

THE TRAIL BLAZERS

ESTEEMED REPORTER PASSES
ON LIFE SKILLS TO YOUNG
ENTREPRENEUR



Wahab Owolabi '09
Tom Squirieri '75
Richard Easton

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Award-winning journalist **Tom Squitieri '75** is not afraid to ask the tough questions—whether reporting from war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, investigating the suffering of women and children in Bosnia, or exposing political scandals on Capitol Hill. It is a fearless reporting technique that has garnered Squitieri coveted recognition from the Overseas Press Club and White House Correspondents Association.

A noteworthy feat for the former *USA Today* reporter who, when looking back on his countless news articles, speeches, poems and blog entries, claims that the first story he ever published originated from an assignment in Richard Easton's Advanced Composition class at Washington & Jefferson College.

“I remember seeing Thomas running across campus toward Davis Hall, yelling out to me and waving a letter saying that he had been published,” said

Easton, who still owns an original copy of the magazine featuring the college senior's satire. The 1975 issue of *Tennis Illustrated* is well read and yellowed with time, but cherished by the author's professor, who proudly keeps it among the other clippings that document Squitieri's remarkable writing career.

“I'd like Tom to know that I've admired him ever since the day he showed me that letter,” added Easton, reflecting on a relationship that has developed into a steadfast bond, packed with memories of weddings, parties and family occasions. Though Squitieri believes that Easton considers all of his students to be his “favorites,” the political science major and avid tennis player felt he had “found a home” in the young professor's classroom. “When he wrote his number on the back of my blue book at the end of that first class, I knew I had gotten what I needed out of college,” Squitieri said.

After graduating, Easton's protégé returned many times to that classroom to talk to future generations of writers about news reporting and the elements of good style. Aided by newspaper veterans when he was still a budding

reporter, Squitieri credits others' “unselfish help” with enhancing his own career. “I vowed that one day, I would edit and teach and give back the good stuff that I was given,” he said.

When approached six years ago about creating and teaching an Intersession course at his alma mater, Squitieri was given the opportunity to fulfill that promise. Called “15 Minutes of Fame or Shame,” his course, which combines facets of journalism, ethics and current affairs, challenges W&J students to think on their feet.

The title alone was enough to intrigue first-year student **Wahab Owolabi '09**, who was looking for an Intersession course that would not interfere with his basketball schedule. The 6-foot-4-inch power forward did not anticipate that the course, and the professor, would forever change his perspective on the world. “When you walk into a class, you really don't expect it to have a huge impact on you, but Tom's class did for me, especially in terms of how I look at life,” said Owolabi, who was profoundly moved by the videos he watched of his professor reporting from hazardous war zones. “At that time, I didn't think all the stuff in the news and on TV had anything to do with me. It seemed like a different world,” he said. “Tom showed us that it does have something to do with you, and if you want to get involved and make a difference, you can.”

It was this eagerness to learn that distinguished Owolabi as a “remarkable student” to Squitieri,

who appreciated the viewpoint he brought to his classroom. “He got what I was trying to teach and interacted every day, increasing the quality of the course,” Squitieri said. “I saw how the others looked to him and followed his lead—not being afraid to participate or, most importantly, challenge me.”

Today, the three-time All-Presidents' Athletic Conference honoree stays active in basketball as an assistant coach at Carnegie Mellon University, where he also acts as an engineering career consultant. Yet he lights up when talking about the company he founded a few months ago that reinvents the college admission process into a virtual format. The concept stemmed from the kind of innovative thinking that Owolabi honed under the guidance of Squitieri, whom he admires for “his entrepreneurial spirit.”

Owolabi looks forward to bouncing ideas about the company off of his mentor who, in turn, is excited to see where his star pupil will go next, willing to offer any advice he can along the way. While Squitieri remains focused on running his own communications consulting firm, as well as raising his two young children, his innate curiosity about the world keeps him asking questions, and writing about the answers.

For Easton, this means a constant flow of Squitieri's stories to his inbox, along with playful reminders of a particularly low grade he once received on a travel article in Easton's class. “Of course, Tom went on to make his career writing travel articles, and years later, he would cut them out of the newspaper and send them to me, asking, ‘Do I get an A on this assignment now, coach?’ I think you could say he's earned it.”

