me to edamame at the SPSP Conference in Las Vegas in 2015.

Steve was a part of my past and present, but he was also supposed to be a part of my future. We had so many plans for research projects we were going to do—eventually, when we both had time. Some of those ideas were probably what Steve called B&SOs ("bright and shiny objects"), but others would have become realities. I can still do those projects, of course, but Steve would have made the work better because he was unfailingly insightful, honest, and encouraging, and that is a powerful combination.

What I had never really realized was just how intentional our relationship was. Our entire relationship post-PhD was conducted on email, so when Steve and I communicated, it was always because one of us reached out—intentionally and individually—to the other. For more than 25 years we both just kept reaching out and reaching back; in some ways, that doesn't seem like much, but in other ways, it is everything.

"Steve Rouse Is in the House"

By Cindy Miller-Perrin

I met Steve Rouse in January of 1998 when he was interviewing for a position in psychology at Pepperdine University. I recall going to dinner at a local seafood restaurant with he and his wife, Stacy. What a delightful couple and a promising teacher/scholar. I knew then and there that this guy was special and that we had to hire him. Though it took me months to remember how to pronounce his name—was it "rowz" or "rooz"—I finally got it down after a colleague helped me out with a mnemonic device. Rouse is in the house! Indeed, Dr. Steve Rouse was in the house for 28 years and impacted my life, along with so many others, as well as the Pepperdine and psychology communities, through the unique person he was as a teacher, researcher, and friend.

I think it's safe to say that Steve was one of the best

teachers in our Social Science Division at Pepperdine. I saw him teach on many occasions, and I conducted many promotional reviews for him. So, I witnessed firsthand his teaching giftedness. In one class I heard him self-proclaim to be a "nerd." And that's true if your definition includes someone who LOVES psychology and its intricacies—Steve did—more than anyone I know and, in my humble opinion, more than any person *should* love an academic discipline! But this, I believe, is what made Steve such a good teacher. He was dedicated to his subject matter and knew it comprehensively. He was passionate and engaging. Steve taught several courses that were popular among students but he also taught many that might not be considered inherently interesting to undergraduates. Regardless, his students were inspired by his knowledge and creativity. His teaching was so exceptional that, in 2007, he was the recipient of the Howard A. White Award for Teaching Excellence. But, above all, Steve was committed to his students, both inside *and* outside the classroom. He served as the faculty advisor to Eta Theta Tau Musical Theater Club, the Neurodiversity Student Organization, and the Crossroads Gender Sexuality Alliance. His service in these areas, no doubt, led to his recognition in 2021 as the recipient of the Impact Award for Outstanding Service to Seaver College Students and in 2023 the Distinction in Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Faculty Award. As more evidence of his impact, when Steve was diagnosed with cancer, many, many of his students sent cards and letters of support. Most of these students designated Steve as their *favorite* professor and also shared a story about how Steve impacted them personally. Through his teaching, Steve *changed lives*.

In addition to being an outstanding teacher, Steve was an accomplished scholar within the field of psychology. Early in his career, he was twice recognized for his scholarship as a finalist for the Samuel J. and Anne G. Beck Award for Outstanding Early Career Research in the Field of Personality Research. Steve was not one to publish simply to rack up publications in order to achieve promotions. He generally chose research projects for one of three reasons: because he felt passionate about the topic (e.g., his personality research), because it provided an opportunity to mentor students (e.g., he worked with dozens of students on research projects), or because the research was in the service of a broader goal such as contributing to his community (e.g., his research documenting the effectiveness of a water purification program to improve attitudes about drinking purified recycled water). In total, he produced over 50 academic publications throughout his career and presented much of that work to the psychological and broader academic communities.

