

amy zerba

Revised: Nov. 14, 2003

Rogers' Drive to Succeed Begins on a Farm

University of Mexico Regents' Professor Everett Rogers credits the life lessons he learned growing up on a farm in Iowa to his success as a researcher in the field of communication. Hard work, competitiveness, a desire to make a difference, luck and timing are values he learned early in life that have had a "profound influence" on him and his success. In his 46 years of teaching, Rogers has written more than 450 journals articles and book chapters and 30 books on Entertainment-Education, Communication Networks, Combating AIDS, Health Communication, Intercultural Communication, the History of Communication Study, Communication Technology, Agenda Setting, and much more. His most well-known text, *Diffusion of Innovations*, was released in a fifth edition in August. The path that led him to these accomplishments was not exactly easy. He grew up in poverty "with lots of very hard physical work."

"I enjoy doing a task just for the pleasure of doing it (and hopefully doing it well). Feeling inferior, as farm kids did in my county seat high school, can be very motivational. From an early age, I realized the importance of working at a job that I really liked. My father was a wannabe electrical engineer who was stuck in farming. Once I tried university teaching and research, I knew I had found what I wanted to do."

Rogers is proud that he attended a "not famous school," Iowa State, for his graduate studies and has been able to teach at prestigious universities. This competitiveness early in his career pushed him to be an "over-producer."

"I feel that in reality I am very competitive, cloaked in a covering of humility." Managing time for both his academic work and personal life has not been easy.

"Teaching comes first, including advising doctoral dissertations. Research is next. And I try to save plenty of time for family life. Time management is always a struggle, especially when one is very interested in their work."

He earned his master's (1955) and doctorate (1957) from Iowa State in sociology. He then taught as an assistant professor of rural sociology at Ohio State (1957-63), moved to Michigan to be an associate professor and professor at Michigan State (1964-73) and then a professor at the University of Michigan for two years (1973-75). Prior to teaching and conducting research at the University of New Mexico, where he has taught since 1993, he taught at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California (1985-92).

When he first started teaching, there was very little university support for junior faculty conducting research. But he received strong encouragement to get referred journal articles published as a basis for tenure and merit. He developed a simplistic, easy-to-visualize-and-understand writing style while writing his master's thesis at Iowa under the guidance of George Beal. His greatest influence in his studies was Robert K. Merton.

His impact on the field of communication has earned him numerous awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award for the Division of Intercultural and Development Communication of the ICA (2000), Thomas Jefferson Award of the Technology Transfer Society (1995), the AEJMC's Distinguished Service Award (1993), and most recently the University of New Mexico's 47th Annual Research Lecturer, the highest honor bestowed on a faculty member at the university, to name a few. He credits his mother for teaching him the value of altruism in his work.

“My mother stressed that one should leave the world a better place than when one came into it. Thus I tried to study communication problems with social significance.”

His diffusion of innovations theory describes how an idea, practice or object that is considered new by individuals is communicated through certain channels over time among these members of society. Since his first edition of the book in 1962, his name has become synonymous with the study of diffusion of innovations and the book is used as a textbook in diffusion studies. And the topic doesn't get old for him.

“My focus on diffusion does not get dull, as newer innovations are constantly appearing.”

Rogers says his research projects grow out of previous research. His 1986 book, *Communication Technology*, was a marker for his interest in the pre-Internet, which has grown since. Also, people are always approaching him with interesting research topics. However, he lives by the school of thought that researchers should strive to focus on one specific area of interest.

“I feel that it was astute for me to consistently stick with the same scholarly interest (diffusion of innovations). Many benefits, such as reputation, accumulate.” Rogers is currently writing about his childhood of growing up on an Iowa farm and how this experience shaped his life.