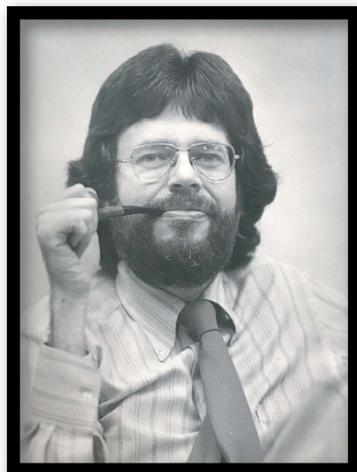
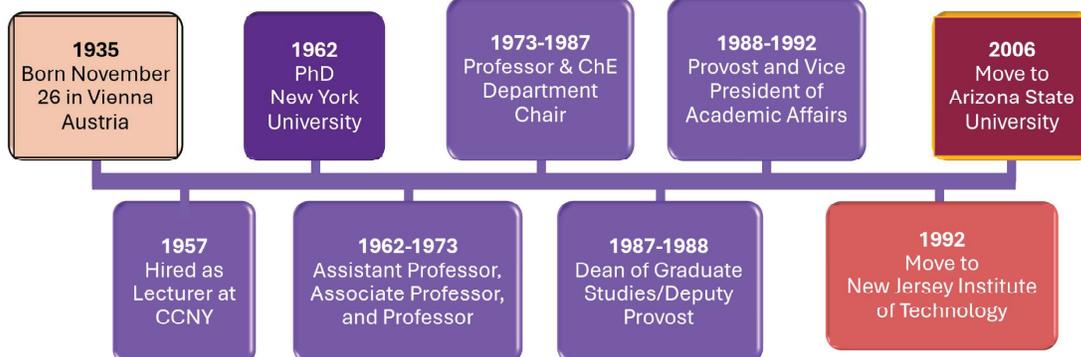


# In Memoriam: Remembering Professor Robert (“Bob”) Pfeffer

*Emeritus Professor Robert (“Bob”) Pfeffer passed away on October 24, 2025. He had a profound impact on the ChE Department through his dedication to hiring excellent faculty and attracting and mentoring outstanding undergraduate and doctoral students. The testimonials below show the breadth of his impact on his colleagues and students at CCNY.*



**Robert Pfeffer (1935-2025)**



**Emeritus Professor Gabriel Tardos** writes, “Bob Pfeffer was my mentor, my boss, my collaborator, and my friend. He excelled in every one of these roles—without exception. Over the course of nearly twenty years, we successfully advised four doctoral students together: Eli Gal (’84), Dominick Mazzone (’86), Junan Kao (’87), and Peter



**Emeritus Professor Gabriel Tardos**

Compo (’89). Working alongside Bob was one of the most rewarding aspects of my professional life. We first met at the Technion in Israel, where I was a graduate student and Bob was on sabbatical in Haifa. During that time, he served as my advisor. My research topic—granular bed separation—aligned closely with his own interests, and our intellectual connection was immediate. Bob later arranged a postdoctoral position for me at CCNY through an NSF grant, where I studied electric effects in porous media. Following that, he played a pivotal role in my appointment as an Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering. The rest, as they say ‘is history’. I will be forever grateful to Bob for his guidance and advocacy during that critical period of my life.

I learned a great deal from Bob over the years, but two of his guiding ‘principles’ stand out as particularly consequential. He expressed them simply: **Principle #1: ‘You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.’** and **Principle #2: ‘Don’t beat (or flag) a dead horse; it is dead.’** At first glance, these sayings may seem to apply only to flies and horses, but in truth they reflect deep and enduring wisdom about how to live and work productively. The first principle emphasizes the power of kindness, patience, and good-natured persuasion in leading others and achieving meaningful results. The second principle speaks to discernment—knowing when effort has been fully expended and when further argument or persuasion is futile. It is, at its core, a principle of efficiency and clarity. Bob embodied these principles effortlessly. He lived them daily as he led the department with distinction for fourteen years and later guided the College for an additional five.