But my memories of Steve transcend the academic,

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as they do for most people who worked with him. Steve was a good friend and neighbor. And, as it turns out, Steve was not the only nerd to inhabit the Pepperdine community. My husband and I have been huge fans of the show *Survivor* for many years and have been celebrating the show by hosting a dinner and watch party, called Survivor Night, since nearly the show's inception. Imagine my delight to find out that Steve and Stacy were also fans! They became a part of our Survivor Night in 2017 and faithfully attended until this past fall. Part of our routine was to rotate dinner responsibilities among members of the group. Steve was often the cook contributing to the meal, and it was always a treat to enjoy his main dishes and desserts. And Steve didn't just whip something up—his contributions were an event! My favorite was his Tres Leches cake. He also made a pretty mean Margherita and Mojito! We also often had a competition to guess which contestant would be voted out each night. Steve was a pretty competitive guy, but also almost always right, and his memory for episodes and past seasons was remarkable. This should come as no surprise to those who knew him given his sharp and analytical mind. He also had a playful sense of humor. But my best memories of Steve, as a friend and longtime neighbor, have to do with his generosity and joyful disposition. He was always the person to chip in and help out, no matter what the request. He never did anything begrudgingly, but instead, always with a spirit of giving. One thing I always appreciated about Steve was his joyful disposition, which I think stemmed in large part from his steadfast Christian faith. He was the kind of guy who always had a smile on his face. I know this to be true because every time I saw him at church or in the office or even driving down the street in front of my home (even when driving by himself!), he was smiling. Even while facing death, Steve was always thinking of how others were doing and feeling and continued to dazzle with his smile. I will always miss him and will never forget him. Steve Rouse will always be in the house!

A Luminary: Thoughts on the Legacy of Steven Vay Rouse

By Robert E. Williams, Jr.

Steve loved light and he loved the idea of light, especially light as a metaphor for truth, for love, for justice, for knowledge. What I most want to convey about Steve is that he was a luminary. He was a brilliant teacher, researcher, and administrator—a luminary in that sense, certainly—but he was also a luminary in the more literal sense of being a light-giver.

Let me begin with some of the obvious ways Steve shined:

Pepperdine University recognized Steve with the

Howard A. White Award for Teaching Excellence, the Impact Award for Outstanding Service to Seaver College Students, and the Distinction in Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Faculty Award. Psi Chi, the International Honor Society in Psychology, made Steve the editor of its flagship journal four years ago and, last month, named Steve a Distinguished Member. In an organization that has had 900,000 members in its 97 years of existence, only 53 have been named Distinguished Members. At Pepperdine, our highly ranked undergraduate Psychology program bears Steve's imprint on the curriculum and, more importantly, on the outstanding faculty. As divisional dean and as a member of numerous search committees over the years, Steve had a role in hiring and mentoring most of Pepperdine's Psychology faculty.

Personally, I learned a lot about Steve (and a lot from him) over the 28 years we knew each other. Much of what I learned came from sticking my head in his office to ask for advice, especially after I followed him in the divisional dean role.

Steve was a friend from the beginning of our association—it was impossible not to like him—but the longer I knew him, the more my appreciation for him grew. He was an upstander, not a bystander. He elevated those around him, especially those who had been marginalized. He brought the light of science, which he pursued rigorously, to questions of gender prejudice and he affirmed—in person and in public, insistently—that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other persons persecuted for their identity were made in the image of God.

While serving as divisional dean, I had the opportunity to sit in on Steve's classes, read his annual reflections on his work, and study his course evaluations. It was quite common to see students, in their anonymous comments about his classes, struggle to find the right superlatives to express their appreciation. Perhaps no one did it better than the student in a class on Personality who said the course was "freakin' lit."

Steve . . . loved . . . teaching, and he was one of the best. He loved teaching so much—and I swear this is true—that he chose not to apply for sabbaticals. He routinely asked to have more students added to closed classes. He taught virtually every summer without worrying about what he was getting paid. I'm convinced that Steve, if given a choice between getting paid without teaching and teaching without getting paid, would gladly have chosen the latter.

When I first walked around campus after Steve passed from us, the weight of his absence was palpable. What I heard often from colleagues was something I was already saying to myself: No one can replace Steve.

We can't replace Steve, but, like him, we can dedicate ourselves to truth, be passionate about our work, and stand with those who are marginalized. We can, together, do what Steve did.

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We, too, can be luminaries and know that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Steve Brought Action to Theory at Pepperdine

By Donna Nofziger

Writing in honor of a colleague is always a humbling task; writing in honor of Steve Rouse, whose life so fully integrated intellect, faith, and action, is especially so. No single account can contain the scope of his influence but what is offered here is not meant to be comprehensive but instead is an example of one of the ways that Steve lived his vocation at Pepperdine with integrity.

Academic life often emphasizes reflection over action. Ideas are debated and refined with care, yet they can often remain largely confined to the ivory tower of scholarly discourse. Steve was a respected and prolific scholar, but his intellectual pursuits were not limited to just academic dialogue and publications. Instead, they were woven into the way he lived his life. For Steve, knowledge carried ethical responsibilities that called him to action in ways deeply informed by his Christian faith. In doing so, Steve made Pepperdine a better and more loving place by openly sharing his authentic self, advocating tirelessly for others, and bringing important conversations out into the open.

