Happy Retirement
Professor Gassler!
Dear Professor Gassler,

Thank you for two decades of commitment and dedication to the Vesalius College community!

All the best for your retirement!
It’s impossible to say in a few words what I will miss when Scott won’t be around.

Since I arrived at VeCo less than a year ago, I moved my steps under the careful, blue, protection of Scott’s eye.

He was there with a word in Italian (“bene”, to say “fine!”) when I was concerned. He was there with a laugh and a word in Italian (“buongiorno!”) when I was happy. He was always there with a solution, with some help, and above all with a smile. He used to say that he knows 21-22 words in my mother tongue. Yet, I have met very few people able to speak the universal language of deep, smart, bright openness as Scott does. I will truly and deeply miss Scott. And I am confident that I will not lose him.

Caterina Carta – Faculty
I will never forget how Dr. Gassler used to show the meaning of the word sloppy (with regards to sloppy assignments). He would take out one corner of his well-tucked shirt and would walk around the classroom. This was such a great visual example that even today, if I am about to do a sloppy job, I would relate to this visualization. Another amazing thing about Dr. Gassler is the fact that he allows us to think big of ourselves and beyond the limitations of a textbook.

Yoana Moncheva - Class of 2006

Professor Gassler is my thesis supervisor. When I was told by the head of the Master program to meet Professor Gassler for a discussion on the plans for my thesis, I had no confidence. I did not know how I would explain my topic to him. I was confused and blind on the topic, though I liked it.

After setting an appointment with him, for the first time in his office, Prof. Gassler made me talk. He is a simple genius, straight forward and interesting supervisor. He opened my eyes on the topic, gave me courage and confidence while discussing my thesis. He broadened my knowledge from an economics point of view. I am proud and lucky to have had such a good supervisor as Professor Gassler for my thesis.

Thanks Professor Gassler!

Manorgi. A. Masham – MA Class of 2013
Professor Gassler was my economics teacher in several courses. I can say he was my favourite economics teacher. His appearance was a refreshing sight, always wearing a backpack and a dark suit. An unusual combination for some perhaps, but in my memory, this was a uniform for Professor Gassler.

His courses have remained an example of enthusiasm and moments of exchange to me (even though I graduated in 2006), mainly because he always had a story to tell. When he came into the classroom, he would sit down on the table and talk about the Iraqi, American or another country’s economy. I think most students were a bit confused...they thought he was just talking. In fact, he was teaching us through real life examples what influences things like war had on an economy. He always had interesting ideas and views. I believe he was the one stating that nothing has ever proven from an economic point of view that capitalism was more effective than, for example, communism.

Professor Gassler was a great teacher and I thank him for his courses and enthusiasm. I wish him all the best.

Chantal Carpay – Class of 2006

As a colleague, Scott has the great ability to make everyone laugh. I will miss his presence in the faculty area, always ready for a chat or interesting insights and the latest news. I have enjoyed all of the lunchtimes we spent together either at my desk or in the VUB restaurant, talking the time away. I had the pleasure of celebrating Thanksgiving with Scott and Vicky on several occasions and it was always great fun. He also taught me quite a lot about life in the US and provided me with some truly amazing cultural insights.

I don’t want to say goodbye to Scott, I’ll just say au revoir instead.

Kathleen Caenen – Faculty
I remember the time Dr Gassler was dressed up for what the VSG at the time in 2005 started: Vesalius Day. We went around getting people dressed up “as Andreas himself”. We used the photos for the following edition of the Vernacular.

I also remember another VSG initiative: the Food Competition. As VeCo has traditionally had a small population but an incredibly high nationality count, we asked students to bring a taste of home to the Student Lounge and asked staff members and students to sample and vote for the best.

Danny Chen – Class of 2007
Dr. Gassler always amazed me by being able to teach using anecdotes. He would start an idea or series of ideas, spin off on a tangent, and around the time I would start to think, ‘how did he start talking about this?’ he would go back to the original point and tie everything together. He was a wonderful storyteller and always expressed an interest in students’ activities.

