

support for faculty development, and other advancements. His advocacy on behalf of the department was tireless. Aside from his one “research day” each week, it was rare to find him away from the office, not even if one knocked on his door late Friday afternoon. It was a level of commitment that gained him enormous respect among the faculty.

Local and national media frequently contacted Bob for his perspective on happenings in the news. He was pleased to oblige such requests whenever possible. Among the issues that he commented on were presidential illness and succession—of course!—and other topics that ran the gamut from presidential debates, to elections, to media and politics, to public policy. One highlight of his long-term relationship with the media came in 1993 when he sat for an hour-long interview on “The Larry King Show” to talk about his book, *The Mortal Presidency*.

Bob was not only a great talker, he was a great walker too. For decades he resided in the town of Brookline, approximately 2 miles away from the Northeastern campus. As a full-time faculty member, Bob’s daily routine usually began and ended with the trek between these end points, a habit he maintained in all but the worst weather conditions. After retirement, Bob continued to complete this hike on a regular basis, taking advantage of a modest workspace set aside by the department for emeritus faculty, where he happily labored on his latest conference paper or journal manuscript. He was a delightful lunch companion if you could pry him away from his computer. Often this was a losing battle, however, since Bob preferred to work straight through lunch. A work ethic acquired over 50 years of research and writing did not fade away easily.

That said, as a retired faculty member Bob enjoyed his continued interaction with political science faculty and staff, particularly Janet-Louise Joseph, the department administrator, who became a cherished friend. Much teasing and joking around enlivened the relationship between the two, such as the lark when Janet-Louise and an accomplice seated a lifelike theatrical manikin of Abe Lincoln at Bob’s desk before his arrival one morning. (He took it in stride). At the same time, Janet-Louise looked after “Father Bob.” Mindful that he lived on his own, when the cold months descended she supplied Bob with large containers of home-made soup to help ensure the wholesomeness of his diet.

Bob Gilbert’s memory will long live on in the department whose future he did so much to shape. And at this moment in our country’s history when the physical and mental condition of American presidents has come under close scrutiny, one wishes for more of his learned insights on this issue.

— David A. Rochefort, *Distinguished Professor Emeritus*
Northeastern University

Joseph Nye

For my entire career as an international relations professor, my colleagues in the academy have furiously debated whether and how academics can “bridge the gap” and have “impact” on the wider world. Joseph Nye rarely engaged in this debate, likely because he would have found it deeply puzzling. While other scholars viewed this question through an academic lens, Nye simply did not see any gap to bridge. That is because he crossed between academia and policymaking

as effortlessly as the rest of us cross the street. Furthermore, he excelled in both areas. In both his ideas and in his actions, Joe Nye had a considerable impact on American foreign policy.

In honor of Nye’s passing in May 2025 at the age of 88, it is worth stepping back to appreciate his significant contributions to the discipline. As the former Dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government as well as a Distinguished Service Professor of the University, Nye performed yeoman service as a university administrator. However, his real contribution, was as a scholar and policy practitioner. He was responsible for developing ideas that demonstrated considerable staying power within the discipline.

Along with Robert Keohane, [Nye developed the idea of complex interdependence](#). Building on their prior work that stressed [the role of non-state actors](#), Keohane and Nye argued that—contra realism—interdependence had profound effects on the international system. In particular, the fungibility of power is restricted; power resources are limited to specific issue areas. They explicitly acknowledged that military power dominates economic power in the security realm, but also argued that military power is of limited utility at best in arenas outside the security sphere. In essence, Keohane and Nye suggested that complex interdependence could constrain actors in a way that Hobbesian anarchy might have overlooked. The effects of complex interdependence remain a subject of contestation today. While concepts like [“weaponized interdependence”](#) push back on Keohane and Nye’s work, it remains part of the conversation. Complex interdependence is a concept that will provide analytical leverage well into the 21st century.

A running debate in 2025 is whether the Trump administration heralds [the death of American soft power](#) and the possible effects that would have on American foreign policy. This debate is predicated on Joseph Nye’s original conception of the term, which he [first developed in 1990](#) and then fleshed out in [multiple subsequent books](#). For Nye, successful policies beget even more attractive forms of power, getting others to want what the actor wants. Again, this is in sharp contrast to realism’s balance-of-power dynamic. Furthermore, Nye argued that soft power can build off of hard power capabilities. Soft power has a multiplier effect in Nye’s rubric, extending the reach of hard power: “the resources often associated with hard power behavior can also produce soft power behavior depending on the context and how they are used. Command power can create resources that in turn can create soft power at a later phase—for example, institutions that will provide soft power resources in the future.”

[Based on a PolicyCast podcast Nye recorded less than a month before his death](#), it would seem that Nye would have agreed that president Trump was eroding American soft power. He said, “When you come into office, the first things you say are that you’re going to take Greenland from Denmark, a NATO ally, no matter what; or you say that we’re going to retake the Panama Canal, which reawakens all of the Latin American suspicions about American imperialism; or you abolish AID, which is an agency which makes Americans look more benign through its assistance. Basically, these suggest that you’re not even thinking about America first, you’re thinking about America alone.”

Nye deserves credit for developing multiple important con-

cepts decades ago that continue to be relevant in current debates about international relations. However, Joe was not just an ivory tower scholar. He might have been the platonic ideal of a scholar who bridged the divide between theory and policy. As he recounted in his memoir *A Life in the American Century*, Nye also served in the US government multiple times across different cabinet departments, with stints as a deputy to the undersecretary of state, chairman of the National Intelligence Council, and assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. Nye also led a bevy of transnational policy organizations such as the Aspen Strategy Group, which he helped found.

In other words, Nye survived and thrived as a scholar, a policymaker, and an administrator. It is a rare person who can excel at all three roles. As [Nicholas Burns](#) noted, "Joe was a protean man — founding father of the Kennedy School, brilliant academic, admired senior government official. What really stood out for me was Joe's commitment to be a servant leader in everything he did. Literally hundreds of us count Joe as our indispensable mentor." Similarly, Dennis Wilder, a former CIA official, and White House adviser to George W Bush, [told](#)

[the Financial Times](#) that, "I guess the big thing about Joe was, to me, he is the perfect academic who is able to do the highly theoretical international relations thinking and then turn it into policy."

I got to know Joe Nye over the last two decades through multiple conversations on a variety of panels, roundtables, and conferences. What always struck me about Joe was how he carried himself as a senior scholar. Like Bob Jervis, Nye was devoid of the pettiness that often consumes even senior academics. He was always generous with his advice, and he was never perturbed by serious debate. To put it more plainly, I want to be like Joseph Nye when I grow up.

The United States is facing a precarious moment, a moment when the wise counsel of Joe Nye would have been valuable. He will be missed. ■

— Daniel W. Drezner, Distinguished Professor of International Politics and Academic Dean of the Fletcher School



2025 TEACHING AND LEARNING CONFERENCE



Left: Michelle Deardorff, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, delivers the keynote address at the 2025 APSA Teaching and Learning Conference on Friday, February 7, 2025 in Alexandria, VA.

Right: Michelle Deardorff and Dr. Kimberly A. Mealy, APSA Executive Director, at the conference.