Professor Profiles

Up Close and Personal With UB's Dr. Stuart Shapiro

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Throughout his years in school, Dr. Stuart Shapiro, professor of computer science and engineering, excelled in his classes, especially science and mathematics. His fascination with the complexities of computers and his questioning nature led him on the career path he is now following at UB.

"I guess I always had a scientific approach," said Shapiro. "I preferred seeing things for myself rather than taking other people's word for it."

Shapiro was born in New York City on Dec. 30, 1944. He first discovered his love of computers when he took his first computer course as a junior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"As I look back, I think that I was in a sense looking for computers without knowing about it because everything else I tried playing with was too simple," he said. "They'd just do a few simple behaviors and that was it, whereas, computers are marvelous, they'll do anything you can figure out how to get them to do."

According to Shapiro, there was no formal computer science major while he was in college, so he earned his bachelor's degree in mathematics, although he took several computer science courses.

Shapiro also took classes in psychology, philosophy and was "interested in the interplay of computing, psychology and philosophy which is now known as Artificial Intelligence and Cogni-tive Science," he said.

After completing his undergraduate work, Shapiro earned his doctorate in computer science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and worked as a professor at Indiana University until 1977, when he and his wife moved to Buffalo.

Shapiro credits the move to his wife, who has a doctorate in microbiology.

"She couldn't find a job in Bloomingdale, so she said, 'Let's move to someplace where there's medical research going on, like Buffalo.' We had friends who were here," he said.

Currently, Shapiro teaches graduate level computer science classes, as well as CSE 116, an undergraduate computer science course. His primary field, however, is "knowledge representation and reasoning," a kind of artificial intelligence.

"(This involves) how to get a computer to understand English and make use of that understanding for further reasoning or for acting. I'm developing a logic that I think is more appropriate for that purpose," said Shapiro. "I'm also working on what is called cognitive robotics which is attaching a mind to a robot."

Shapiro said he expects his research in this field to continue for the duration of his career, of which he has no plans of ending any time soon, despite his approaching 26-year anniversary as a teacher.

"I have no concrete plans to do anything different than what I am now," he said.

Aside from his teaching and research, Shapiro serves as an advisor to graduate students within the CSE department.

According to Frances Johnson, a graduate student in the CSE department and one of the students Shapiro advises, the professor dislikes mixing his business at UB with his personal life.

"Once he was meeting for an outside consultation, and he wouldn't even meet at his UB office. He went to Starbuck's across the street," said Johnson, who has known Shapiro for about six years.

This separation, however, does not interfere with Shapiro's dedication to his work.

"He gave a one hour presentation three weeks after quadruple bypass surgery about the work he'd been doing since the operation," said Johnson. "Every professor has their area that they're good at, and Stu's area seems to be a lot larger."

When he is outside of a professional environment, Shapiro enjoys going out to nice restaurants and the theater with his wife, and playing racquetball in Alumni Arena.

"He's also very competitive. He plays a mean game of racquetball and a mean game of croquet," said Johnson.

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