Louis J. Hammann, M.Div., M.A., and Ph.D., passed away on Feb. 17 after a brief stay in hospice care. Lou was a dynamic presence in the classroom and across campus. He helped transform the College’s Religious Studies Department from a Lutheran-based theology department into a religious studies program with a long intellectual reach. Lou’s “Religion: From the Center to the Fringe,” perhaps his most famous course, taught generations of Gettysburgians what true open-mindedness looked like and how to find wisdom in unlikely places. Lou believed deeply in the liberal arts, interdisciplinarity, real political action, and the sustaining value of teaching and learning.

Lou was a Gettysburg College citizen in full. His remarkable story began in Baltimore, Maryland, where in 1929 Lou was born into a working-class family. Fish-mongering was his father’s trade, and it was to be his son’s life path, too, until a friend told him about Gettysburg College. Lou attended Baltimore City College, a college preparatory school with a liberal arts focus. After becoming the first in his family to graduate high school, Lou set his sights on becoming the first in his family to graduate from college. At Gettysburg, Lou studied Latin as a classics major, with minors in philosophy and psychology, graduating in 1951. He was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa before he left for Yale Divinity School, where he earned the Master of Divinity Degree. Lou became a clergyman in the United Church of Christ, but traditional religion did not fit his rebel mold.

In 1956, Lou returned to Gettysburg and began teaching full-time, while completing both an M.A. at Pennsylvania State University and Ph.D. at Temple University. Lou’s scholarly output was impressive, including numerous conference papers, articles, and books. But the classroom was his place. Lou taught more than twenty different courses during his career and took pride in never teaching the same class the same way twice.

His influence on his students wasn’t limited to the classroom. He was a mentor, life-long friend, and “father confessor” to many. His family lost count of the marriages performed for students, sometimes in the family living room or on the hill behind the house. Many a night with students was spent in the kitchen around a table covered with steamed crabs brought back from his father’s sea-food company. Marriages, funerals, graduations, a trip to New Haven to check out Yale graduate school are among the many ways Lou was involved with his students in all aspects of their lives. And quite a few of them because part of his family.

Lou’s involvement at the College wasn’t limited to teaching in the classroom. Early in his time at the College he coached the varsity and junior varsity men’s soccer team as well as the Women’s Soccer Club. He was a prime mover in establishing a new Department of Management, an Area Studies Program, including Latin American Studies and Global Studies, and Interdepartmental Studies.

Outside the College, Lou was very involved in the community. From the High School PTA to Youth Soccer, the Gettysburg Hospital Board of Directors and Hoffman Homes for Children, Lou served his beloved Gettysburg community in many important rolls. In his retirement he and his wife Patricia championed American democracy. Their multiple arrests for protesting for campaign finance reform were honors he embraced. Lou’s honest political commitment brought speakers like Doris “Granny D” Haddock and editor and writer Lewis H. Lapham to campus.
Louis J. Hammann ’51

Lou is survived by his wife of 69 years, Patricia Rogers Hammann, four surviving children and one that pre-deceased him, three sons-in-law, two “adopted in-laws” and 8 grandchildren.

Soccer coach, scholar, mentor, teacher, father, and husband, Lou Hamman left his mark on the world and Gettysburg College in so many positive ways that it is impossible to collect them all. The family would love to hear from you with your memories of this extraordinary man. They have set up a site on CaringBridge for you to share memories with each other and Lou’s family. Go to www.caringbridge.org and type “Professor Louis Hammann.” Tentative plans are being made for a memorial service on June 5, 2022, as part of Reunion Weekend. For now, though, please keep our beloved colleague Lou Hammann and his family in your thoughts.

Memorial gifts may be made to an endowed fund in Lou Hammann’s name at Gettysburg College (Development Office, Box 423, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325 or via www.gettysburg.edu/onlinegiving). Memorial gifts may also be made to two other causes that Lou and Pat were passionate about: Democracy for America (www.democracyforamerica.com) and Gettysburg Chamber Orchestra (www.gettysburgchamberorchestra.com).