Lou D'Abramo, Ph.D. ’71, Hon. ’96, demonstrates an unwa-vering passion for discovery and knowledge, which has fueled an exemplary life of research, teaching and service.

The dean of the Graduate School and associate vice president for academic affairs at Mississippi State University (MSU), D’Abramo has received a litany of awards throughout his career, including being named a W. L. Giles Distinguished Professor in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. An MSU faculty member since 1984, his involvement in faculty governance sparked his interest in higher education administration and in 2008 he was named dean.

“I felt that this position would be the perfect next step in my academic career,” said D’Abramo. “I am passionate about graduate education because I believe it is the foundation of scholarship for any university/college,” he said. “I enjoy advocating for the various disciplines, including the humanities, engineering, business and education. We are developing the future leaders of the world.”

His enthusiasm for education flourished at Assumption. “The core courses that were part of my liberal arts education had such a positive influence on my intellectual development,” said D’Abramo. “They laid a strong foundation for graduate study. Many colleges and universities offer highly specialized curricula with core courses that are more of a ritual walk-through rather than a stimulating foundation for future study. Assumption develops a multi-dimensional person.”

D’Abramo majored in natural science and mathematics, and had intended to enter the medical field. His interest in ecology and the marine environment blossomed after experiencing Assumption’s first Earth Day celebration in 1970. He learned more about ecology and geology through a class field trip – and he changed his career plans to ecology and environmental stewardship.

After earning a Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology from Yale University, he was a post graduate researcher at the University of California-Davis. He authored a doctoral dissertation on the presence of food and the role of dietary nutrients on the population dynamics of small shrimp-like organisms. That’s when he entered the discipline of aquaculture – the farming of aquatic plants and animals. His primary research interests are the aquaculture of freshwater and marine organisms and the development of sustainable commercial production practices based upon the wise use of natural resources and environmental stewardship. He is highly active in professional associations and received the 2010 Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award from the United States Aquaculture Society.

D’Abramo’s ardor for research has taken him around the world. His research has improved U.S. commercial farming practices for channel catfish and hybrid striped bass, and has been essential to the development of the U.S. freshwater prawn aquaculture industry. He also has edited or co-edited three books, served as editor of professional journals, written numerous articles and book chapters and provided insights as a guest speaker at various conferences and review panels for aquaculture research.

D’Abramo supervises a staff of 22 at MSU, which boasts a graduate enrollment of 4,000 and 28 percent distance education students. “We have entered a new phase in graduate education, and young faculty are much more versed in delivering distance education courses to a generation of students who have grown up with ever-changing and improving technology,” he explained. “While there are many wonderful developments, unfortunately I also see a lack of training in writing, ethics and critical thinking, which are essential for success in graduate school.”

He is dedicated to high standards of scholarship in the graduate programs. “I view my role as helping students and faculty broaden and enhance their research accomplishments and academic careers,” D’Abramo stated.

While there are many professional and academic achievements to his name, D’Abramo views his two adult children, Jason and Erin, as his greatest legacy. D’Abramo sets the bar high – for himself and those around him. ♦

Lou remains very active with the College, including helping plan his 40th Reunion. He received an honorary doctorate of science degree from Assumption and the Fr. Louis Dion, A.A. ’35 Outstanding Achievement Award, and was inducted into the College’s Alumni-Athletics Hall of Fame.
Lou D’Abramo, Ph.D. ’71, Hon. ’96
Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS

2010 Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award from the U.S. Aquaculture Society

PHOTO: MEGAN BEAN