This integration of inquiry and compassionate action was especially evident in Steve’s involvement in Pepperdine’s Bridges Program (formerly SEED). The program gathers faculty and staff in sustained dialogue around questions of equity and belonging through the lens of higher education. Participants share experiences, listen across difference, and reflect on how institutional life shapes the flourishing of all members of the community. Steve embraced this work as an expression of his deepest commitments. He believed that Christian and academic ideals alike require intentional effort to ensure that every member of the community is seen, valued, heard, and enabled to thrive.

Over the many years Steve participated in Bridges both as a participant and as a panelist where he shared openly with courage and humility about his own experience as a bisexual man at Pepperdine. He also organized panels of students who identify as LGBTQ+ to share their own journeys. Such open discussions involve vulnerability, particularly in light of the power dynamic between students and faculty. Their willingness to do so is a testament to the credibility and trust he fostered through leading by example and his consistent care for others. These sessions were among the most impactful of the program in a large part due to Steve as he inspired us to reflect on the testimonies of these

community members and how they call us to action to do our part in making Pepperdine an example of an inclusive, welcoming institution grounded in Christ.

Steve’s influence extended throughout the university. He cultivated environments—classrooms, offices, informal gatherings—where individuals felt safe to speak honestly and to be received with dignity. He practiced a quiet boldness: a willingness to name difficult realities, to accompany those who felt marginalized, and to invite others into deeper understanding. His credibility as a scholar, teacher, and faithful member of the Church of Christ gave weight to his witness. If he possessed forms of privilege, he employed them not for self-protection but for the benefit of others, enabling many to live and learn more fully.

To remember Steve is to recall a life in which theory and action played out in beautiful ways. He demonstrated that scholarship can be an instrument of care, that faith can fuel intellectual hospitality, and that institutions can be shaped by those who live their convictions with heart, soul, and mind. His example continues to call this community toward deeper faithfulness, wider compassion, and more generous understanding so all can live more abundantly.

Steve’s Classroom Was Like No Other

By Juan Carlos Hugues

Black T-shirt, jeans, a tumbler in hand, and a gentle smile. This was Steve. This is how I remember him during my first day in his Psychology of Personality class. When the clock struck 8:15 a.m., Steve introduced himself and started class by going over his syllabus. I will say, Steve’s syllabus was unlike any syllabus I had ever seen until that point. And after almost eight years since this class, I have yet to see a more caring and thoughtful syllabus than his. What made this syllabus unique to me was the section titled: “Learning environment values.” In this section, Steve recounted how he valued a, “Diverse, inclusive, accepting, welcoming, safe space, for everyone.” These words were stacked on top of each other like building blocks and shaded with the colors of the Pride flag. As a queer person attending a Christian-affiliated university, Steve’s use of the rainbow was a gentle reminder that I belonged in his classroom and that I was welcomed for exactly who I was.

Another element that I have yet to see in another syllabus was his “In memorium” section. I remember him saying that “All of my courses are dedicated to the memory of Larry Kimmons.” He then explained that Larry Kimmons was a Black teenager who was murdered on March 12, 1969, by a white Pepperdine security guard, for the simple reason of trying to use the basketball courts at Pepperdine’s former South Los Angeles campus. Steve was acutely aware of Pepperdine

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University's history of police brutality and actively used his white privilege to call out Pepperdine's past and present institutional racism. We went on like this until 10 a.m., and Steve stayed after class to answer any questions.

The following day in his class, I learned about Janet Hyde's gender similarity hypothesis, or the idea that women and men are more similar than different on most psychological variables. On the third day, I learned that "Our modern skulls house a stone-age brain." On the fourth day, that collectivist cues are important in making Latinx students feel welcomed in higher education. On the fifth day, that gender and sexual orientation are continuums (and that being an LGBTIQ+ Christian is possible). On the sixth day, about OCEAN or the Big Five personality traits. On the seventh day, about how snobbish 20th century scholars used tea to create the p value (for the story of Fisher and the Lady Tasting Tea, see Brereton, 2020). During every class, I dreaded when the clock inched closer to 10 a.m. I didn't want Steve's classes to end. His teachings were like seeing new colors. I'd plant every word he offered in class inside my heart.

