

Professor George M. Bodner

Biography

George M. Bodner was born and raised within a half-mile of Kodak Park in Rochester, New York. In spite of this, he entered the State University of New York at Buffalo as a history/philosophy major. At SUNY he found, much to his amazement, that chemistry was fun, and he changed his major under the mistaken impression that jobs were easier to find as a chemist.

After a mediocre career as an undergraduate (B.S., 1969) he entered graduate school at Indiana University (Ph.D., 1972), undoubtedly on the basis of letters of recommendation from individuals with whom he had done undergraduate research. He apparently did well enough in graduate school as a double major in inorganic and organic chemistry to gain an appointment as a visiting assistant professor at the University of Illinois (1972-75), where he taught general chemistry and a biochemistry course for undergraduate and graduate students. His research interests at that time focused on the application of ^{13}C NMR spectroscopy to studies of the structure and bonding in organometallic complexes.

Two things became apparent during his tenure at Illinois. He found that teaching was fun, and he realized that his research could best be described as searching for definitive answers to questions that no one ever asked. In 1977, an opening in Chemical Education was advertised at Purdue University. He applied for the position and, much to their later chagrin, the faculty at that institution offered him the job. (They have since compounded their error by promoting him to Associate Professor, then Professor of Chemistry and Education, and, more recently, as Distinguished Professor of Chemistry, Education and Engineering.) He is the author of more than 140 papers and 52 books or laboratory manuals. In 2003 he received the ACS Pimentel Award in Chemical Education and the Nyholm Medal in Chemical Education from the Royal Society of Chemistry. Last year he became both a Fellow of the American Chemical Society and a Fellow of the Royal Chemistry Society. He has been known to claim in public that his primary interest is in epistemology. His interests also include the development of materials to assist undergraduate instruction, research on how students learn, and the history and philosophy of science.