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## Spero Peters Picks Perfect Profession, Pastimes

**Mechanical engineering alumnus has a passion for nuclear power work**

JANUARY 5, 2017 BY EDWIN SMITH

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Spero Peters is a 2010 alumnus of UM. (Submitted photo)

Spero Peters always seems to make just the right choices for himself.

Nearly 10 years ago, the Germantown, Tennessee, native decided to attend the University of Mississippi. "Between family and friends that had gone or were going to Ole Miss, I was very familiar with the university," he said. "It just seemed like a good fit after I visited to look at enrolling."

Once he was accepted into the School of Engineering, Peters chose mechanical engineering as his major.

"The late Dr. (James) Chambers was a favorite for a bunch of us in my class," Peters said. "His Power Conversion course was by far my favorite course at Ole Miss. I had an interest in nuclear power, and this class let me look into that subject in greater detail.

"Also, the way he taught the course was discussion-based, more like a graduate-level course, which really made it engaging and anything but dull."

Toward the end of Peters' time at the university, he accepted an opportunity to work at the National Center for Physical Acoustics.

"Getting to be around a research center like that prepared me for the environment I found myself in when I went to get my master's in nuclear engineering at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville," he said. "Also, the courses I took in Fluid Mechanics and Heat Transfer gave me a good foundation in those subjects that came in handy when it was time to take the test for my PE license."

After earning his degrees, Peters went to work as a nuclear engineer for Bechtel National Inc. in Reston, Virginia. He is working on the Hanford Tank Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant.



Spero Peters (far right) answered questions from UM students during his guest lecture in Engineering 400. (Submitted photo)

"Its purpose is to take millions of gallons of radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project sitting in tanks and convert – or vitrify – them into solid glass for safe disposal," he said. "I model radiation dose rates in the plant using computer simulations and evaluate mechanical system and radiation shielding designs to ensure that doses to future workers are minimized once the plant is constructed."

Peters has worked on commercial nuclear power projects, including the design of a scaled-down nuclear power plant called a small modular reactor. He considers creating that design to be his most fulfilling professional achievement to date.

"In nuclear power, many of the power plants were built and designed decades ago, so getting to progress a new concept was a unique experience that I enjoyed," Peters said. "Plus, it really utilized both my nuclear and mechanical backgrounds."

Since graduation, Peters decided to return to Ole Miss for the Leadership 400 Class and the Power Conversion ME 405 class.

"Dr. Chambers had me back in 2015 to guest lecture the class on nuclear power," he said. "I learned I couldn't do it on a Friday – which would have been convenient – because, as he informed me,

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OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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apparently my classmates and I had talked him out of having a Friday class years ago.

"The students were thankful for my 'contributions' to the department, at least!"

Arunachalam Rajendran, chair and professor of mechanical engineering, remembers Peters as one of the department's shining stars.

"I always noticed his ability to initiate a conversation on any extracurricular activity whether it was related to the student chapter of ASME or the growth of the mechanical engineering department as truly amazing," he said. "Spero was always proactive in providing outside-the-box ideas to me whenever I approached him for suggestions related to class room teaching or capstone projects.

"I am not surprised to see him very successful in his career thus far."

Assistant Engineering Dean Mami Kendricks voiced similar sentiments.

"Spero did a great job," she said. "He and Jim Chambers were very close."

Peters' family includes his parents, Manuel and Susanna Peters, and his brother, Alex. Engineering seems to run in the family bloodline.

"Dad's an electrical engineer, retired from Memphis Light Gas & Water, and Alex is a chemical engineer," he said.

As for leisure, Peters again found just the right choices.

"When not working, I love getting ribs on the smoker, especially for an Ole Miss game, and am part of a Memphis in May Championship Barbecue competition team," he said. "I also enjoy running and golf to help balance out the barbecuing's side effects."

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