Outside of the classroom, Steve was just as caring. He always wrote feedback and emails in green, since "green was calming and red can be intimidating for students," he'd say. He'd throw out exam questions where 50% of students got the question wrong (to him this meant he wrote a bad test question). He always encouraged students to attend his office hours, "to talk about class or life." I'd visit his office every chance that I could, and I'd ask him many questions about psychology. He'd tell me about how psychology came from philosophy, and how psychology was cooler since we could actually test things (This was lighthearted interdisciplinary jousting, of course). That the big debate in the 1950s on whether a person's personality or social context was more important was stupid. "It's both," he'd say. As a bisexual Christian, Steve recommended I read David Gushee's book *Changing Our Mind*. Even in his office, I dreaded the moments when our conversations would end, when I'd see another student from the corner of my eye standing by the door also wanting to talk with him. Everyone loved talking to Steve. Steve was a great conversationalist.

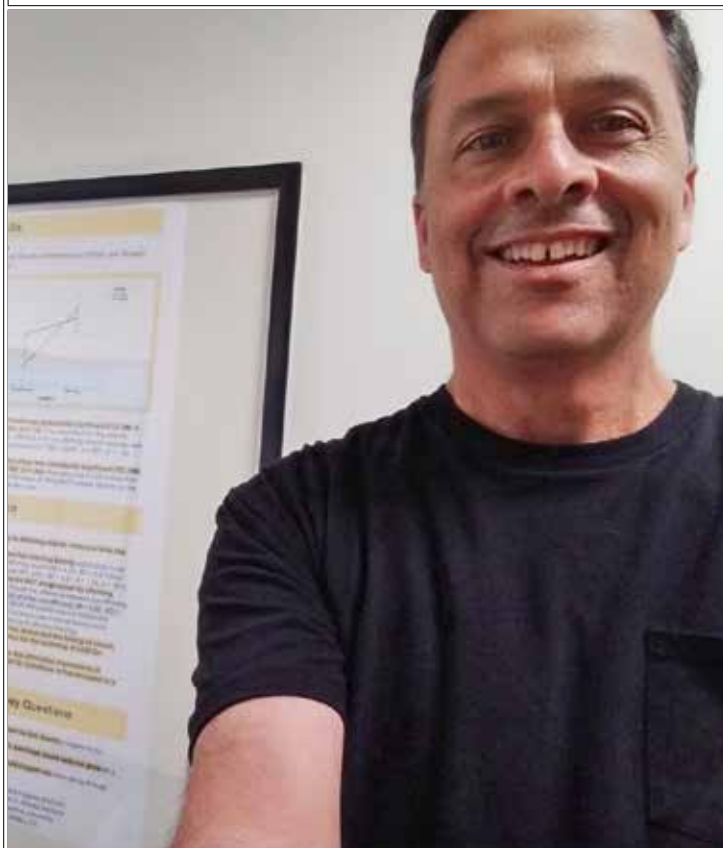
Later that same semester, Steve chaperoned a university field trip to San Francisco that introduced students to the different social justice movements born there. Steve led the tour of the LGBTIQ+ movement, and we visited the Castro district with him. It was my first time in San Francisco; my first time seeing men wear stilettos and strutting down the sidewalk with joy and Pride. On the tour, we passed in front of a school named after Harvey Milk. The school prided themselves in promoting a "social justice curriculum," and that was when I got the words to describe Steve's class. I remember turning to Steve and

telling him that this school did exactly what he did in his classes. He smiled and thanked me. We also went to the Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, the only church in the area that helped LGBTIQ+ people during the AIDS epidemic. Thanks to Steve's commitment to introducing his students to new ideas, this was another moment that solidified my conviction that I could be queer and Christian.

During the rest of my time at Pepperdine, I took as many courses as I could with Steve. I even signed up to do independent research with him to better understand the Identity Safety Cues (ISC) that help LGBTIQ+ Christians to better belong within churches (see Figure 3; Hugues & Rouse, 2023). Doing research with Steve was like flying. He gave me complete liberty on the paper. "You should write a paper that you're proud of," he told me, and I now know that he was pushing me to be an independent thinker. Steve was the best research teammate until the end. In fact, my email exchanges with Steve were a bit like playing tennis. Steve responded promptly; gave feedback promptly; read the drafts promptly—the ball was always in my court.