Dr. Gassler, I wish you the best in your next phase—enjoy your travels!

Marina Lynch – Class of 2012

Scott Gassler has always been known for his forthrightness, his blunt adherence to the truth as he saw it. He suffered no hypocrisy, no attempts at self-importance, no covering up of unpleasant facts. He disliked the bureaucratic side of academia and had little patience with committees and organizational activities. But he was always strongly committed to his students and made their advancement his main goal.

Barbara Schubeler Jillson, Ph.D. - Retired Associate Dean and Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Dr Gassler,

I remember quite well my first economics class with you, during which you drew the variables in French on the board and you never knew where the words ended :) – ‘what a language’, you would say. And then of course, every time you had a good joke about George W Bush, it would be on your office door. And during senior year, when I was writing my thesis, you were there for me and even helped me prepare my presentation. Both you and Vicki were a very good audience. And since then, you have kept the name plate in Arabic to remember me by. I won’t forget you!

Houda El Metni – Class of 2002
Dear Scott,

On May 5, I saw on the Belgian news Howard Gutman’s official farewell as US ambassador to Belgium. He talked about the great time he had in a country that, before he arrived here, used to be his first choice out of many other countries (although the latter may just be diplomatic language, let’s give him the benefit of the doubt anyway). A real eye-opener to me was his firm conviction that “Belgium is one of the most politically unified countries on the planet.”: Belgians agree on the welfare state, climate change, banning gun violence …and many other issues on which the US is still seriously divided. Let me be clear, with this tribute to you it is not my intention to make any political statements. The fact that Gutman is a democrat does not matter. What does matter is that he’s been an expat in Belgium, a US expat, and so have you, Scott.

And this is exactly what we Belgians should cherish: expats’ views on the Belgian way of life, Belgian politics, and Belgian culture. During your career at Vesalius College, you shed a new light on my country in a more positive way. You discovered the diversity among the Flemish who helped expats find their way through Brussels by referring to “Chaussée de Wavre” instead of “Waverstesteenweg”. In a way, it felt like reminding the Flemish of their inconsistencies and putting both feet firmly back on the ground. Thank you, Scott, for doing so. And this is just one example of how you showed us the bright side of being a Belgian/Flemish person; mentioning all other examples would lead us too far. In any case, your insights made me look at my country and consider my roots in a way I never looked at or considered before.

Besides, I will never forget the innumerable captivating and interesting chats we had on economics, politics and other secular issues; now and then against the mainstream but always respecting different views; and with that touch of humor putting things into perspective. You preferred to have no part in narrow-mindedness. That says a lot about your academic integrity.

You have also shown how enriching and indispensable it is in a working environment to work with colleagues from different generations. They can learn so much from one another.

For about twenty years –the first ten years as Vesalius/VUB colleagues; the next ten as real Vesalius colleagues– I’ve had the luck to get to know a man with an open mind; always respectful to others; and proud of his loved ones: your wife Vicky, your mother, your son, your daughter, your grandson,… (I certainly forgot many others, sorry); they were all featured in your stories, and marked your enthusiasm and curiosity. That says a lot about you all.

And some say there is no such thing as a coincidence. One would indeed say so, given the resemblance with the bust of Andreas Vesalius, all the more because Clara, my 8-year old daughter, indicating the logo on the catalogue, made the same observation when she met you.

Thank you, Scott, for those great moments, thank you, colleague, thank you, mentor, thank you, friend. Enjoy your new life together with your loved ones. I look forward to your stories.

Ilse Scheerlinck – Faculty
Scott’s humour, wisdom, and refreshing Out West outlook have always been a delight in European Brussels. He’s offered challenging courses and honed the thinking skills of students; on a personal level, he’s provided seriously sage advice when I confronted difficult classroom situations. He’s a terrific sounding board, where one can bounce ideas and strategies—and inevitably he comes up with wonderful solutions.

