

Introducing Professor Everett M. Rogers, 47th Annual Research Lecturer, University of New Mexico

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I am honored to introduce to you Dr. Everett M. Rogers. When I first met Professor Rogers in Los Angeles 17 years ago, he was the Distinguished Walter H. Annenberg Professor of Communication at the University of Southern California. I was a first-year Ph.D. student. We are here to celebrate Dr. Rogers' "intellectual journey": The journey of a scholar, teacher, writer, and mentor. I hope you will allow me to tell you about Ev from my privileged vantage point as an advisee, collaborator, and co-traveler.

Ev's journey began on the family Pinehurst Farm in Carroll, Iowa, where he was born. The great depression had just begun. Life was tough everywhere, especially on an Iowa farm. The farm did not have internal plumbing, heating, or electricity. Ev went to a one-room school. He came home to milk the cows, feed the chickens, and do the chores.

That daily hard work ethic, learned on an Iowa farm, defines Ev's intellectual journey. Ev has written 32 books and some 400 refereed journal articles. That's a hard work ethic, and more. Ev's books and articles have shaped and influenced the field of communication, sociology, marketing, and political science.

Hard to believe today, but Ev almost never went to college. He wanted to stay at home and farm. But a high school teacher packed a bunch of promising high school seniors in his car and drove them to Ames, Iowa. It was Ev's first visit to Ames. Fortunately, for us, he liked Ames, and pursued a degree in agriculture.

Iowa State in those years had great intellectual tradition in agriculture and in rural sociology. Numerous agricultural innovations were generated by scientists at Iowa State. Rural sociologists were conducting pioneering studies on the diffusion of these innovations — like the high-yielding hybrid seed corn, chemical fertilizers, and weed sprays. Questions were being asked about why some farmers adopt these innovations, and some don't. These questions intrigued Ev.

Back at his farm, Ev saw that his father loved electro-mechanical farm innovations; but was resistant to biological-chemical innovations. His father resisted adopting the new hybrid seed corn, even though it yielded 25 percent more crop and was resistant to drought. However, during the Iowa drought of 1936, while the hybrid seed corn stood tall on the neighbor's farm; the crop

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on the Rogers farm wilted. Ev's father was finally convinced. It took him eight years to make up his mind.

These questions about innovation diffusion, including the strong resistances and how they could be overcome, formed the core of Ev's graduate work at Iowa State. Ev's doctoral dissertation dealt with the diffusion of the 2-4-D weed spray in two Iowa farm communities (The weed spray has since has been discontinued). Ev's dissertation had an elegant multiple regression, but his committee didn't think much of it. They were, however, intrigued by his review of literature chapter.

In this chapter, Ev reviewed the existing studies of the diffusion of all kinds of innovations — agricultural innovations, educational innovations, medical innovations, and marketing innovations. He found several similarities in these studies. For instance, innovations tend to diffuse following an S-Curve of adoption

Ev published this review of literature chapter, greatly expanded, enhanced, and refined, as his *Diffusion of Innovations* book. The year was 1962. The book provided a comprehensive theory of how innovations diffused, or spread, in a social system. The book's appeal was global. It's timing was uncanny. National governments in countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were wrestling with how to diffuse agricultural and family planning innovations in their newly independent countries. Here was a theory that was useful.

When the first edition of *Diffusion of Innovations* was published, Ev was an Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology at Ohio State University. He was 30 years old. But he had also become a world-renowned academic figure. The *Diffusion of Innovations* book, now in its fourth edition, is today the second most cited book in the social sciences. Perhaps someday soon it will be in first place.

Ev has traveled a long way from Iowa to Albuquerque. He has a long vita which humbly notes certain milestones in his career. A chaired professor at Stanford University, Regents' Professor at UNM, and more. One thing you will not find on Ev's academic vita is his illustrious career in the U.S. Air Force between his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Ev, at that time, often flew in and out of Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. He made up his mind then, as a 20-year-old, that someday he'd build an adobe house and retire in Albuquerque. In essence, Ev had charted his destination to Albuquerque many decades ago. He just took a circuitous route (about 50 years) to finally land here.

Let me say something about Ev, the teacher. People who know Ev marvel at the ease with which he brings his research experiences into the classroom. At USC, I remember Ev taught a 200-person freshman class. For 16 weeks, Ev moved around an auditorium, microphone in hand. He reminded me of Phil Donohue. The 200 eager-beaver freshman journeyed with Ev to all parts of the world. He discussed his work in Nigeria, Colombia, Korea, Pakistan, and Egypt. He also told them about his work in Indonesia, and how he narrowly escaped a simmering volcano. Ev has a special fondness for teaching large freshman and undergraduate classes. He taught them at Stanford, at USC, and I know he teaches them here at UNM.

This week, Ev and I are putting the finishing touches on our fourth book. The book is titled

Controlling AIDS in the Developing World. While conducting research for this book, I witnessed his enormous global influence. We visited five countries: South Africa, Kenya, Thailand, India, and Brazil. Everywhere, we ran into former students of Ev Rogers. In Nairobi, Kenya, Ev and I visited Dr. Mary Ann Burris, the Ford Foundation Representative for East and Southern Africa. When I tried to introduce Professor Rogers to her formally, she said: "I was Ev's student in a freshman class at Stanford 27 years ago." Our research meeting was quite productive.

Now to Ev Rogers the mentor. At a recent event held in Phoenix in order to honor Ev, which brought many of his former students under one roof, someone asked Ev the formula for mentoring. Ev replied: "I like to plant little acorns and then watch them grow into trees." You can tell that Ev is at heart still a farm boy — thinking of plants and trees. Several of Ev's mentees are here in the auditorium today. Some like Professor William Brown, Dean of Communication at Regent University, have flown in to toast their mentor.

In closing, a year or two ago, Ev and his wife, Corinne, returned to Carroll, Iowa, to Pinehurst Farm, where Ev's journey began. Ev took Corinne to show her the one-room school which he attended some 65 years ago. They even posed and took a picture. The one-room school with perhaps its most illustrious alumni! To me, this picture, symbolizes the intellectual journey of Ev Rogers, a journey that we are here to celebrate this evening. Congratulations, Ev.