DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
DAVID MAYO AUSTIN

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for David Mayo Austin, professor emeritus, social work, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
DAVID MAYO AUSTIN

Dr. David M. Austin, a former faculty member at The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work, died May 29, 2008, in Berea, Kentucky, following his battle with cancer. He was 84. David and his wife Zuria (Berea College '45) spent summers in Berea entertaining family and friends and continued to reside in the fall and winter in their Austin home.

David was born in New Haven, Connecticut, while his father was a student at Yale; his father was a minister and his mother was a teacher. After attending schools in Wisconsin and graduating from Lawrence College in 1943, David was inducted into the United States Army and served as a clerk in Panama. Following his military service, he was among the first social work students supported through the G.I. Bill after World War II. In 1963, he directed a planning team in Cleveland that prepared the first comprehensive community-based action proposal funded under President Kennedy’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. The program was known as Community Action for Youth. In addition to The University of Texas at Austin, David taught social work at Western Reserve University, Smith College, Boston University, Brandeis University, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Boston College, and Rockefeller College at the State University of New York at Albany.

David joined the UT’s School of Social Work in 1973 and held the Bert Kruger Smith Centennial Professorship. During his 24 years at the university, he served as acting dean of the School of Social Work (1991-93) and was director of the school's Center for Social Work Research from 1974-79. He received numerous teaching awards, including UT Austin’s Lora Lee Pederson Teaching Excellence Award and University Outstanding Graduate Teacher Award. In addition to this recognition for his competence as a teacher, David was honored nationally for his research, particularly in the area of human service management. His scholarship, especially his 1988 book, The Political Economy of Human Service Programs, has provided the seminal statement on the distinguishing characteristics of human service organizations. From 1988 to 1991, David served as chairman of the National Institute of Mental Health Task Force on Social Work Research, which produced an extensive report with far-reaching recommendations for changes in the organization of research within the profession of social work. The report remains one of the most important and long-lasting projects in professional social work, according to Dr. Barbara White, dean of the School of Social Work, who provided the following tribute regarding David’s work, “In his brilliant career, David has left a magnificent legacy in the students whom he mentored, taught and inspired. He was a leading scholar in the field of social work and his profound contributions have been recognized through numerous awards.” In 1997, in recognition of his dedication to the profession and lifetime of work changing the lives of people at the local, state, and national levels, the National Association of Social Workers named David a Social Work Pioneer®. He is survived by his wife, Zuria Farmer Austin; two sons, Clayton Austin and Paul Austin; daughter, Dr. Judith Austin; daughters-in-law Jacqueline and Karen Austin; son-in-law Dr. David Straus; brother Donald Austin; and eight grandchildren.

A colleague, Clay Shorkey fondly remembered David as follows:

Dave and I joined the faculty at the same time in 1973. It was exciting to become a member of an existing faculty with a core of wonderful professionals along with another new recruit who was full of enthusiasm related to moving the school to become one of the highest ranked programs in the country.
David’s energy, creative ideas, and exceptional ability to skillfully work with all levels of the university administration and state agencies was and continued to be one of the most important assets to the School of Social Work and the university. David’s vision related to the development of the Center for Social Work Research was a natural match with my work to develop the Learning Resource Center which was supported by Title XX.

Clay noted that David’s national stature in social work provided a major boost to our fledgling Ph.D. program when he became the program’s director. His knowledge, patience, and support became well known through the years among applicants to our program. He was an excellent colleague and friend and acted as a model and supporter of new faculty for 25 years. He was a cheerful and sunny person, who treated everyone as a valued individual, and had only good things to say about everyone.

Another colleague, Cal Streeter recalled that David was instrumental in his coming to The University of Texas. Cal said his first encounter with David was most memorable and influential in his decision,

The year I finished my Ph.D., the CSWE Annual Program Meeting was in Chicago. When I arrived at the conference, David Austin was standing in the hotel lobby talking with David Gillespie, my major professor. I was very familiar with David’s work and his prominence in the field of social work, but I had never met him. Dr. Gillespie introduced us and mentioned that I was on the job market. David immediately asked me if I would join him for a cup of coffee. As a new Ph.D., who was just starting my career in the academy, I felt a bit intimidated by the offer. However, David’s quiet and unassuming manner and his down-to-earth style put me at ease immediately. We sat in the coffee shop for more than an hour talking about my research, The University of Texas School of Social Work, and Austin. Before the conference was over, he had introduced me to most of the UT faculty who were at the conference. A few days after the conference, I received a personal note telling me how much he had enjoyed meeting me. And within about a week I was invited to Austin for a campus visit. Prior to meeting David, I had never considered UT. I had no connection to Texas and had no desire to move to Texas. To a large extent, it was David’s genuineness and warm hospitality that first attracted me to UT. In the years since that first encounter with David, I’ve participated in dozens of faculty candidate interviews. I always remember how my first meeting with David influenced my decision to come to UT, and I’ve tried to follow his example as I’ve interviewed faculty candidates.

David was a true professional mentor. During my first few years at UT, a week rarely passed without David stopping by my office to share something he thought I should read, to talk about some potential research opportunity, or to just say hello. Early in my career, I published an article on organizational redundancy in Social Service Review. Before I had even seen the article in print, he was in my office to offer his congratulations for being published in one of the top journals in social work. He had already read the article and had several ideas for how I could build on the typology of redundancy that I had developed in that paper. I don’t know if he showed that kind of interest in all new assistant professors. I suspect he did. But true to his style, he did it in such a natural and unpretentious way that no one really noticed.

David worked closely with Michael Lauderdale for many years utilizing the resources of Title XX funding and the school’s established Continuing Education Program to create the school’s research center and extend the scholarship and service of the school across The University of Texas at Austin, within the state, and throughout the Southwest. David was witness to many of the great forces that shaped social work and social work education. He came from a family tradition of service and reached adulthood in the Great Depression and served in World War II. He participated in the process of social work moving from a personal calling to professional preparation through the doctorate and growth of publically-funded efforts to address problems of social welfare. David left an enduring mark in social work education and is remembered fondly by faculty colleagues, former students, and many citizens in Texas.
This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Michael Lauderdale (chair), Calvin Streeter, and Clay Shorkey.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Social Work, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on March 26, 2009. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.