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Editorial: The Oracle's Last Words

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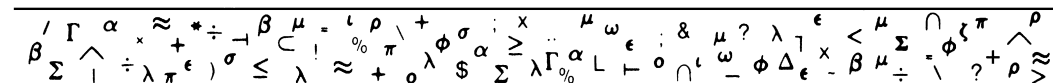
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When one wants wisdom and independent thought coupled with a rich knowledge of the relevant facts, one hopes to find an oracle. For many years, our profession had an oracle in Hugh Miser. During the past decade, Hugh wrote a series of columns for *Interfaces*, "The easy chair," in which he discussed various professional topics, including the history of OR/MS, its precise nature, its craft skills, and the task of editing professional journals. Hugh died on June 22, 1999. His philosophical writings on the nature of operations research and systems analysis are the definitive works on that topic. We will miss him personally, and our profession will be much poorer for his absence. In this issue, we print the last of Hugh's "Easy chair" columns. It deals with whether OR/MS is indeed a profession.

OR/MS Today printed an extensive obit-

uary for Hugh [Rothkopf 1999], but there are a few things worth emphasizing or adding here. Hugh was an operations researcher in World War II. After the war, he completed his doctorate in pure mathematics at Ohio State and taught for three years at Williams College. He spent the next 20 years doing operations research in the military and in private industry, dealing in each with both tactics and strategy. In 1969, he joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and taught there for a decade and then spent the next three years at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria. He retired in 1982, but he never stopped working for OR/MS, thinking about it, and writing about it.

It would be hard to overstate Hugh's service to our profession. He was a founding member of ORSA, its secretary, its vice

president and then in 1962–1963, its 11th president. From 1968 to 1975, a period of great success and expansion for our profession, he was editor of the journal *Operations Research*. In spite of having been ORSA's 11th president, he was awarded its Kimball

His last column is not the last of his influence.

medal for service in 1975, the second year it was awarded. He continued to serve the society in a variety of ways for the rest of his life.

Hugh was a superb editor. As editor of *Operations Research*, he went to extra lengths to improve submitted papers and to see to it that the journal published new ideas of importance. In one instance, he personally refereed a paper that applied operations research in so new an area that Hugh could find no potential referees who had written related papers. The paper went on to win the Lancaster prize. Unknown to Hugh, it had previously been rejected by *Management Science*. With Edward S. Quade, he edited a definitive three-volume *Handbook of Systems Analysis*, published between 1985 and 1995. He recently edited a volume of World War II reminiscences for INFORMS' "Topics in operations research" series. Hugh mentored new editors, including us, and wrote a classic "Easy chair" column, "Journal editing as I see it" [Miser 1998], that was immediately reprinted as a lead article in a publication that circulates to the 1,200 members of the Council of Biology Editors.

One of Hugh's passions was the history of OR/MS. He believed that our history is worth preserving and has important les-

sons for us. In the 1980s with Ernest Koenigsberg, he devised an approach to preserving the papers of the early founders of operations research in the University of California library system only to have it rejected by the ORSA and TIMS councils as unaffordable. The papers of many OR/MS founders have since been lost. Fortunately, and only because Hugh worked briefly for MIT, the MIT library has agreed to preserve Hugh's extensive and thoughtful correspondence. (It also has Phil Morse's papers.) In addition, Hugh's passion through its impact on us is largely responsible for the newly founded history section of *Interfaces* [Harrison and Rothkopf 2001]. Thus, his last column is not the last of his influence.

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