FIGURE 3

Steve in the Appleby Center (AC) at Pepperdine University in Front of a Student Poster Presented at SPSP 2022



Steve stopped teaching midsemester in the fall of 2025. By this point I had completed my master’s in psychology and had my eye toward a PhD in psychology. The news of his battle with cancer crushed me. Like many who also loved him, I asked repeatedly: “Why Steve?” To cope with the grief, I sent him an email inquiring about something he had mentioned a long time ago when I first took his Psychology of Personality class:

Juanca: “You know, one time in class you told us about your psych genealogy, and that has always stuck with me, since I consider you my first mentor. So, I was wondering, when you had a chance, if you could tell me your psych genealogy again” (see Figure 4).

It’s now been a few weeks since Steve’s passing, and I am still heartbroken. Heartbroken that with Steve’s death, his classes have also come to an end. One truth that brings me peace is that Steve’s teachings continue to live in the hearts of every single student he taught during his academic tenure. It is now up to us, his students, to continue nurturing the good that he planted in every single one of us.

**The Professor He Wished
He Had in College**
By Ashley Burton

I first met Steve at church, which I was attending for a class project. After leaving the service that day, I did not expect to see him around. However, about a week later, Crossroads GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) had a game night. I hadn’t realized this, but it was hosted at Steve’s house. When he opened the door, we instantly recognized each other and were able to talk more casually. That year, I would see Steve around at several GSA events, including sexual education events he would personally lead.

The next academic year, I became GSA’s financial officer. While I didn’t always interact with Steve directly, I saw his role in helping our club’s leadership. He helped give us direction on what to do or who to talk to next if we were struggling, and he always had great ideas for events. That year, Pepperdine started to cause some problems for the club. The situation involved most of the spring semester, and it was incredibly emotionally and mentally draining to deal with. Through all of it, Steve was there for us. He gave us encouragement and helped us move forward.

This academic year, I rejoined GSA as the president. This was when I truly saw Steve’s advising role for the club. He and I met individually so that we could plan

FIGURE 4

Steve’s Email Response to Juan Carlos Hugues

Steve: "I'm so honored to have been your first mentor. Here's my lineage. Wilhelm Wundt is considered the first empirical psychologist, and one of his mentees was Hugo Munsterberg (who was a character!). With Munsterberg, my lineage splits into two lines because two of Munsterberg's mentees were Richard Elliot and Gordon Allport.

My lineage from Richard Elliot was more scientific and statistical. He had a mentee named Starke Hathaway, the primary author of the MMPI. Hathaway mentored Grant Dahlstrom, who mentored my major advisor, James Butcher. I really love Jim—he was a very kind and generous graduate advisor.

My lineage from Gordon Allport was more theoretical. He mentored Gardner Lindsey (who co-authored what used to be considered THE definitive personality textbook), who mentored Auke Tellegen, who was my dissertation advisor."

out the year for the club, potential challenges, and how to make sure that we could be as successful as possible. During the year, we planned to do office hours to support queer students. When I told Steve we were planning this, he immediately requested us to include his office hours information on our posts. Even after his diagnosis in the fall, Steve continued to lend his assistance through Zoom meetings and asked us to keep his contact information publicly available in lieu of his inability to do office hours in person.

Through all of this, I was also personally dealing with a lot, including homelessness, struggles with my sexuality, and coming out as transgender right around Steve's diagnosis. He was always there for me individually. I went to my first Pride parade with Steve and Stacy, and he offered a backup option for item storage if I needed it during the summer. Most of all, I'm glad to know that he was able to finally see me fully realize who I truly am.

In fall semester, after hearing of his diagnosis, I led the GSA to organize a series of videos for Steve from GSA members and alumni to express our appreciation for everything he's done for us, both in our personal lives and for GSA. When we finally sent that over to him, something that he said that I'll never forget was that he wanted to be the person he wished he had when he was in college. I think for all of us and GSA, Steve was that professor he always wanted, and I'm happy that he knew that.

Steve as a Student Mentor

By Isabella Moreno

I was never fortunate enough to take a class with Dr. Rouse, yet his influence on my academic life was still foundational at Pepperdine. Our conversations never took place in classrooms, but in his office for advising meetings, where they became discussions about class schedules and graduation requirements, and about direction, passions, and possibilities for the future.

