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## A Lifelong Student

**Alumnus earns 500th credit hour at MU**

*Story by Jake Kreinberg*

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**F**or nearly a decade, Bernie Esser thought about what it would be like to reach an academic milestone few students ever accomplish: 500 credit hours.

Esser, 72, enrolled at MU in September 1958 and went on to earn his bachelor's in business administration in 1963. A year later, he received a master's in economics. He walked across the stage a third time in 1967 for his law degree and finished with 499 credits after earning his medical degree in 1995.

When asked why he completed so many degrees, Esser smiles and says, "I just decided I would like to take some extra courses."

After receiving encouragement from longtime friend and journalism Professor James Sterling, BJ '65,

Esser enrolled in a one-hour independent study with Sterling in fall 2012 to earn his 500th credit hour.

“I don’t think Bernie thought of this as being the last class he’d take as much as he was just trying to reach 500,” Sterling says.

Esser, who resides in Jefferson City, Mo., deflects praise when asked about his academic and professional accomplishments, which include stints as a Stephens College professor, an assistant prosecutor, a judge and the vice president of a Canadian industrial manufacturer.

With an educational history spanning more than five decades, Esser says it was the faculty that attracted him to MU. Professors, notably Pinkney Walker in economics, often sought students to ask how they were doing in class and if they needed any additional assistance, Esser recalls.

“The university here was built on those people,” he says. “Not anything else.”



Bernie Esser stands in front of his four MU degrees in his former residence on Highland Street in Columbia in fall 2012. Photo by James Sterling.

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