

Jack Gorski: Scholar, Mentor, Friend (1931–2006)



Jack Gorski

Jack Gorski epitomized excellence in a scientist. He was what most men wish to be but few can be. By example, he was the gold standard for others to follow, especially those for whom he served as mentor.

Jack was born in Green Bay, WI, but was raised in Milwaukee. As a teenager, he worked on a dairy farm and developed an interest in dairy cattle, an interest he maintained throughout his life. And, as might be expected, his favorite beverage was a tall glass of milk. Because of this interest, he spent two years as an undergraduate at California Polytechnical College, which had a strong program in dairy cattle production. Subsequently, he transferred to the University of Wisconsin–Madison where he earned a B.S. degree in 1953 and met his future wife, Harriet Fischer. At Wisconsin, he was exposed to the subject of Physiology of Reproduction, which he found stimulating.

With this new interest and his continued interest in dairy cattle, he was encouraged to apply to Dr. Ralph Erb at Washington State University who, at the time, was conducting research on the reproduction of dairy cows. Erb was interested in characterizing the changes in ovarian production of progesterone during the estrous cycle of the cow and identifying the types of estrogen produced by the placenta. He arranged for Jack to participate in an NIH-sponsored steroid training program in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Utah headed by Drs. Leo Samuels and Kristen Eiknes. This was Jack's first in-depth exposure to steroid biochemistry and the up-to-date techniques being used to isolate and quantify steroids from tissues. Upon returning to WSU, Jack utilized what he had learned in Utah to conduct his dissertation research on chemical identification of estrogens and progestins in the bovine placenta and ovary. He earned his Ph.D. at WSU in 1958. In his last years at WSU, Jack developed a love for dogs and he acquired a sheltie sheep dog named Maggie that was his constant companion, even in the laboratory. This was appropriate because at that time dogs were an integral part of the campus scene.

From 1958 to 1961, Jack worked as a postdoctoral fellow with Gerry Mueller at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research at the University of Wisconsin. Here, he came to appreciate the potential of using *in vitro* cultures to examine the mechanism of action of estrogens. A widely held hypothesis during the early 1960s was that steroid metabolism at the level of the target cell, induced biological responses. Jack was given the task of identifying the estradiol metabolite in the rat uterus responsible for its action. He was unable to find such a metabolite; therefore, he concluded that estradiol itself was the likely active agent. From 1961 to 1973, Jack was on the faculty of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Illinois-Urbana. During these 12 years, his laboratory made major contributions in characterizing the nature of estrogen receptor α and elucidating the mechanism of action of estrogens. In 1973, Jack returned to the University of Wisconsin with appointments in the Departments of Biochemistry, Dairy Science and Animal Science. He remained at the UW until his retirement. In the later years of his career, Jack's research began to focus on the genomic aspects of estrogen action and its consequent macro biological implications.

Although Jack was able to attract excellent students and postdoctoral trainees to his laboratory, it was the manner in which he mentored these individual that made his laboratory so productive in performing cutting edge research. One hundred graduate students and postdoctoral fellows passed through his laboratory during his career. In his many national and international research presentations, he always credited the students and postdocs whose data he presented. Jack's

mentoring style was to develop his trainees to be independent investigators who could think critically and use logic in solving problems. He did not micromanage their work and assumed a hands-off approach for research performed by others in his laboratory. He offered critical evaluation of data, however, and sound advice when needed. Jack deeply cared about each of his trainees, not only during their sojourn in his laboratory but also after they left. They were his extended family. The annual Christmas card from Jack contained newsworthy tidbits of information about the research in the laboratory and up-to-date news of present and former trainees.

Jack served on numerous editorial boards and review and/or advisory panels throughout his career. He served as president of the Endocrine Society, a year in office he did not particularly cherish but one he filled with distinction. Jack was the recipient of numerous awards and accolades which he modestly and humbly acknowledged. He greatly appreciated being elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1993. Whether this recognition or owning the Grand Champion Jersey Cow at the 2002 Wisconsin State Fair was the pinnacle highlight of his life, we will never know.

Jack impacted the scientific careers and personal lives of many and he is deeply missed by those whose lives he touched.

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