One of the things I'll remember the most about Dr. Rouse was his patience. Academic advising always felt procedural and became a to-do list of credits and deadlines, but every time I met with him for academic advising and rambled on and on about my worries about the future or whether or not I'll be able to take all the classes I want to take and still graduate on time, Dr. Rouse always met my worries with patience. He listened to my problems and made my worries feel worthy of time. He never imposed answers on me, but instead helped me to think through my problems and gave me choices so that I could figure out what I needed. He had this amazing ability to break down my complicated problems into a manageable plan, and I always, always felt better after every meeting. Even though I never had a class with Dr. Rouse, I still could see his passion for teaching and for

students through our conversations, which were refreshing to see, and I always felt so inspired after our meetings. I remember one of the first things I noticed about Dr. Rouse was that we had the same favorite soda: Diet Dr. Pepper (see Figure 5). Every time I walked into his office, there was always a can of Diet Dr. Pepper on his desk, and I remember the first time I saw it I thought, "Wow. This guy gets it." And I wish I would've told him that.

Dr. Rouse was also the advisor for Pepperdine's GSA Crossroads, and he had such an impact on queer students at Pepperdine, especially queer students who are of the Christian faith. He always provided a safe space for anyone and everyone to come talk to him, and I wish I had used that space sooner. He never made me feel ashamed to be who I am, especially within my faith, and I know he did the same for so many other students like me. I am so grateful for that community he was able to create, and I want to be able to be at least half as kind and understanding as Dr. Rouse was.

While I wasn't his student in a traditional sense, I felt guided in a deeper way. He was a true model of God's love, and he has inspired so many people in so many different ways. I realize now that mentorship doesn't come from just the front of a classroom or from across a desk—it comes from game nights, club meetings, and from people who understand your uncertainties and help you navigate through said uncertainties. His impact didn't

FIGURE 5

During Steve's Celebration of Life on February 28, 2026, Family, Friends, and Loved Ones Toasted to Steve With a Diet Dr. Pepper in the Elkins Auditorium at Pepperdine University



come from a syllabus or a grade, but from conversations and from the confidence he gave so many people. I think and hope he knows how many people he has helped, and I can only hope to be half the person Dr. Rouse was.

Steve's Legacy

By Danica Christy

Steve was, without a doubt, the best professor I've ever had. I took his classes every chance I got. He was passionate about teaching, and it was evident how deeply he cared about both psychology and his students.

I took Steve's intermediate statistics class from 6 to 10 p.m. at the end of twelve-hour days. With any other professor, that class would have been miserable. Steve somehow made it fun. He designed the course like a cooperative game where we earned points throughout the semester as we prepared for what he called the "boss fight" (the final exam). He even printed each of us a 95 page "statistics bible," which I still use today. Although I've taken many statistics classes since then, I find myself returning to his notes when I'm confused.

Steve consistently went out of his way for his students. At the start of my senior year, I told him I was interested in sexuality research and frustrated by the lack of opportunities to explore it at Pepperdine. A week later, he emailed me and said, "You know what? It's about time Pepperdine offers a Psychology of Human Sexuality course. What do you think of this syllabus?" He had already designed what felt like the most thoughtful, forward-thinking course I had ever seen. In true Steve fashion, he got it approved for the following semester. I was able to take the class, and it remains my favorite class of all time.

As my research mentor, Steve met with me weekly to discuss my progress. I often arrived scatter-brained and overwhelmed, but within thirty minutes he would calmly untangle everything. He had an incredible ability to make complex problems feel manageable. More importantly, he could make you feel capable of solving them.

I know I am far from the only student that Steve helped. He was endlessly generous with his time and guidance. He made it clear that he was always available as a professor, mentor, or simply a listening ear. No matter how busy he was, Steve would make time for you.

Steve was also a staunch advocate for queer students at Pepperdine. He made us feel safe, seen, and supported. That meant more to me as a queer student than I can fully express. As the Crossroads GSA advisor, Steve supported our ideas, activism, and growth without hesitation. Whether we wanted to join a nationwide protest against Title IX exemptions or organize a sex education workshop, he was always in our corner.

When I spoke with Steve after his diagnosis, he told me he'd been thinking about his legacy. He said, "I want my legacy to be that people who otherwise would have felt marginalized were able to feel like they belong and are valued." That is exactly what he did for me and countless others. Steve helped me grow into the researcher, advocate, and mentor I am today. I will forever be grateful to have had him in my life. Steve's legacy will live on through the many lives he's touched.

