

## **Memorial Minute for Gary Lehring**

**Written and read by Velma Garcia at the November 17, 2021 Faculty Meeting**

Gary Lehring passed away on March 13, 2021. Gary was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, the middle child of Burnetta and Melvin Lehring. He graduated from Durrett High School and the University of Louisville and received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Before coming to Smith Gary taught at Wellesley College and Clark University. At Smith he was a Professor of Government and he was also a long time member of the Program on the Study of Women and Gender.

Gary's specialty was political and queer theory. Perhaps his best known work was his book *Officially Gay: The Political Construction of Sexuality by the U.S. Military*, published by Temple University Press in 2003. In this beautifully written book, Gary analyzed the military's construction of gay identity as it historically included or excluded LGBTQ people in that institution, depending on particular larger foreign policy concerns. The book explains how at times the military used religious, medical, and psychological discourses to exclude LGBTQ people based on the assumption that they were a risk to national security. These discourses in turn then actually helped to shape the gay and lesbian movement as it sought to counter the military's policies. Gary was also very interested in Costa Rica and in Central American politics. He wrote many articles--in both English and Spanish--that were published in prominent newspapers in Costa Rica. Those essays examined themes such as education, politics, LGBTQ issues, and elections. One of Gary's essays drew the ire of a major Costa Rican presidential candidate who subtly threatened Gary if he did not back down. Of course, Gary did not back down. At the time of his passing Gary had immersed himself in a queer theory analysis of the Shakers and the formation of their communities in the U.S.

Gary was very committed to his teaching. In the Government department he taught the introductory course, Gov 100, as well as theory courses such as the Politics of Gender and Sexuality and Contemporary Political Theory. He also taught a very popular seminar on Foucault. Gary loved to incorporate cutting edge technology in his courses and though like

everyone else he lamented the impact of COVID on our classes, he nevertheless quickly embraced Zoom and other online teaching techniques. For example, he literally spent hours creating introductory videos for his Gov 100 students. In one video, he even included his own cameo appearance: dressed as Socrates, in a toga he made himself, he steps into a scene depicting ancient Greece and explains the importance of the study of Plato and Aristotle for the Government major. Gary also taught off campus: on two occasions he led groups of students to Costa Rica and he also served as faculty director for our now defunct study abroad program in Puebla, Mexico. Gary loved Latin America and he enjoyed introducing Smith students to Latin America's varied history and culture. Over the years, he became fluent in Spanish.

Gary had many interests outside of the academic world. He was an excellent cook and baker and he loved to host parties at his home in Easthampton. Indeed, he was very proud of his house and garden; he and his spouse Rolando Garro designed and built their own koi pond and they were constantly involved in elaborate home projects. But above all Gary was obsessed with tennis. He was a huge fan of Rafa Nadal. He founded and led the "Backhanded Complement" tennis team and he was a member of the board of the New England US Tennis Association and the Tennis Association of Western Massachusetts. Gary and his tennis friends also enjoyed traveling to New York each year to watch the U.S. Open.

Gary also loved to sing; he had a beautiful singing voice and he was always singing. His office was in 10 Prospect and those of us in the building could always count on Gary to start singing loudly at inopportune moments. One time as Howard Gold was in the middle of an important phone conversation, Gary, not knowing that Howard was on the phone, felt the urge to break into "That's Amore." Other days he sang show tunes, pop songs, or themes from TV shows like Gilligan's Island. We will always remember Gary for his wit, his charm, his kindness, and his music. His loss has left a gaping hole in the lives of those who knew and loved him.