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Dr. Stephen “Steve” Tibbetts, the newly hired chair of Radford’s Criminal Justice Department, died unexpectedly Tuesday, Sept. 10.

Tibbetts had been a professor at California State University at San Bernadino for 19 years and had just been hired for the position at Radford.

It was a bit of a shock to everyone involved when he passed.

The healthy 49-year-old began bleeding in his upper GI-tract and died instantly, according to Tibbetts’s wife who spoke with The Tartan.



Steve and his daughter, Rian, who plans to attend Roger Williams University to play

volleyball.

“He was meeting with classes; he was fulfilling his duties in the department. It was a bit of a shock to everyone involved when he passed,” said Dr. Matt Smith, Dean of the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences.

Smith said the college was very hopeful about what he would bring to the department and that he was “full of promise.” He described Tibbetts as a remarkably student-focused professor, which was the main reason the school hired him.

In addition to his duties as department chair, Tibbetts was teaching a freshman-level criminal justice course.

[Dr. Isaac Van Patten](#) has been named the department chair in the interim.

Tibbetts is survived by his wife, Kim, and his daughter, Rian. He and Kim were married for 18 years, but Kim decided to stay across the country because their daughter is a senior in high school. Once she had finished, the plan was for Rian to attend Roger Williams University while Kim would join her husband in Radford.

Radford University President Brian Hemphill attended a reception comprised of family, friends and colleagues. His wife and daughter flew in from California, and his mother and father drove from Florida.

“Dr. Tibbetts was an amazing chair, a great colleague and friend to a number of people in the department. In the short amount of time that he was with us, he had a significant impact on a number of lives and is going to be deeply missed,” President Hemphill told the Tartan.

He was humble; he was very humble... He didn't want anyone to call him 'Dr. Tibbetts.' He's like, 'I'm just Steve'.

Tibbetts was also an accomplished scholar. He obtained his Master's and Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, home to the [top-ranked criminal justice program in the nation](#). While at CSU, he was given an Outstanding Professor Award and consistently got good reviews on [ratemyprofessors.com](#), which Kim mentioned to The Tartan.

“He was humble; he was very humble...” Kim said. “He didn't want anyone to call him 'Dr. Tibbetts.' He's like, 'I'm just Steve'.”



Steve and Kim Tibbetts at East Tennessee State University, where they first met.

He had published 10 books and over 50 scholarly journal articles. His leading book, *Introduction to Criminology, Why Do They Do It?* is in its third edition.

Dr. Lori Elis, a criminal justice faculty member at Radford, attended the University of Maryland with Tibbetts. Until this August, they had not spoken in 25 years, but they caught up immediately.

“It’s one of those things where you really haven’t spent time with somebody for 25 years, but you can automatically go back to what you did in grad school,” Elis told the Tartan.

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Elis described the criminal justice field as small and one in which scholars across the country can make connections.

According to Elis, a memorial to honor Tibbetts is “in planning stages.”

Tibbetts has been cremated, and now Kim is traveling across the country scattering his ashes in places they found to be sentimental. Her first stop was the East Tennessee State University campus where they first met. Once she is done, she will still move back to the Southern Virginia area.

Counseling was made available for the students of his class, and Smith said their priority is finding a professor to pick up the course.

For more updates on Radford news, keep up with your [Tartan newspaper](#).

Photo Credit: (Kim Tibbetts)

Featured Image: (Steve in California, where he spent nineteen years as a professor at California State University. This summer, he drove for five days to get to Radford with his dog, Sinjin.)