

# DEGREE

FROM A1

also in the official online syllabus for his course on civics and government. The same syllabus included a caution for students: "You are expected to abide by an honor code in all you do for this course. Plagiarism is defined as 'an act of academic dishonesty.'"

Former Shawano School Board member Julie Van Dyck called it "horrible" that Grams misled people about his credentials.

Van Dyck, who served on the school board until 2015, said she had heard murmurs that Grams' Ph.D. was not legitimate. The advanced degree seemed to come out of nowhere, Van Dyck said, but nobody in the school district ever confirmed whether it was real.

Despite the fact that Grams has retired after a long career of service, Van Dyck said she believes people in the community should know that the former school teacher is not who people think.

"I think that's rotten," she said of the phony Ph.D. "I think he needs to be exposed."

## Credentials questioned

Questions about Grams' academic credentials surfaced during his recent campaign for Shawano School Board. In the April 4 election, he lost a close race to Bruce Milavitz. The retired teacher had talked about running for political office before, but this was the first time his name appeared on a ballot locally.

In a pre-election interview with The Shawano Leader, Grams said he held a Ph.D. from a university he identified as Patrick Henry University in Alabama.

His profile on the social media website LinkedIn also showed that he attended a Patrick Henry University between 2008 and 2011 and that he earned a Ph.D. in Austrian economics.

When the Leader could not locate such a university, Grams changed his story several times before acknowledging that his advanced academic degree was not real. He showed a framed copy of a Ph.D. awarded from Patrick Henry University in Cleveland, Ohio — the same institution from the fictional story in "Atlas Shrugged."

"It is, at best in the United States, a fictional, honorary doctorate," he said.

He explained that he had approached Shawano School District administrators about the district's pay scale for teachers at a time when his master's degree and years of service put him at the top of the



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Mart Grams, left, shares a light moment with Shawano School District Superintendent Gary Cumberland at a June 2016 ceremony for retiring school district employees.

scale, just below \$60,000 a year. Although the district offered nothing more for earning a Ph.D., Grams said the salary issue "kind of pushed me into doing this."

After deciding that getting an actual Ph.D. would cost too much money, he dreamed up the "Atlas Shrugged" doctorate in partnership with some old friends who shared his frustration about the state of higher education. Referring to his old friends, whom he declined to identify, Grams said: "If it's a doctorate, it's because these guys say so."

Shawano School District Superintendent Gary Cumberland said none of the school district's teachers have a Ph.D. Cumberland said that while he heard other employees talk about Grams' claiming a Ph.D., the subject never came to his attention as superintendent.

"There is no indication in our files that he holds a Ph.D. from any institution, real or fake," Cumberland said.

**Retired teacher**

## also an author

Grams retired in 2016 after 29 years with the Shawano School District, including many years at Gresham High School before switching to Shawano Community High School. His salary at the time of his retirement was \$62,936.

In addition to his economics textbook, Grams self-published a 2013 book on U.S. history, called "The Great Experiment," and a 2016 philosophical work called "Words My Grandfather Gave Me." All three books show the author's name simply as Mart A. Jacob Grams.

However, the back cover of "Words My Grandfather Gave Me" refers to him as Dr. Grams, and the book is marketed at amazon.com using the author's doctorate title in the

same way as the economics textbook.

The acknowledgments listed inside "Economics for the Remnant" also include a reference to "Atlas Shrugged."

Published in 1957, "Atlas Shrugged" offers a politically charged story about big industry striking back against government regulation. The book has enjoyed revived popularity in recent years since House Speaker Paul Ryan and other national Republican figures expressed an affinity for it.

Bohm, who is cited as a teaching assistant on "Economics for the Remnant," said Grams referred to "Atlas Shrugged" many times in his classes. He also allowed students to watch a film version of the book, she said.

Now a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Bohm said she suspects that claiming he had a Ph.D. from the story's fictional university was Grams' way of "strongly endorsing" the Ayn Rand book.

"I don't think it's being dishonest," Bohm said. "But I can see how people who don't know him would completely disagree."

Upon returning to SCHS this school year as a substitute teacher, Grams was a familiar face to many students. He recalls that students greeted him with shouts of "Dr. Grams."

Students have been using that title for years, Grams said, which he interprets as a simple sign of respect. He said he does not believe he misled students or others by telling them he had a Ph.D. from the fictional Patrick Henry University.

"Everybody knows that there's no such place," he said.

Asked how anyone would know he was talking about a fictional university, he said: "I don't know how they would know, unless they're well-read."