And there’s some sort of cosmic symmetry that a tall dude from Texas can so perfectly incarnate our “éminence grise,” Andreas Vesalius—not only physically—but as the “spirit of free inquiry and active teaching.”

Carlene Adamson – Faculty

As I get older, more and more people ask me which teachers or professors made a lasting impression on me. In my primary school career it was Ms. Broecke, in my secondary school career it was Mr. Ward, and in my university career it was Dr. Gassler. I took the course International Political Economy taught by Professor Gassler. I really got to know him as my advisor in my senior year. I used to love going to his office hours, he was aware that I was politically active. There were times he used to challenge my politics; in a sense, he gave me debate training. Dr. Gassler is also one of the nicest people that I have ever met; I could also talk to him about non-academic or political matters.

When I was re-elected to the City Council of Antwerp, and elected to the Provincial Council of Antwerp for the first time in 2012, I immediately had to think of you Dr. Gassler!

Enjoy your retirement, Professor Gassler – you’ve deserved it!

Patrick Janssen – Class of 2011
Dear Scott,

It does not seem like such a long time ago, mid-August 1990, but we were much younger then, just arrived in Brussels, settling into a newly-rented apartment with boxes to unpack full of clothes, dishes and plenty of books that had to fit somewhere. We spotted you walking along entrance 6 of the VUB, ready to cross the boulevard at the risk of your life (there were no lights yet in those heroic days) to reach the offices at Triomfiaan 35. We had not talked yet, but we knew that the tall man with a beard was like us, a new kid in the Vesalius faculty and we probably did not exchange much on that day or even the days that followed, busy as we were to find our way to F 108 that was not on level 1.

Our next memory is Thanksgiving, when we hosted the Bentley student group at our apartment and you joined us in hosting the dinner. Our apartment was large and you envied it because yours was too small; but it was equipped with modern appliances. We, on the other hand, had poor electrical wiring and a tiny oven in which only a European-sized turkey could fit, not enough to feed a dozen students and our two families. Vicky saved the day by bringing a second turkey.

We also recall that you accompanied us on one of our first Bruges excursions organized for the Vesalius “trip course,” called GNE 311 at that time. Was it that first semester or the next year? Time has made that blurry, but we remember searching for a place that would serve pepperoni pizza, the only thing Gregory would eat. Yes, you had a little one to take care of then; we had two young teenagers.

Over the years, our paths crossed so many times: when exchanging classes on the VUB campus and later in the rainbow building; more often we'd chat in one of the many rooms we held our office hours in, across the hall, upstairs or downstairs. We'd bump into you and ask: “How are you today, Scott?” Invariably you’d answer: “Fair to middl’n.” And then there were all those times when you’d enter the corner café, now the Time Square, once upon a time The Shamrock, and you’d ask: “Can I join you?” Of course, you can join us, Scott, anytime, anywhere!

Mike Palo and Martine Delsemme - Faculty
To Dr Scott Gassler, on the occasion of his retirement.

Howdy, Scott. I believe 'howdy' is a common form of greeting in Texas—and other wild places. I was in Texas only once, many years ago. My visit consisted mainly of driving through the state, from south to north—at a rapid pace (i.e. 55 mph at the time). Although I knew that the state had one of the most affluent universities in the country, at Austin, I found the place to be rather barren, quite frankly. I trust you won’t hold this against me.

So imagine my happy surprise when you and I met. I discovered a colleague who corresponded in no way to the stereotype. Your critical attitude (always with positive intentions) to the powers that be and your keen interest in foreign languages (including Dutch!) were, perhaps, what struck me most. And the fact, of course, that you seem to know the ins and outs of every single US university!

