

Anton W. Neff

*Professor of Medical Sciences; Adjunct Professor of Biology;
Senior Fellow, Indiana Molecular Biology Institute*

The opportunity to teach first-year medical students in a small class setting attracted Anton W. Neff to Indiana University Bloomington. In addition, southern Indiana offered the ideal environment to raise a family. As a native of Switzerland, he immigrated to the United States in the mid-1950s, settling in Washington State. He was raised on a farm, drove a diesel truck with a semitrailer, and worked at a pottery kiln. After graduating from Auburn High School, he became a first-generation college student by attending Central Washington College (now University) in Ellensburg, Washington, initially studying art. He interrupted those studies for three years of service in the U.S. Army (1966–1969) and then returned to Central Washington College, graduating in 1971 with a B.A. in biology.

His training as an electronics technician during his Army years and a college course in embryology sparked an interest in scientific inquiry that, for him, would be a career-long endeavor studying the phenomenon of embryonic development. That fascination led him to pursue a Ph.D. in the Department of Biological Structure (Anatomy) at the University of Washington, Seattle. He was mentored by Professor Mark A. Nameroff, as he pursued a series of important studies on the differentiation of *in vitro* cultured chick embryo muscle cells. He gained valuable experience teaching human gross anatomy to medical and undergraduate students, as well as developmental biology. These experiences became a springboard for his teaching program here at IU, where his enthusiastic and interactive teaching style has been appreciated and well liked over the years.

He was awarded a Ph.D. in 1977, and then traveled with his wife Vicki, daughter Joey, and newborn son Anton to Bloomington to begin teaching human gross anatomy to medical students in the Medical Sciences Program. During the past 30 years he has taught human gross anatomy to approximately 840 first-year medical students and 90 graduate students. In addition, he has taught basic human anatomy, as well as lectured on human diseases, to hundreds of undergraduates. He has mentored numerous graduate students and postdoctoral students who went on to academic and industry careers. He also devoted time to teach gifted 8- to 12-year-old children Space Biology at the College of Gifted and Talented Youth. One of those students is presently a medical student and is enrolled in his gross anatomy class! Lastly, he has routinely presented gross anatomy laboratory demonstrations to south-central Indiana high school students. Clearly, his teaching skills were well matched with IU's student-learning agendas.

While at IUB he has pursued important research questions with amphibian model systems. His research approaches have evolved during his career. They began with descriptive, classical studies, then moved to cellular-level analyses, and now focus on molecular biology (especially gene expression projects). Early on he focused on understanding the effects of gravitational forces, or lack of them (microgravity), on early

amphibian primary pattern formation. More recently he has analyzed gene expression patterns that drive amphibian limb regeneration.

In 2002 Anton W. Neff was promoted to professor of anatomy and cell biology. A truly creative thinker, always willing to challenge long-established paradigms, he enthusiastically served not only students, but his colleagues as well. His service contribution to IU most notably included chair of the Institutional Biosafety Committee for seven years. In addition, he served on numerous committees involving renovation projects for the Medical Sciences Program. Open discussion, intellectual pursuit, and dogged determination to “understand” characterized his interactions with his IU colleagues as well as collaborators outside IU, including Eli Lilly. His diverse experiences with electronics, plumbing, organic gardening, animal husbandry, photography, and artistic painting, to name a few, have been the envy of many of his peers.

In retirement he plans to continue pursuing his research interests in regenerative biology, but with a more general overview/systems approach. He also plans to rekindle his first college interest, art. In addition, he intends to spend more time with his family and grandchildren. He looks forward to not having his calendar determine his daily routine, but rather, as he learned growing up on a farm, to be more spontaneous and “to make hay when the sun shines.”

George M. Malacinski