My fondest memories of my time as Dean of the Tepper School will be of the people — faculty, staff, students, and alumni — especially those with whom I worked most closely.

Bob Dammon

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Michael A. Trick, Sr. Assoc. Dean, Faculty & Research (2014–17) and Sr. Assoc. Dean, Education (2011–14)
Laurie Weingart, Sr. Assoc. Dean, Education (2014–17)
Sevin Yeltekin, Sr. Assoc. Dean, Education (2017–20)
Alan A. Scheller-Wolf, Sr. Assoc. Dean, Faculty & Research (2017–20)
Richard C. Green (1953–2015), Sr. Assoc. Dean, Faculty & Research (2011–14)
Diana Dewey Emanuele, Exec. Assistant to the Dean (2011–20)
HESTER SPATT, the Pamela R. and Kenneth B. Dunn Professor of Finance, remembers well the day he met Bob Dammon in December 1983, at a meeting of the American Finance Association in San Francisco.

Dammon — the future dean of the Tepper School of Business — was a freshly minted Ph.D., newly emerged from the University of Wisconsin, where he had just written what Spatt remembers as “a very nice paper” that creatively examined how corporate finance related to progressive taxation.

Later, when Dammon visited the Carnegie Mellon campus, Spatt and Kenneth Dunn (who was then a faculty member, but also a future dean) took the young Dammon to dinner and discussed their mutual research interests. It would prove to be the beginning of a long and satisfying collaboration.

Nearly four decades later, Dammon has become indelibly linked to the Tepper School, from which he will step down as dean this year. But long before he ascended to the top job in 2011, Dammon was helping to shape the school’s trajectory and immersing himself in its ethos. Considered a master teacher both by his peers and students, he is the only three-time winner of the school’s George Leland Bach Teaching Award, taking the title in 1989, 1997, and 2007. When he served as a visiting professor at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business in the 1995-96 academic year, he won the “Outstanding Teacher of the Year” title there, too.

In the nine years he has led the Tepper School, Dammon brought the same approach to his role as an administrator that he brought to the classroom: thoughtful, encouraging, and analytical. These are qualities that have endeared him to faculty, alumni, and students alike, who were eager to share their impressions of Dammon’s leadership and how his legacy will shape the school’s future.

‘ONE OF THOSE GOOD BOSSES’

GUNJAN KEDIA (MSIA 1994) remembers meeting Dammon in 1992, when she was a student in his Corporate Finance 1 and 2 courses. “I was fresh from India — a very shy, quiet person, and he encouraged me to be part of the case competition, which was great experience for me,” she recalls. Now the Vice Chair of Wealth Management and Investment Services at U.S. Bancorp, Kedia praises the deep, positive impact Dammon had on her fellow alumni: “He was why so many of us chose to go into finance as a career,” she says.

Kedia continues to work with her onetime professor as a member of the school’s Business Board of Advisors, crediting him with bringing “grace and tact” to his tenure as dean.

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Fellow board member DAVID COULTER (BSIM 1971, MSIA 1971) agrees. Through the BBA, he became involved in discussions about the school’s needs and strategies, which alumni actively helped shape.

“Bob was in the middle of the evolution of that and played an important kind of leveling, not highly emotional role,” Coulter says.

DIANA DEWEY EMANUELE, who has served as Dammon’s executive assistant for a dozen years, calls him “one of those good bosses that you always hope you’re able to work for. He’s an exceptional leader, and also very thoughtful. He gives his best, and that inspires others to give their best.”

Carnegie Mellon President FARNAM JAHANIAN calls Dammon “an ardent champion for the Tepper School of Business,” citing his efforts to launch several programs that increase connectivity between Tepper and the other schools and colleges on campus.

“The entire CMU community is grateful for his nine years of service as dean,” Jahanian says.

“IT THINK THAT’S THE ENVIRONMENT THAT BOB HAS ALWAYS TRIED TO CREATE: THAT PEOPLE WORK TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD, FOR THE HIGHER GOOD.”

Sevin Yeltekin, Rohet Tolani Distinguished Professor, Professor of Economics, Senior Associate Dean of Education
Dean Robert Dammon, who will step down in June 2020, will be remembered for nine years of shepherding the Tepper School through a rapidly changing business school environment. The school has seen significant advancements during his time as dean.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING DEAN DAMMON’S TENURE

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THE DAVID A. TEPPER QUADRANGLE
The quad serves as both a welcome center and a collaborative hub for the entire CMU campus.