I will always keep fond memories of our repeated conversations, often in the Time Square café (you with a Coca Cola, noblesse oblige, and I with a coffee). We used to speak of many things: comparative grammar of Indo-European languages, religion, American television series, American and Belgian universities, etc. But we also always touched upon the weal and woe of Vesalius College. This is where we really found a common ground.

The rest is silence . . .
Ik wens je het allerbeste toe in je nieuwe leven!

Jan Walravens, PhD - Faculty

Scott, your humour, enthusiasm for new languages you have not tried yet, and love of M&Ms will be sorely missed. Best wishes for a long and happy retirement!

Alea Fairchild - Faculty

I didn’t really have much interaction with Dr. Gassler, but I remember how everyone always looked forward to his classes and acknowledged his prowess in all things Star Trek!

Lorenzo Fornari - Class of 2000
When I look back at my years at VeCo, Dr Gassler is always one of the first faces that pop into my head. My experience at the university would not have been nearly as fulfilling without him.

Sitting through a lesson with him was always an eventful experience because Dr Gassler walks the fine line between mad professor and absolute genius. He might spice up a would-be boring and complex economic notion by explaining it with a metaphor for the latest Hollywood blockbuster. He was the type of professor that when you would pop into his office for a 5 minute conversation, you would come out one hour later with a big smile on your face (regardless of the awful Belgian weather), all sorts of general knowledge and absolutely no recollection of why you went there in the first place.

But don’t get me wrong - it was not all fun and games with Dr Gassler. His grading standards were higher than the highest of mountains (I’m talking Everest here) and many of us are still irked that he made us sit through TWO midterms instead of just one.

However, since I am now older and wiser, I have come to appreciate his methods. Professor Gassler was one of the only teachers that I have ever had that encouraged us to question (even when that meant questioning him) and he encouraged us to debate and develop our own opinions even if they were not of the mainstream.

I will always be grateful that I had the pleasure of being taught by the best all-American mad Professor in the world. I hope that he is blessed with laughter, happiness, passion and peace in this next chapter of his life.

Tracey October – Class of 2011

Working at the World Bank without having been an economics major, I have to say Dr Gassler is responsible for whatever basic economics spiel I gave to the people here who hired me. Thanks.

Guggi Laryea – Class of 1992

Dear Scott - you look too young to retire! Wishing you the very best in your new life. Regards to you, Vicky and your family. Happy Retirement

Love Rhian

Rhian Jones – Former Staff member
Robert Scott Gassler is a man before his time. Not in any obvious way - when he was my teacher, back in the medieval days of the last century, when PowerPoint was all the rage, his visual aids were his coat, his tie and, if my mind is not playing tricks on me, his hat. I recall no course web page, and the FAQA, (or “potentially frequently” as he put it), were put on his office door.

But a full 8 years before anyone but the cognoscenti heard about “Sub prime”, long before the greatest economic crash of our life time, Gassler imbedded us with scepticism about bankers: “You have to watch them every second”, he used to say. After the crash, the more I learned about the causes the more I realized I have already known most it; the economic profession has not remembered – but it used to know, and Dr. Gassler did, and does, know it. We are all Euro-skeptics now, but Gassler (and that other bearded Vesalius professor, Dr. Solar) was sceptical from day one.

Even his geeky tastes are more relevant than ever, with the various Star Trek and Star Wars franchises becoming bigger than ever, and with Superhero and Sci-Fi films taking over the cinemas.

But whether before his time or behind it (word has reached me that in the days since I left VeCo even Gassler succumbed to the power of PowerPoint), Gassler was an excellent teacher and a kind and attentive human being. I learned from him both in and out of class. And I still do – nowadays, on Facebook.

Omer Belsky - Class of 2002

Scott Gassler has kept me laughing for the past ten or twelve years. He is a master of anecdotes with messages – our own resident Abe Lincoln (who happens to look exactly like Andreas Vesalius!).

But his wisest message when I’ve appeared in his office, flustered and clucking like a chicken about some student or other who was in academic danger - and one that he has had to repeat to me several times, (though I think it is finally sinking in this year) is: as professors, we can’t care more about the students’ grades than they do.