Bob’s influence on my professional life and personal development is immeasurable. I am profoundly grateful to have learned from him, worked with him, and had him as a friend. His legacy lives on through the people he mentored, the students he inspired, and the example he set for all of us.”

**Dr. Dominick Mazzone (ChE ME ’81, PhD ’86)** remembers, “I interacted with Prof. Pfeffer often as he was one of the co-founders of the International Fine Particle Research Institute (IFPRI) in 1979, which supported much of my high temperature fluidization research. After earning my PhD, we kept in touch while I was at Mobil then ExxonMobil and we connected at several IFPRI meetings as I was my company’s IFPRI representative. The picture was taken at Clausthal University at the annual IFPRI meeting in the late 1990’s. Prof. Pfeffer was an excellent administrator and communicator as well as a well-respected researcher. I was always impressed with his eye for technical excellence and talent. The interactions he developed with the Israeli Technion University helped bring many outstanding researchers to teach or become ChE graduate students at CCNY.”



**Dr. Dominick Mazzone (left) and Prof. Pfeffer at IFPRI meeting**

**Dr. Peter Compo (ChE PhD ’89)** recalls, “Professor Pfeffer was both a talented administrator and a scientist, though you often had to pull the science out of him. He wasn’t one to volunteer much; instead, he preferred to let others debate in seminars and never dictated direction to his grad students. He didn’t teach during my time in the department, but I sense he would have been a good professor. Ultimately, I think his greatest legacy was hiring the excellent professors who went on to maintain the department’s high standards.”



**Dr. Peter Compo**

# PhD Alumni Remember Prof. Pfeffer

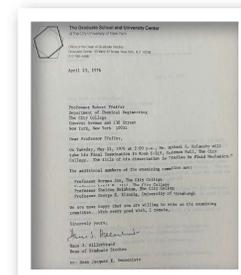
*Dr. Robert Pfeffer touched many of his students' lives. Here are just four excerpts from four of his doctoral students that show the magnitude and depth of his mentorship:*



**Dr. Ronald S. Kane**

**Dr. Ronald ("Ron") S. Kane (ChE PhD '73)** Dean of Graduate Studies Emeritus, New Jersey Institute of Technology, recalls that, "[Prof. Pfeffer's] steady hand in guiding students and focusing on research was a feature of his mentorship and working with [him] impacted me in many ways—it helped create my career, and was an important early influence on whatever success was achieved for me and my family." Ron also writes that "[Prof. Pfeffer] shared his enjoyment of research and encouraged me all the way through the doctoral process. He was never critical and always supportive." Ron had the privilege of continuing a working relationship with Prof. Pfeffer at New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) where both eventually worked as high-level administrators—Prof. Pfeffer as Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies and Ron as Assistant Vice President for Graduate Studies.

**Dr. Michael S. Kolansky (ChE PhD '76)** fondly remembers Prof. Pfeffer as "a great mentor" who, in the early 1970's, took him and others on a trip to a Euromech conference in Stockholm. It was Michael's first time out of the U.S. and while he learned a lot at the conference, he recalls "enjoying the company and touring the area and feeling like he was on a family vacation." Michael credits Prof. Pfeffer's mentorship and his rigorous education at CCNY for helping him land a job at ExxonMobil where he worked with engineers from prestigious universities such as MIT and Cornell. Michael ultimately ended up working for ExxonMobil for a prolific 38 years.