Dr. Steven Rouse: Researcher, Colleague, Friend

By Robert R. Wright

As a researcher, Dr. Steven Rouse had an impressive track record. Following completion of a rigorous doctoral program at the University of Minnesota in 1997, he authored nearly 60 publications, gave numerous academic presentations to students and scholarly colleagues, taught higher education courses for more than 25 years at Pepperdine University, and was an editor of the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* for nearly 5 years. He has mentored hundreds of students (many of whom learned to love research, and even statistics, under his tutelage), influenced his colleagues and peers through his research and editing services, and impacted many prospective authors in his efforts to further the mission of the Psi Chi International Honor Society by leading their flagship journal. He was especially noted for his attention to detail in methodological rigor and statistical accuracy in both psychological and personality assessment. Yes, Steve had an impressive academic career.

Yet, as a person, friend, and my colleague, Steve was even more impressive. I joined the Psi Chi Journal Editorial Board back in 2016 and then later became an Associate Editor in 2019. I was immediately welcomed by Steve, who helped socialize me to the new role by embracing and encouraging my contributions. I was very impressed at how personable, warm, and likeable he was. Then, when he became Editor in 2021, I was further amazed as he demonstrated his love not only for the field of psychology (that he loved greatly), but also for the people in it. There was no demeaning attitude or belittling behavior from Editor Rouse as he handled my reviews and recommendations for the journal. He was always encouraging, uplifting and providing edifying experiences. I saw him exemplify this with everyone he interacted with, whether a hopeful student author or colleague. For instance, during our regular editorial meetings, Steve would always ask us to check in and provide personal updates from our lives in recognition that we were more than employees, but that we were humans with personal lives. This allowed us to

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acknowledge events occurring behind our professional persona. I witnessed several disheartening and difficult circumstances that were shared in those meetings and Steve's unwavering ability to encourage and support those who were struggling whether it be personal or professional. I loved that about Steve—he treated people with respect and dignity not simply out of scientific curiosity, institutional obligation or personal agenda, but because he recognized we were all like him, we were all human.

In short, Steve left an impact wherever he went: from his academic achievements in the field of psychology to the colleagues and students he interacted with. Steve's legacy is one that will live on with us, as he has profoundly and positively impacted so many as he journeyed through this life, both professionally and personally. We will miss him. Yet, we will press forward by honoring his memory both with this collection of essays and with a commitment to follow Steve's example. The *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* will forever be grateful for his devoted service and will continue to further the values and ideals that characterized Steve's own professional and personal life—even the high ideals of academic excellence and personal connection.

A Tribute to Steve

By Bradley Cannon

I had the privilege of knowing Steve for more than ten years through our work on the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*—not just as a colleague, but truly as a friend.

Steve was deeply passionate about psychological science and about helping students grow into confident, capable researchers. Paired with his extraordinary knowledge and productivity, he was the perfect person to step into the role of Associate Editor in 2014 and then Editor in 2021.

Steve didn't necessarily make the research or publishing process *fun*. Instead, through his seemingly limitless energy and ideas, he made it *meaningful* to all those around him—which I've come to believe is far more important.

This may come as a surprise to some of you... but certain parts of the research process can be a bit tedious. And yet, no matter how painstaking the task—whether reviewing a 100-page issue for small errors or navigating the long road to inclusion in an academic database—Steve inspired every person around him to always give their best, to work with intention, and to approach every project with care. Through his own passion for whatever we were working on, he fueled us with certainty that we were making a difference in the world.

Working with Steve was an incredible gift. He was

always prepared, thoughtful, and two steps ahead. No one could write more eloquent emails or keep more plates spinning—and yet he was endlessly patient and encouraging too. He often thoroughly reviewed papers within mere minutes after I passed them to him, and because of the great detail in his decision letters, I suspect that he was actually looking ahead in our online portal so that he could examine papers before they were even assigned to him. I could never quite keep up with Steve's remarkable pace, and I doubt that anyone could! And yet, he never pressed me harder or made any criticisms on those days when projects piled up around me. He always seemed to know when people were trying their hardest and instead sought ways to be supportive and make the best of every situation.

Because I live more than 2,000 miles from Pepperdine, most of our collaboration happened over bi-weekly Zoom calls and (quite literally) thousands of emails (always in that green font of his). But one time, shortly after he became Editor, Steve traveled to Chattanooga after an SPSP conference so we could spend a few days planning for the journal's future. I remember that visit well. The future felt tremendously bright. And when he left for the airport, I hugged him and felt deeply grateful for the work we were doing—and for the person he was.