Scott has always been a friendly face in the faculty area and a great support in the SCC. He is off to great adventures and I’m sure, with his personality and deep interest in the foibles of human nature, he’ll enjoy every minute. But he has never been able to bring me to any understanding of Economics. (Remember, Scott: if you drink your Coke out of a coffee mug, you won’t have to share it with the children.) xo

Kate Connelly – Faculty
I am sad to hear that Dr. Gassler will be retiring from Vesalius College. During my time as Vesalius, I took several of his classes and I really enjoyed his teaching style. I learned a lot in his courses and always appreciated the way that he managed to keep his lectures lively and fun, often by relating topics to ‘Star Trek’ and several of his favorite TV shows.

Aside from his teaching, I feel that Dr. Gassler had a knack for bonding with his students on a more personal level. I always felt comfortable talking to him about any difficulties I was having and found that his door was always open if I ever needed advice (school-related or not). All throughout my studies, I held a full-time job; Dr. Gassler was always understanding and willing to work with me if I needed extra time but was never so lenient that it would cause me to slack off.

I really admire that he was willing to share who he was as a person with his students and not just simply show up to teach. I really hope that he knows what a great teacher and person he is and how much students appreciated him as a professor.

Wishing him all the best in the future.

Nickie (Nicole) Pacheco - Class of 2009

About my most vivid memories of Dr. Gassler: he is an embodiment of the theories he taught, always asking us to dig deeper than the dry text in a book, to see real-life applications, stay on top of abstract ideas by finding out how things work in practice. I am proud to have been selected by Dr. Gassler to create one example of this in a paper on institutional meddling in digital goods after I graduated from Vesalius and I try to follow this axiom of his every day. Also, I learned the phrase “I trust you, I do not trust the person next to you.” as well as many details about Star Trek in the several classes I took with him. And, my favourite, how to draw graphs so “by God, they will fit together” at the latest on the third try.

Have a wonderful retirement! You’ve earned it!

Martin Mitev - Class of 2005
Before beginning, I would like to remove my socks, and raise my voice, ehm, ehm, and do some general meandering about this or that to get into character.

Prof Gassler was known for his colorful anecdotes during political economy at 8:30am. One of the earliest classes one could take while at VeCo, I remember this tall, gangly, bearded Texan rattling off stories about mad intellectuals being reined in and found to be sockless while spouting ideas about how bats find food; animating economic graphs with a wave and flex of the belt; and moderating early morning debates between study abroad students and “the full timers” with that high voice everyone in the school had an impression of. “You see,” he would start, and then launch into some wacky illustration of the Nash Equilibrium or some theory or practice of macroeconomics. The wackiness at the time was a welcome bit of professorial kookiness, representing that ideal mad scientist that I had grown up to imagine holding forth in college classes. Pure entertainment.

Reflecting back, however, the character Prof Gassler brought to class every morning probably helped me to remember the basic concepts and learnings from the course even to this very day when they've fallen out of daily use. I'm grateful for the spirit he fostered in his courses and the friendships he helped to launch because of the common experience he created for so many Vesalius students. We still share Gassler stories over a Belgian beer 10 years later.

Christopher Chavez – Class of 2005
There are countless anecdotes featuring Scott Gassler. A proud Texan, he was always open to the world and could be genuinely amazed and impressed by the small things in life, such as a “Flemish communist TV magazine”.

One of the things he is very good at is making things clear in a roundabout way, and here is a modest example. It is commonplace among Europeans to laugh at Americans who have never been abroad. One day, he started talking about how well-travelled Belgians are. They have the most wonderful opportunities, they just drive 400 kilometers south and they’ll be in central France, or they can go 600 kilometers west and discover Ireland. “Of course, if I did that as a kid in Waco, I’d still be in Texas.” Or how equal opportunity comes in many forms.

