DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
GORDON A. BENNETT

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Gordon A. Bennett, associate professor, government and Asian studies, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
GORDON A. BENNETT

Gordon Anderson Bennett died on May 11, 2007, at the age of 67. At the time of his passing, he was an associate professor of government and Asian studies and had just completed his first year of phased retirement.

Gordon was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 1, 1940, and perhaps it was the coincidence of his arrival on April Fools’ Day that accounted for his unflaggingly cheerful disposition and the permanent twinkle in his eyes. Bennett earned an M.S. (1964) and a Ph.D. (1973) in political science from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. After a short stint as a research fellow at the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, he joined the faculty of the Department of Government at The University of Texas at Austin in 1971 and remained in Austin for the rest of his career. He was granted tenure in 1976.

Bennett’s scholarly interests encompassed the entire Asian region, but he devoted special emphasis to China and Japan. He completed his graduate training in an era when China was closed to Western researchers. He compensated for this in a variety of ways. He lived in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1965-66 and in Hong Kong in 1967-69 and 1975 by virtue of Fulbright-Hays and National Science Foundation Fellowships. There he developed fluency in Chinese. He acquired his Japanese language skills during two summers in Tokyo in 1972 and 1975. After China opened, he visited the People’s Republic three times (1976, 1980, and 1985).

While in Hong Kong, Bennett became acquainted with a Chinese national who had been active in the Cultural Revolution that swept the country from 1966-69. Working with Robert Montaperto, Bennett oversaw the writing of an extensive diary of this individual’s activities. Supplemented by interviews and documentary evidence, this work appeared in 1971 as Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-Ai. A review of the volume in Time Magazine observed that, “it succeeds far better than anything yet published in transforming that frightening mass of unhinged automatons into boys and girls with human faces.” The scholar James R. Townsend called it “the best single volume for bringing out the complex character of the Red Guard movement during the Cultural Revolution.” Bennett’s other major publications include Yundong: Mass Campaigns in Chinese Communist Leadership (1976), China’s Finance and Trade: A Policy Reader (1978), and Huadong: The Story of a Chinese People’s Commune (1978).

Gordon’s impact on Asian Studies at the University was as much a function of his teaching and professional associations as from his scholarship. He regularly offered courses on Chinese and Japanese Politics, East Asian International Relations, and Introduction to Comparative Politics. Later in his career, he turned a citizen’s passion for the environment into regular offerings on international and domestic environmental politics. Outside the classroom, Gordon was a tireless promoter of Asian studies and, more generally, understanding between East and West. He held the post of undergraduate adviser in Asian Studies, lobbied the UT library to upgrade its holdings of Chinese language materials, sponsored legions of Asian visitors on campus, was the director of the Texas Program for Educational Resources on Asia, and served for years on the Board of Directors of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations.
Gordon was a wonderfully generous and innovative colleague. Dozens of his friends were the regular recipients of clippings he gathered from his wide reading in the periodical literature. He seemed to know exactly what everyone was working on and what they might find helpful. Among the very first of his peers to adapt to the computer age, Gordon was for many years the government department’s faculty director for computer services. His personal web site became a resource for colleagues and students at the University and beyond. Gordon also incorporated the internet into his classrooms long before it was command practice. For many years, he served as the government department’s liaison with the Measurement and Evaluation Center and in that role was responsible for developing examination for credit for the legislatively mandated six hours of lower-division government.

For all his dedication to the University and to scholarship, the core of Gordon’s life was found in his family and neighborhood. Gordon was married to Karen Elaine Whitley, and they had two daughters, Meaghan born in 1983 and Anna Claire born in 1986. Those of us who knew Gordon in the years between his early first marriage and his life with Karen can testify to the joy and contentment he found in domesticity. Gordon emerged as a leader in his community, serving as president of the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association, creator and manager of the Association’s listserv and web site, and a member of the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport Redevelopment Goals and Process Task Force. Indeed, it is probably no exaggeration to claim that Gordon had as much to do with moving the city airport to its new Bergstrom location as anyone else. It was testimony to his modest and unassuming manner that few of his colleagues appreciated the extent of Gordon’s celebrity in the milieu of Austin neighborhood activism.

In his last years, Gordon suffered a number of serious physical setbacks. Months of onerous rehabilitation were required before he was able to return to the classroom after a 2002 stroke. Complications from diabetes contributed to his reluctant decision to enter phased retirement in 2006. Illness prevented his completing a major project on political legitimacy on which he had been laboring for many years and which he intended to be his magnum opus. Publication would have assured his promotion to full professor, a rank he richly deserved on all other grounds. Through all these tribulations, Gordon soldiered on, never complaining and never asking for special consideration. He never refused any assignment he was offered and right up to the end passed along spontaneous memos laying out his ideas about undergraduate and graduate education, the best format for graduate exams, and other matters that piqued his interest.

Gordon carved out a unique and important niche for himself in his scholarly profession, at the University, and in his community. By his profound intellectual curiosity, his genial manner, his devotion to teaching and to the University, his commitment to active citizenship, his deep affection for his family and friends, and his inspiring endurance in the face of serious illness, Gordon served as a challenging and admirable role model to all who had the honor of knowing him.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Gary P. Freeman (chair), David F. Prindle, and Yvonne Chang.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on November 13, 2008. 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/.