



Dr. Bruce Bechtol  
Class of 2019

Bruce graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1956 and was a member of the California Scholastic Federation (CSF) for three years. He participated in the Brain Brawl and was a member of the Rod and Gun Club. In his senior year he won the school newspaper "Tiger Tales" Ugly Man contest, receiving 2,931 votes and raising \$29.31. When not at school, he worked at Currier Brothers in the grocery department.

Following graduation, Bruce enrolled at Chico State College (CSC), was a member of the Men's Glee Club, wrestled for one year and in four years earned his BA degree in social science. He went on to the University of Oklahoma earning his MA degree in geography, and in 1967, received his PhD from the University of Oregon, also in geography. While in the doctoral program at Oregon, he applied for and accepted a position with USAID in Guatemala. His work there was the basis for his doctoral dissertation titled, *"Where Men Ride Tigers: The Industrial Landscape of Guatemala."*

Upon graduation from CSC, Bruce enlisted in the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and attained the rank of Captain, serving as an infantry heavy weapons and staff officer with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. He was a member of the "planning team for the invasion of Cuba" that never happened.

In 1968, Bruce was named Assistant Professor of the Geography Department at CSC, and the following year earned his full professorship in the department and remained in that position until his retirement in 2000. His 32-year career at Chico State (now CSUC) was a storied one. He helped start the Latin American Studies program in 1971 and taught numerous courses. He served as the Coordinator of that program in the 1970's and again in the early 1980's.

Dr. Bechtol also served as Chair of the Department of Geography where he taught a multitude of Department courses. In addition to his teaching in the geography department, he taught interdisciplinary courses with the College of Business, Natural Sciences, and Behavioral Sciences. In the early 1990's, Bruce was a founding member of the Environmental Sciences Group on campus.

He served on and chaired numerous MA theses committees, inside and outside of the geography department. He received both the CSUC wide and national award as Outstanding Student Advisor of the Year in 2000. In addition, he served on numerous national committees and was involved in both the California Geographical Society and the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers.

Bruce co-hosted the weekly NPR radio program on KCHO, GEOSPOT: Geography in the News, for 15 years with his longtime pal and faculty member Dr. Jerry Williams, and was actively involved in National Geographic's Geography Education Program for classroom teachers. He and Dr. Williams were part of the original founders in 1982 of the California Geographic Alliance that was hosted by the Department from 1988-2000.

In addition to his being named Outstanding Student Advisor in 2000, Bruce was also inducted into the Palermo School Hall of Fame, had several widely held publications including Tuning in the Geographic Education Network, The World at 5 Billion, and Solid Waste in a Throw Away World.

A quote from former student Warren Nelson in his letter of support for Bruce, *"Probably the most important fact anyone should know about Dr. Bruce Bechtol was that he proudly served as a captain in the USMC. As a student, learning this helped me best understand his approach to education and life. Bruce was a tough educator and while always supporting his students understanding, he expected us to take initiative and be responsible."* *"Did I mention that he was inspirational?"*

Bruce was well known for his ability to play the piano and while at OHS classmates loved that he played “Sabre Dance” and “Flight of the Bumble Bee” by heart.

Dr. Bechtol passed away on March 18, 2016 in Chico at the age of 77 and is remembered for the wonderful work and enthusiasm he brought to students and fellow faculty. He is survived by his five children.