**Dr. Kolansky's PhD Defense Announcement**



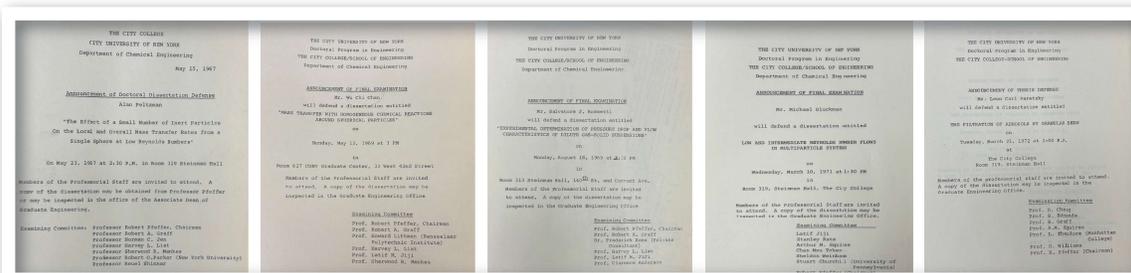
**Dr. Leslie M. Arminski**

**Dr. Leslie M. Arminski (ChE BE '75, ME '77, PhD '80)** writes that, "[Prof. Pfeffer's] decision to have me work for Prof. Shelly Weinbaum (M.E.) made a profound impact on my eventual career path, which has been biomedically oriented. I probably would have had a completely different career had my thesis been on a traditional chemical engineering subject." Leslie also recalls that Prof. Pfeffer prepped him extensively for his presentation at the AIChE conference in San Francisco in 1979.

**Dr. Ghebre ("Gabe") Tzeghai (ChE PhD '84)** writes that, "I met Prof. Pfeffer in mid 1981 when I came to CCNY from Columbia University for a PhD. After I told him that I wanted to do research in the emerging field of biochemical/biomedical engineering, he replied, 'You may also benefit from having other professors as mentors to help you deal with the complexity of the problem to be solved. Advanced Mathematics and Computer Programming, Biology, Chemistry, Engineering – that will take quite a bit of effort and creativity to integrate into a solution to the one problem.' I ultimately ended up doing research on the topic of "Mass Transport with Mixed Boundary Conditions with Special Application to Problems in Atherogenesis" which introduced a mathematical model for the flow of blood components across very small channels (junctions) in arterial walls that are 1 to 10 angstroms in width and to dimensionalize the transports of molecules and access channels in the arterial walls leading to atherosclerosis. I remember when I was frustrated by not having access to a computer off-hours to do my research and how Prof. Pfeffer came to my aid by loaning me a portable computer terminal. After thanking Prof. Pfeffer for this incredible loan, he responded, 'You are most welcome. That is what mentors do; they remove barriers and enable.' I later learned that I was the first student at CCNY/CUNY to have a computer terminal at home! Twenty-five years after my graduation, together with some distinguished scientists and engineers, we were able to fully decipher the root causes at the cellular level and progression of the disease and to develop a platform technology for prevention, early treatment, and significant delay of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, the number-one cause of mortality.



**Dr. Ghebre Tzeghai**



**PhD Defense Announcements: Alan Peltzman (ChE BE '60, PhD '67), Wu-Chi Chen (ChE ME '67, PhD '69), Salvatore J. Rossetti (ChE BE '64 or 66, PhD '69), Michael Gluckman (ChE PhD '71), & Leon C. Parettsky (ChE BE '66, PhD '72)**

The company name "Summit Technology & Products" was named in honor of the "summit" of great ideas and capabilities in dedication to Profs. Pfeffer and Weinbaum for introducing and inspiring many of us to get in and lead in chemical and biomedical engineering."

# Emeritus Professor Robert Pfeffer cont'd

## Emeritus Professor Sheldon (“Shelly”) Weinbaum Pays Tribute

While in some ways he achieved greater recognition both at NJIT and ASU, Dr. Robert Pfeffer’s formative years were at CCNY where he was Chair of the ChE Department for 14 years (1973-1987) and Dean of Graduate Studies/CCNY Provost for 5 years (1987-1992). Bob played a critical role in my coming to CCNY in 1967 and helped prevent me from being fired in 1969. Although I was recruited for Mechanical Engineering (ME) by Latif Jiji in 1967 it was Bob who saw to it that I was not fired in 1969 for calling an illegal meeting of the GSOE faculty when I was a junior faculty member without tenure. I was the only GSOE faculty member who was an outspoken supporter of the Black and Puerto Rican student takeover of the CCNY campus in 1969. I had been working with Bob on fluid mechanics research for two years and we had obtained major NSF grants in low Reynolds number flow fluid mechanics. We were a great team in that we could combine theory and experiment, looking at how our red cells could move through our microcirculation with so little friction. Bob went to [Chair] Alois Schmidt, who invited me to his office and told me that ChE would hire me if ME did not offer me tenure because of my political activities.