24 CLASSROOMS
315K SQUARE FEET
$201M

Largest BubbleDeck project in North America at the time of completion

UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

#5 UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS PROGRAM

UG Business Administration Program Student Population

ACCELERATE LEADERSHIP CENTER

ACCELERATE, created in 2014, provides individualized coaching and leadership training for MBA students.

NEW PROGRAM: SHIFT
Programming focuses on the human side of business leadership.

NEW MASTER’S PROGRAMS

#1 TOP ONLINE MBA
Poets & Quants (2020)
PT Online Hybrid MBA began fall 2013

#8 BEST PART-TIME MBA
PT Flex MBA began fall 2019

MASTERS OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ANALYTICS
Began fall 2018

MASTERS OF SCIENCE IN PRODUCT MANAGEMENT
(Joint with the School of CS)
Began spring 2018

PIONEERING RESEARCH

Interdisciplinary Initiatives addressing major cultural issues:

NEW DOCTORAL PROGRAM
Ph.D. in Behavioral Economics (joint with Social and Decision Sciences)

SWARTZ CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Swartz Center, created in 2015, serves as a campus-wide hub for entrepreneurial innovation, attracting a wide spectrum of disciplines to converge at the Tepper School.

10 STARTUP SPACES
175+ STARTUPS LAUNCHED
15K SQUARE FEET
$140M INVESTED FUNDS

TEPPER SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN 2023
Building the Business School of the Future

R E S E A R C H E X C E L L E N C E
E D U C A T I O N E X C E L L E N C E
T H E T E P P E R S C H O O L E X P E R I E N C E

TRANSFORMATIVE EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP
ADVANCED ANALYTICS
INNOVATION
TECHNOLOGY
NEW PROGRAM
The Executive Leadership Academy prepares African American business professionals in the Pittsburgh region for executive advancement.
A UNIFYING CENTER

Perhaps the signature achievement of Dammon’s tenure has been the journey, from conception to construction, of the $201 million David A. Tepper Quadrangle — a state-of-the-art reimagining of what a business school could be, the physical embodiment of Carnegie Mellon’s much-vaunted philosophy of cross-campus collaboration.

When the idea of replacing the school’s former home in Posner Hall first surfaced, Dammon was able to synthesize the input of many stakeholders, ranging from alumni to faculty, donors, other university schools and departments, and more.

“I think Bob — in his even-handed, intellectual, step-by-step way — was in the midst of making a lot of things happen,” says Coulter, whose name graces the new Welcome Center within the Tepper Quad. “And he may have been the perfect person for that.”

Today, the building stands as “a unifying center that has transformed the entire Carnegie Mellon campus,” notes Provost JAMES GARRETT, who praised Dammon for creating “new opportunities that have attracted a more diverse community of students, scholars, and researchers to Tepper.”

MARK COBLITZ (MSIA 1982) points out that Dammon’s ability to wrangle diverse strong viewpoints also helped inform another of his important achievements, a strategic plan that focuses on a research agenda described by influential Poets & Quants editor John A. Byrne as “new and ambitious.”

“Bob did a terrific job of engaging multiple CMU constituencies, including administration, deans, faculty and staff, students, alumni, and his Business Board of Advisors to propel Tepper to become a singular, constantly innovative business school of the future,” says Coblitz, the retired Senior Vice President of Strategic Planning for Comcast Corp. and a BBA member. “I found it actually quite easy to collaborate with him.”

So, too, did SEVIN YELTEKIN, Rohet Tolani Distinguished Professor, Professor of Economics, Senior Associate Dean of Education — a position Dammon also once held.

Having a boss who was once in her current role is helpful, says Yeltekin, because he understands the workload and “he knew exactly where the pain points were,” yet he gave her license to make the job her own.

“He always wants to do the right thing. He thinks about the implications of what he decides clearly. He’s fair, and he’s been very collaborative with us,” she says, referring to herself and ALAN SCHELLER-WOLF, Richard M. Cyert Professor of Operations Management, Senior Associate Dean of Faculty and Research. “Even though ultimately the decision lies with him, there’s a lot of give and take, a lot of discussion. I’ve always felt that not only did he have my back, but I was respected.”

Scheller-Wolf praises Dammon’s straightforward style, even during difficult conversations, such as breaking the news that a promotion won’t happen.

“He doesn’t mince words. He’s very honest with them. He talks to them in a way that is respectful and decent,” Scheller-Wolf says. “You see people’s character most when they have a choice between doing the easy thing and the hard thing, and the hard thing is in keeping with their moral compass. Bob does the hard thing, the right thing.”

