



## Joel Barket Samaha

May 28, 1936 - December 16, 2024

Joel Barket Samaha, who taught at the University of Minnesota for more than 50 years, died on December 16, 2024. He passed away peacefully at his home in Minnetonka. He was 88.

Joel was born in Lorain, Ohio on May 28, 1936 to Mildred and George Samaha. His father immigrated from Lebanon and his mother's family came from Germany. Joel grew up in Milan, Ohio where his parents ran small businesses and became prominent antique dealers.

Joel met Jennifer (Hoskins) Samaha in Chicago and they married in 1967. They later had two sons, Adam and Luke. In Chicago, Joel taught in public high schools where he developed an advanced placement program and coached debate. He also worked as a bartender, played in jazz sessions, practiced law briefly, and attended countless Cubs games.

At Northwestern University, Joel earned four degrees (BA, JD, MA, PhD). For his doctorate in history, he explored centuries-old criminal justice records in the archives of Essex, England, and was guided by Sir Geoffrey Elton at Cambridge University. Joel dedicated himself to social history that focused on ordinary people--"those who worked," as he once wrote, not only "those who ruled."

In England, Joel and Jennifer acquired their first Irish Wolfhound, Pegeen. Joel went on to breed and show champion Wolfhounds, and he became an internationally respected dog show judge. He published a book on the breed, *The New Complete Irish Wolfhound*, in 1991.

Joel's teaching career was impactful and award-winning. After a year at UCLA, he joined the University of Minnesota in 1971. There he helped found a criminal justice studies department, which he chaired from 1974 to 1978.

By the 1980s, Joel was publishing highly influential textbooks. Covering criminal law, criminal procedure, and criminal justice, his books were used at hundreds of colleges in 48 states. He wrote his first textbook on legal pads and a typewriter. But he quickly shifted to personal computers and ultimately online platforms. Early adoption of new technology helped him live a full life with dystonia, a rare neurological condition that affects movement and posture.

The textbooks complemented Joel's interactive teaching approach which, he said, aimed to make students "uncomfortable with their assumptions." Joel was kind and encouraged students to voice a range of views. He shared his views, too, sometimes colorfully questioning society's reliance on surveillance, force, and punishment. At the same time, he prized positions based on evidence and critical thinking. Joel himself never stopped learning, and he emphasized "there are several reasonable meanings to any topic worth studying."

In that spirit, Joel influenced thousands of students and others who work in criminal justice today, including police officers, prison officials, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges.

Joel is survived by his two sons (Adam and Luke); former spouse (Jennifer);

four grandchildren (Ariana, Oscar, Laurel, and Brooke); two great-grandchildren (Stella and Julius); and two siblings (George William Samaha and Ann Samaha). He was preceded in death by his parents (George and Mildred) and a sister (Joan Blackburn).

Memorial services are being planned for early 2025. In lieu of flowers, well-wishers may send donations in Joel's memory to charities of their choice.

# Tribute Wall

JF

“ I was a student of professor Samaha in the 1970's. He was a person that to this day I remember with the utmost respect and admiration! He was a kind brilliant and compassionate person, he always took an interest in you and really listened and regarded what you had to contribute during class discussions. I recall I was quite lost at graduation time and he wrote a note in my blue exam book to come and see him as I seemed a bit lost.. that was the type of person he was, with so many students he still noticed each one. No one has ever led a Socratic dialogue like him, bringing the lesson around to what his message was and what he wanted you to consider. Never pushy, always respectful. The best teacher I have ever had and I'm sure there are thousands that agree. The world was a better place for having him in it, a man of character and decency and just plain a good egg. Rest in peace professor and thank you for teaching me so much and for being such a good man!

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**Joel Frankel** - March 11, 2025 at 01:26 AM

NH

“ So much love and respect for Joel Samaha - the greatest professor I have had the honor to know and work with. Always honest and inspiring, he made the sometimes dusty pages of law come to life. His legacy lives on in his books, his students, family, and colleagues.. Many thanks and so much gratitude

Always --

Nancy A Heitzeg

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**nancy a heitzeg** - January 25, 2025 at 06:46 PM

JT

“ One of the two best Professors that I had the pleasure of learning from. He was my inspiration to go on to law school and spend a 40 year career practicing the principles he espoused.

*RIP Professor. Your work is done!*

*Jeff Thill*

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**Jeffrey Thill** - December 31, 2024 at 11:06 AM