1969 was a critical year in that it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GSOE. Bob and I nominated Prof. Yuan-Cheng Fung, considered by many as the “modern father of biomechanics,” to be a guest lecturer for a week-long series of lectures that were televised on CUNY TV. It was the year Bob and I took a series of lectures in Physiology at Columbia Medical School which led to a series of collaborations with Columbia at the graduate level on a joint biomechanics program.

Bob was remarkable as department Chair. In 1985, he recruited Carol Steiner to join the ChE Department, the first female professor to join the GSOE since Prof. Cecile Froehlich had retired from EE in 1965. It is hard to imagine now that in a faculty of 125 there was not a single female faculty member for 20 years! ChE was generally considered the strongest research department in the GSOE. Bob was also instrumental in creating the Levich Institute and recruiting Andy Acrivos from Stanford as the NYS Einstein Chair in 1985 when Levich passed away. At the time, this recruitment was shocking since Acrivos had been actively recruited by MIT and ended up turning them down. What is not well-known is that **Dr. Andrew Grove (ChE BE ’60)**, the father of Intel, had been a PhD student of Acrivos’ when he taught at Berkeley and that Grove himself was a CCNY alumnus.



**Department Chair Professor Robert Pfeffer (1973-1987)**

Bob was regarded as the elite chair of the strongest research department in the GSOE in 1987. He was recruited as the Dean of Graduate Studies and Deputy Provost and the following year became Provost and President for Academic Affairs. He worked closely with President Bernard Harleston, CCNY’s first Black President. Bob was the only upper administration official who was not asked to resign by the Chancellor when there was a complete change in leadership at CCNY after the startling disaster in 1991, when nine CCNY students were crushed to death in the stairwell of the CCNY gym during a weekend basketball game.

Bob moved on to NJIT to serve as Vice President for Research until 2006 when he decided to move to ASU and then returned to research at age 70. The move was motivated in part by Bob and Marcia’s desire to live near their children and grandchildren who lived in Phoenix. The last 20 years of Bob’s life were in some ways his most productive. In 2024, at age 88, he was nominated by Professor Liang Shih Fan of Ohio State University to the NAE. His nomination was supported by myself and Professor Stuart Cooper (Ohio State University) largely for research that was performed in the last 20 years of his life. Bob has 200 research publications and roughly 10,000 citations. Had he been inducted, his citation would have read, “for outstanding fundamental and applied contributions in particle science and technology and impactful academic, professional and administrative leadership.” I am not aware of anyone who has been nominated at the age of 88 to the NAE. Bob died a few weeks short of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. In my letter of support for the NAE, I specifically emphasized that I knew of no one who made many of their most important research contributions after the age of 70.



**Emeritus Professor Sheldon Weinbaum**



**L-to-R: Profs. Ganatos (ME), Weinbaum (ME/BME), and Pfeffer (ChE)**

# Undergraduate Alumni Remember Prof. Pfeffer

*We asked a few of our undergraduate program alumni who were taught by Prof. Pfeffer to share their thoughts and any funny stories from their time at CCNY. Do you have a story? E-mail us at [che@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:che@ccny.cuny.edu)*



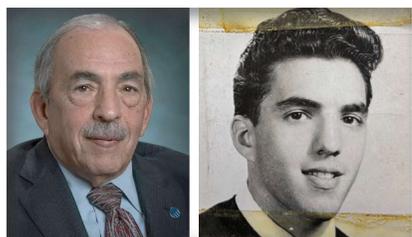
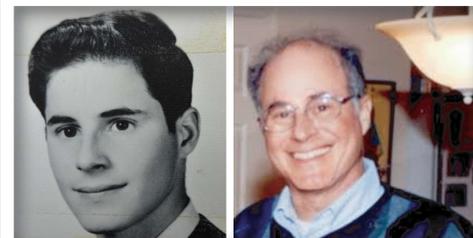
**Jerrold Sameth (ChE BE '71)** writes "I had the privilege to have Dr. Pfeffer for ChE129/130 Thermodynamics [now ChE 229 and 330] in 1970 and still remember Fanno Lines! He was a good soul who cared for all of us." Since graduating, Jerrold has had an illustrious career at Matheson, a compressed gas and equipment company. Then he spent 11 years at Compressed Gas Association. He now works for Electronic Fluorocarbons and Advanced Materials as a Senior Technical Manager assisting the Operations and Technical Team on compressed gas cylinders, valves, and governing DOT Regulations.

