

## Remembering Mac Destler -- One of SPP's "founding fathers"

By Jonas Siegel

From the moment I.M. "Mac" Destler joined the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy in 1987, he began to build out the capacity and broaden the impact of the fledgling graduate school--in both scholarly and policy terms. He also prioritized educating SPP master's and doctoral students so that they could help establish the "Maryland Way" of public policy. When Mac died on March 27, 2025, SPP lost one of its "founding fathers," but Mac's many contributions to the school will live on long into the future.

Mac's interest in public policy spanned the domestic and international, demonstrating how each affects the other. Indeed, it is because of Mac's expansive policy interests that the school so often meshes these two often-distinct policy arenas today. When he started at SPP, Mac was already among a number of scholars focused on how domestic politics and bureaucracy shape U.S. foreign policy. He soon extended his inquiries into the realm of international economic policy, penning the award-winning *American Trade Politics*, which tells the story of globalization's social, political, and economic impact.

An extended research project with Ivo Daalder on the evolution of the National Security Council and the expanding importance of the "advisor to the president on national security affairs" resulted in the publication of *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*. Both of these books have been staples of SPP's curriculum ever since publication. They also helped to define the focus of SPP's international security and economic policy (ISEP) specialization, blending the study of traditional international policy topics—e.g. great-power conflict, civil conflict, and diplomacy—with the economic challenges that dominated post-Cold-War international relations.

Mac's early activities at the school, including leading the Ford Foundation Fellows program, led Dean Nacht to appoint him as the second director of the school's Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM). Though he was reluctant to take the position, Mac grew CISSM significantly over his tenure, adding scholars and programs that became mainstays of CISSM for decades. For example, much of SPP's public opinion research derives from Mac's establishing the Program on International Policy Attitudes within CISSM. As CISSM director, Mac also regularly involved SPP students in the center's research and oversaw dozens of doctoral students' dissertations.

Despite Mac's numerous enduring contributions to SPP, the International Security and Economic Policy specialization, and CISSM, perhaps his largest impact can be seen in the hundreds of masters and doctoral students who benefitted from his generous, yet demanding, approach to public policy education and went on to impact contemporary

policy and scholarly debates. I was privileged to co-teach with Mac on multiple occasions during his last decade at the school, and, though the generational divide between him and the graduate students was more pronounced every year, his deep and personal knowledge of and experience with U.S. international policy making during the most consequential decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century kept students rapt. He brought his thorough and intense approach to scholarship to the classroom and encouraged countless students' to pursue their own research interests.

Despite the many illustrious scholars of international public policy that have passed through SPP, the school's focus on international policy making would not be what it is today without Mac's many contributions. Mac's impact on international policy research at SPP and CISSM also cannot be overstated.

All of the SPP community owe you a debt of gratitude, Mac.