A LEGACY OF CONNECTION

For JOHN SENGENBERGER, Executive Director of Alumni Relations, some of his favorite memories will be his travels with Dammon: “From his first days as dean, Bob was committed to increasing alumni engagement with the school and advancing lifelong learning opportunities for alumni,” he says.

Together, the two appeared at alumni events around the globe, including one memorable trip to Hong Kong when a protest broke out in front of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, where the two were staying.

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“We really witnessed it firsthand,” Sengenberger recalls. “You saw students gathering, putting bricks on the road, spray-painting, taking down street signs.” Police showed up in riot gear.

Together with their alumni host, RIMMO JOLLY (MSIA 1995), they marveled at their front-row seat to history.

On other occasions, while visiting India, Sengenberger rode in the front seat with their car’s driver so Dammon could ride in the back and be spared some anxiety from the invariably wild ride.

“Driving there is an experience, because it’s so chaotic that you think you’re going to crash at any given moment,” Sengenberger laughs. “When you travel with colleagues, you get to know another side of them.”

Back in Pittsburgh, the two are usually at the Tepper Quad’s gym first thing in the morning. And Emmanuele notes that Dammon’s is one of the first cars in the garage: “It’s hard to beat him to the office.”

The desire to stay connected with students was why Dammon insisted on teaching even while he was an assistant dean.

“He didn’t want to lose contact with the current students who were at the school. That’s rare to find among deans, and it’s something that I think will be one of Bob’s legacies here,” Sengenberger says, adding that a high percentage of alumni had Dammon as a professor. “That’s given him a high level of visibility among alumni, perhaps more than any dean before him. They know that he cares, that he knows, that he understands. He’ll often say this place not only changed his career; it changed his life. He feels very invested here. GSIA and the Tepper School really became his home base.”

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Spatt predicts that he and Dammon will continue to collaborate academically. He recalls fondly several significant projects with Dammon. One — which included Harold Zhang, now of the University of Texas — used dynamic optimization to provide insights about the trade-off between rebalancing a portfolio and managing capital gains tax liability. Building in part on the optimization framework, they also worked on asset location — determining what to hold in taxable versus tax-deferred accounts, research that caught the attention of well-known academics.

“It was gratifying that several distinguished finance professors used that research to change their own personal investments,” Spatt notes.

In addition to their mutual interest in taxation, Spatt and Dammon shared another love: Pittsburgh Steelers football. They attended games together on occasion, most recently in the fall of 2019.

“He’s low-key,” Spatt says of his friend. “He’s very careful; he’s very thoughtful. He’s a very principled person.”

In the spring of 2020, as the final weeks of his tenure approached, Dammon led the school through the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed campuses nationwide, including Carnegie Mellon.

Within two days, all of the school’s full-time MBA and undergraduate courses were transitioned to remote online teaching. Dammon credits the school’s experience with its existing Part-Time Online Hybrid MBA format for helping smooth the transition for faculty, and believes the COVID-19 event will probably accelerate use of online learning in business schools.

As Tepper moves forward in the post-Dammon era, those who have worked with him believe he has strategically positioned the school to advance in a rapidly evolving climate. Under Dammon’s stewardship, the master’s programs have expanded to include business analytics and product management, both products of the strategic plan. The online hybrid MBA program has earned top billing in several prestigious rankings.

He also established four research initiatives to guide current and future faculty, focusing on sustainability, health care and health technology, blockchain, and the use of technology to create more broadly beneficial economic growth.

Undergraduate enrollment has doubled, and the Swartz Center for Entrepreneurship has moved into the Tepper Quad, where it serves as a hub for campus-wide innovation while staying quite literally under the school’s roof.

“Knowledge creation has always been central to the school,” says Scheller-Wolf. “It’s also been central to Bob’s vision.”

Yeltekin concurs: “I think that’s the environment that Bob has always tried to create: that people work together for the common good, for the higher good.”

For Sengenberger, Dammon’s most impactful legacy won’t necessarily be the Tepper Quad, but rather what the building represents.

“It’s what’s going on in the building that Bob was most concerned about: How can we get a facility that will allow the work of the school to go on and be as fruitful as possible?” he says. “The Tepper Quad is a visible sign of the vision and the passion that Bob had for the school. The building wouldn’t be anything without the vision.” —

Dean Robert Dammon and his wife, Sue Dammon