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## BROMMEL-BRADY-PORTOKALIS SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HONORS PROGRAM

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### *Timothy (Tim) Portokalis*

In recent correspondence with Tim, he outlined both his career and our relationship. I will briefly summarize his career and then take excerpts from his letter for more information about Tim. As a student he possessed a certain curiosity that stood out in all class activities. He always had probing questions; liked group work; carefully prepared his papers and speeches. I knew when he graduated that he would be successful, but I was unsure which direction his faceted mind would take him. Surprisingly, he became an expert in the uses of computers in business and educational settings.

-Dr. Brommel

For the past 28 years he has had a wide variety of computer industry experiences. He did not major in computers, though his resume would make one think that he did. Tim tends to stay in positions, good ones, for long periods of time and works up within the corporation. In those 28 years, he worked in three major companies: Household International as a manager of office systems from 1985-1995; Whittman-Hart as a director of consulting and infrastructure solutions, advising on technical management for a number of major corporations (Walgreens, Chicago Tribune, CAN, et al) from 1996-2004. From that year until the present he has worked for SDI Corporation as a Senior Consultant in the public sector, including assignments in government, education, emergency management and airports. Clients include the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, CTA, and the U. S. Virgin Islands. He now serves as vice president of SDI. Tim makes us all proud that he went to Northeastern! Here are some remembrances he has of life at NEIU:

“During my junior year Dr. Brommel recruited me into the Kaskaskia Honors Program. There he helped me focus my interests and talents by designing a customized degree in Business and Speech, from which I graduated in 1985. He also advised me to take an internship in the Public Relations department at Swedish Covenant Hospital. This internship helped me understand the importance of professional relationships within an organization and civic relationships between an organization and the community, in addition to the interpersonal relationships which are the key to a rich and fulfilling life.

At Northeastern I took three of Dr. Brommel’s classes: Interpersonal Communication; Family Communication, (a fascinating class); and Persuasion, the hardest and most rewarding class I have ever taken in my life. The themes and skills I learned at Northeastern have distinguished me throughout my professional career. I learned to ask and find answers to the vital questions: Who is my audience? What is important to them? What is their motivation? What language is appropriate? While an IT manager at Household International I found myself well equipped to speak to groups and readily able to represent my employer’s interests.

When I later became an IT consultant at Whittman-Hart, these skills helped me be successful even through the economic downturn that put many of my peers out of work. I am still in IT consulting, now in a management and advisory role where communication and presentation skills are even more important than technical skills.

There is an incident with Dr. Brommel that has stayed with me all these years. While I was attending his Interpersonal Communications class, I was ironically confronted with the awkwardness of being in a class with a woman I had recently broken up with. We initially ignored each other and sat on opposite sides of the classroom, but as the term went on we started dating again. Inevitably she left me for someone else, then stopped coming to class. I thought there had been no outward indication of the whole affair, but after her first absence Dr. Brommel asked me what had happened to her. How did he know? I told him the story and then said, 'I just want to know why she did this to me.' Dr. Brommel replied in his professorial voice, 'You have neither the training nor the education to figure that out.' As a heartbroken 22-year-old, this statement only frustrated me more. It wasn't until many years later that I understood the wisdom and maturity of that statement.

Dr. Brommel and I have kept in touch over the years. His encouragement, advice and friendship have been of great value to me. Every student should be fortunate enough to have a mentor like Dr. Brommel."

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### ***Dennis Brady***

Dennis Brady shares the name of this scholarship with Timothy Portokalis. Dennis majored in political science, but took my Interpersonal Communication course. In many respects, he nicely paralleled Portokalis. Both came from ethnic families, Irish and Greek respectively, with parents of modest means. Dennis was an older undergraduate than Tim, for he had a successful military career. In the Vietnam War, he had been in combat and had been seriously injured.

When he came to Northeastern without any scholarship support, he made his living driving a taxi. I got so that I would look around the parking lot to see that parked yellow cab. Then I would know Dennis had arrived on campus. He would park that cab and take a class or two and then run out to O'Hare Airport and pick up arriving passengers. I never heard him complain; it was just what he had to do to make ends meet.

I remember Dennis as one of the most brilliant students that I taught at Northeastern. Again his maturity from the military set him apart from the 18 to 20 year-old students. He relished interactions with his classmates, and enjoyed challenging them to see a wider world view. I remember his assignments as some of the most candidly honest essays that any student ever wrote for me. What further amazed me was that on long, hard objective tests, he usually got the top score. The same was true of his essay answers. He did this with great modesty, and I wonder if he realized then just how bright and impressive he was to his professors.

Dennis graduated from Northeastern and then held a variety of positions in the business sector. He ended up a vice-president of a leading real estate title company in Chicago. He later took a "buy out" and to this day manages his resources as a day trader on the stock market.