Dear Dr Gassler,

Can’t believe you are retiring already. That said, it has been 19 years since I graduated from VeCo. I’ll never forget how you helped me so much with my Masters’ thesis even though you really didn’t have to. You wanted me to succeed and you believed that I would. Thank you so much. You have been a great teacher to so many of us.

Enjoy retirement! I can’t wait, myself!
Best wishes and look forward to staying in touch,

Aida Bakri – Class of 1994

Chris Janssens – Staff
One morning in the early 1990s, as I was laboring on my dissertation, a tall bearded stranger wearing a Stetson walked by my office and down the hallway. He was carrying a tote bag in one hand and a can of Coke in the other. I looked up, wondered who he was (and why someone would drink Coke at 9am), and got back to work. We weren’t introduced until a couple of days later, when he gave a seminar at the economics department. The talk was about the role of local non-profit organizations in the transition of formerly planned economies to market economies (or something like that), and during the discussion I was as cocky as a young PhD student can be. The stranger’s name was Scott Gassler, and he turned out to be from a place called Waco, Texas. That was before David Koresh and the Branch Davidians would make Waco a household name.

Scott was teaching economics at Vesalius College (I had vaguely heard about them), and turned out to be one of the funniest and smartest people I ever met. A couple of years later, we became colleagues and would work in the same building (Triomflaan 35 and 36, known for its creaky stairs and collapsing ceilings). During a coffee break I loved to drop by Scott’s office and bring up some recent news item (say, the Whitewater controversy). In no time, I would be listening to a lecture brilliantly relating liberal politics, Star Trek, and the economics of Kenneth Boulding (his famous PhD advisor), delivered in a Southern drawl with lots of hand waving. Twenty years later, I still enjoy doing this, and I never walk out of Scott’s office without having learned something new and worthwhile.

I will miss the small talk. I will miss the Big Idea disguised as a joke about Lieutenant Uhura. I will miss Scott.

Luc Hens – Faculty
Oberlinians (Obies—otherwise known as graduates of Oberlin College in Ohio) recognize each other within a few sentences. Sometimes they even remember each other.

Running into Scott Gassler, the radical rabid Texan who was one year ahead of me at Oberlin outside of Raoul van Esbroek’s office was an out of body event for me. We were both members of the student government at Oberlin in the early seventies. We tried to pick up the pieces of 1968 while digesting the Kent State killings and Vietnam at the same time. I remembered him as somewhat contrarian, but further knowledge of economists provided to me by Vesalius colleagues let me know it was not only Scott, but the ‘dismal science’ itself that brought his turn of mind.

We could easily find each other, in part because his economics was alternative and in part because he keeps trying to convince non-sociologists that sociology is actually more difficult than economics. How bizarre that a Cleveland girl who via Oberlin went to Sweden and an Oberlinian Texan who out of the blue after a stint in Maine would decide to move to Europe would meet up in Brussels? Probably both Oberlin and Vesalius have something to do with that. Certainly our ideas about what Vesalius could be were formed by our experiences in our College years. Participatory democracy, All College governance and student voice were important rallying cries.

Scott has never ceased to be amazed and impressed at the talented multi-lingual personages that populate Vesalius, and is unceasing in his flattery and sincere admiration. He makes everyone feel good.

Despite the fact that the trails have not always been happy ones, he and his family have left an indelible legacy to Vesalius that is not only about Oberlin but about integrity and respect.

How lucky we were to have Dr. Gassler as a lecturer and mentor. What a character and what will VeCo be without him?! Knowledgeable, humorous, and creative in his teaching. I honour him and will never forget him, comparing me to the gorgeous Jodie Foster has nothing to do with it :) I wish him well in his free time and I know he will never stop making a difference to make this mad world a better place. Thank you very much for being who you are and please rock on, awesome Dr. Gassler!!!

Isabel Rechberg – Class of 2006

Alison E Woodward – Former colleague