**Dr. Jeffrey Silverstein (ChE BE '69, ME '71, PhD '78)** took Prof. Pfeffer's ChE 141 Transport Phenomena 1 (now ChE 341) in Spring 1967 and ChE 142 Transport Phenomena 2 (now ChE 342) in Fall 1968. Jeff has focused his career on the use of fundamental engineering theory and principles, computer-based process simulation, and statistical analysis to define and solve chemical engineering problems. He has had a long career at American Cyanamid Company/Cytec Industries serving as its internal expert consultant for distillation, process analysis, and simulation projects. He is now the Director of Process Simulation Express LLC. Jeff reminisces, "Robert Pfeffer was a wonderful person and a great teacher. He had a wry sense of humor. His classes in transport phenomena were always enlightening. Personally, he was very kind to me, as were other professors in the department at the time [such as] Harvey List, Alois X. Schmidt, Reuel Shinnar, Bob Graff, Stanley Katz, Minocher KN Patel, and Henry Meyers. They were all exceptional people and fine teachers. I was fortunate to have had a first-rate education at "the Harvard of the proletariat - The City College of New York."



**Gary Goetz (ChE BE '72)** had Prof. Pfeffer in ChE 141 (Spring 1970) and ChE 142 (Fall 1971) and retired in 2012 as Senior Marketing Manager from Alstom Power, a major global power generation business acquired by GE Vernova in 2015. He is now focusing on family and enjoying his retirement. Gary shares with us that he has, "pleasant memories of Dr. Pfeffer's transport phenomena class including the Navier Stokes equations during the early 1970s. [Pfeffer was] a kind person and great teacher. May his memory forever be a blessing."

**Dr. Leon Levine (ChE BE '67, ME '68)** had Prof. Pfeffer in ChE 141 (Fall 1966) and remembers, "I was a student of Dr. Pfeffer's way back in the mid-60's. We had kept in contact over the years. Last year he told me his wife had passed and this past April, he told me was going to have some tests. When he didn't reply to my messages in mid-Sept and mid-Oct, I feared the worst. He told me something that I have used my entire career and still quote to others: 'All this theoretical stuff is correct, you just have to figure out how to use/apply it.' He will be missed." After graduating from CCNY, Leon embarked on a career at Proctor & Gamble followed by a research scientist position at Pillsbury Co. Then, he started Leon Levine & Associates, Inc. of which he is the president. A few years in, he decided to go back to school and earned his PhD (2003) from Purdue University in Agriculture and Biological Engineering. Currently, Leon is also a visiting colleague at the University of New Mexico.



**Dr. Martin B. Sherwin (ChE BE '60, PhD '67)** enjoyed Prof. Pfeffer's teaching in ChE 260 Unit Operations Lab I (now part of ChE 345) in Fall 1958 and ChE 261 Factory Trips (no modern equivalent) in Spring 1959. He shares a mischievous story, "I was an undergraduate in ChE when Dr. Pfeffer and Dr. Graff joined the CCNY ChE faculty. They were housed in an open cubicle in the Unit Operations lab next to the Plate and Frame filter press. My team member in the lab was a real rascal (Alvin Blacksburg) and he disengaged the filter feed line, aimed the hose skyward, and doused the office cubicle with calcium carbonate slurry. The two new faculty staff darted from their office while my partner quickly blamed the incident on a faulty fitting. They didn't really believe him but maintained their composure in good humor. Prof. Pfeffer made a name for himself at CCNY by both increasing his intellectual scope and taking on ever more administrative positions. He will be missed by all that knew him." Martin has the distinction of being the first doctoral candidate to be awarded a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Engineering at the City University of New York. He has also been an NAE member since 1989 (see ChE Newsletter 09/2021).