I'm grateful still. And I miss his cheerful, steady presence more than I can say. Steve often encouraged others to speak first in our meetings. He even did this on the day that he told us about his diagnosis—letting me first rattle on for several minutes about trivial matters like how to respond to a reviewer about an unusual question and our edits in the latest layout proof.

Of course, no one would have blamed Steve if he had resigned immediately that day. But instead, he insisted that he keep at it for as long as his health would allow. According to Steve, he enjoyed his role and wanted to stay busy and maintain some sort of normalcy in his life. But more than this, it was at this time that I came to really understand just how important the journal was to him. Supporting early career psychologists meant so much to him, and through the journal, he had found a conduit with which to nurture their skills and reach across the psychological community and society as a whole.

Steve believed in doing excellent work, but he believed even more in the people doing it.

Rest in peace, Steve. You made an impact on us all.

Conclusion

Our aim with this festschrift was to express our appreciation not only for Steve, but for all those professors and students who are working to cultivate a stronger culture

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of belonging in higher education generally and in the field of psychology specifically. We hope that these pieces will also serve as evidence that even small acts can make a big difference. Even those of us who knew Steve personally were inspired by the stories others shared, and we hope that other readers too will be encouraged to do the work of being “an upstander, not a bystander,” as Robert E. Williams wrote. As Donna Nofziger stated, Steve “fully integrated intellect, faith, and action” in ways that deserve to be emulated.

Part of the reason why we decided to do a festschrift for Steve was because the festschrift, as a genre, is fading. According to Richetti (2012), in an academic culture of rugged individualism and a lack of time, celebrating colleagues is becoming a tradition of the past, a “charming survivor of a more collegial academic age” (p. 237). In a way, then, the festschrift, as a genre, is the perfect medium through which to revive the spirit of cooperation within academia. And Steve Rouse is the perfect person to honor in this way, in part because of his long-term service to Psi Chi, and in part because—as Danica Christy recounted—Steve lived his life in a way that ensured that his legacy will be “that people who otherwise would have felt marginalized were able to feel like they belong and are valued.”

This festschrift represents much of what Steve stood for and worked to accomplish during his life. Ashley Burton wrote that Steve tried to be “the professor he wished he had in college,” and he was indeed able to be that person for many of his students. Like dominic VAY Rouse wrote, “Jinx [or Steve] walked a fine line between deconstruction and antisestablishmentarianism,” yet managed to be someone who appreciated everyone around him and embodied meaningful collegiality. Whether he was divisional dean at Pepperdine or the Editor of the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, Robert R. Wright said it best that Steve treated everyone as, “more than employees, but [as humans] with personal lives.” This way of being intentional in relationships, of reaching out “intentionally and individually” as Heather Haas wrote, characterized Steve’s interactions with others. In “treating people as ends in themselves” (Marshall & Bokhorst-Heng, 2025, p.12) and incorporating a “social justice curriculum” in his classroom, as Juan Carlos Hugues wrote, Steve fulfilled the true mission of higher education, which is to form the whole person and to foster the flourishing of students, friends, colleagues, and loved ones (Marshall, 2024).

In addition to easily being, “one of the best teachers in [the] Social Science Division at Pepperdine,” as Cindy Miller-Perrin wrote, Steve’s kindness and his nature of, “seeing the positive side of things,” as Jan Obenhaus wrote, is what made him truly special. Steve’s two guiding values—gratitude and awe, as Steve himself and Stacy Rouse wrote—are great reminders about what truly matters in life. In the end, Isabella Moreno speaks for all of us in writing

that, “[We] can only hope to be half the person Dr. Rouse was.” Of course, while Steve would have never wanted anyone to be exactly like him, we use this festschrift to remind people that relationships matter, and they make life joyful and worthwhile. Steve knew this better than anyone, and he inspires us, “[to believe] in doing excellent work, but [to believe] even more in the people doing it,” as Bradley Cannon wrote. We hope that Steve’s legacy will continue to live on through these words, like a seed planted inside the hearts and minds of the reader, blossoming under the warmth and care of a new kind and gentle steward.

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This festschrift, or collection of celebratory essays, honors the life of Dr. Steven V. Rouse, after his premature passing on Thursday, February 5, 2026.

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