IN MEMORIAM

MARLAN BLISSETT

Marlan Blissett, Professor in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, died June 10, 1989. Born in Paris, Texas, on July 24, 1938, he obtained elementary and secondary education in the Paris public schools and then received the B.A. degree from Texas Technological University in 1960, the M.A. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1963, and the Ph.D. (in government) at the University of Texas in 1969. At Berkeley, he concentrated on political philosophy, studying under such then or future luminaries as Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., John H. Schaar, and Sheldon Wolin, for the last of whom he felt a lifetime of indebtedness and affection. At the University of Texas, he continued the study of political theory with Benjamin F. Wright, Jr., and Malcolm Macdonald, studied international relations with James Roach and David Edwards, but concentrated on American government with O. Douglas Weeks and Emmette Redford.

During the years of graduate study, Blissett taught at Texas Technological University (Instructor, 1961-63), Angelo State College (Instructor, 1964-65), University of Nebraska (Visiting Assistant Professor, fall 1968), and Purdue University (Assistant Professor, spring 1969). He remained at Purdue after receiving his doctorate and became, in 1970, Acting Director of its program in Science and Public Affairs.

After 1970, Blissett's professional life developed at the LBJ School, and after the breakdown of his marriage, many of his personal associations as well. Even as the School was founded in 1970, he served as consultant to the dean on its program, and
he joined its faculty as an assistant professor in 1971. Among a group of about a
dozen, he engaged in the numerous, lengthy, often contentious dialogues over the
nature and content of a curriculum for a public affairs school. It was a period of
transition away from concentration on the narrower focus of public administration to
policy study and of replanning in a number of the leading public policy schools, and
the LBJ deans and faculty stepped into the trend with enthusiasm and a spirit of
innovation. It was a challenge for Blissett's inventive spirit and tireless energy. To the
concept of a course on "Freedom, Power, and Responsibility," he responded with a
seminar that combined political philosophy with a case study of the Pentagon Papers.
To the idea that the core courses should be developed collaboratively and
interdisciplinarily, he became the center of efforts to establish what became the core
sequences in Policy Development and Public Administration and Management, both
of which emphasized the parallel contributions of different disciplines to the study of
public affairs. In those first years and later, Blissett served on every standing
administrative committee of the LBJ School, always infusing imagination and
energetic effort.

There was a fresh approach year to year in his section of Public Administration and
Management (he earned a perfect 4.0 rating from his students the last time he taught
the course), but his fullest contribution was in his participation in the School's most
innovative teaching vehicle, the Policy Research Project. For eighteen years, Blissett—
often with the collaboration of one or two others—managed one of these faculty/student
and client-oriented projects. Along with Professors Jurgen Schmandt and David
Warner, he summarized his experiences with policy research projects in an article
published in Policy Analysis, arguing that these nine-month courses served as
analogues to clinical education. There is, to date, probably no other LBJ faculty member who has conducted as many Policy Research Projects as Marlan Blissett.

With Professor Stephen Spurr he developed a focus on energy policy at the LBJ School, and with Professors Jurgen Schmandt and, later, Susan Hadden, an interdisciplinary focus on science policy, politics, and management. His interest in the intersection of these areas began with his doctoral dissertation entitled *Politics and Science* and published in 1972. This study advanced the thesis that scientific decision making was characterized by a political process in which "political techniques" were utilized "in focusing and coordinating research", and in which external "politics of power may ultimately define the institutional arrangements under which scientific work is established."

Blissett's publications included only one within the field of his disciplinary study—political theory and public administration. A book (with Emmette S. Redford) entitled *Organizing the Executive Branch: The Johnson Presidency* was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1981. But this was only a diversion from the primary interdisciplinary focus of his research. In the mainstream of his own work, he was essentially seeking frameworks of analysis that would prove useful in a variety of applied policy settings. Typical of this adventuresome thinking was the book he edited on *Environmental Impact Assessment*, published by the Engineering Foundation in 1976, in which he analyzed techniques for evaluating policy implementation. His articles and research papers dealt primarily with energy policy, but also reflected the interests he had developed in technology assessment and the politics of science. In parallel with this, he organized a national conference on environmental impact...
statements, authored a bill on energy budgets for state buildings, served on the Lignite Task Force of the Texas Energy Advisory Committee, and was executive producer of a color documentary on alternatives to nuclear power.

Toward the end of his career, Blissett devoted his energy in teaching and research to demonstrating how techniques of decision making and analysis are related and coordinated in large complex structures. Such structures include professional societies, scientific disciplines, public research foundations, units of state and local governments, and the entire executive branch. And, his continued interest in energy problems resulted in the development of innovative teaching materials in international energy, including country and regional profiles, estimates of global resources and demands, and analyses of political and economic factors that affect major energy systems.

Marlan Blissett was a first-class writer—a master of clear, concise, and engaging prose. But his dedication to clarity of expression went beyond the mere felicitous communication of ideas. He was profoundly concerned with bridging the purely disciplinary perspectives that so often characterize policy studies. To Marlan, policy analysis simply was not interesting if it failed to be interdisciplinary. He appreciated the engineer’s "can-do" ethos, the political scientist’s understanding of political realities, the sociologist’s sensitivity to organizations and institutions, and the artist’s eye for graceful execution.

Many of Marlan’s colleagues fondly recall the informal faculty get-togethers he organized on alternate Fridays where discussions could range from current events to
cognitive psychology to nuclear physics. An avid fan of collective brainstorming, Marlan would dutifully write up the key points of the discussion and circulate them among the participants who were frequently amazed in retrospect at the range, and yet coherence, of the topics.

Marlan Blissett was a straight-shooting, irreverent, and even curmudgeonly person who provoked thought and took deep satisfaction in a good argument. He was also a warm, caring person. While he may not have opened up to everybody, he reached out to a number of colleagues, and especially students, and touched their lives profoundly in an individual way (it was not uncommon, for example, for Marlan to carry an extra load of four or five directed reading courses).

Yet, perhaps the most enduring memories of those who knew him best have to do with his fierce pride in the state in which he was born, the university from which he received his Ph.D., and the school that he devoted so much energy to develop. These were three loves of his life. And woe to the sinner who would make unkind remarks about any one of them in Marlan's presence. Moreover, despite the failure of his marriage and a loneliness that most recognized but few understood, he also was intensely loyal to those he considered friends: more than once he would lend (or more likely, spend) his last "peso" on buddies, forego a weekend to help someone move, or spend endless hours patiently listening to the grievances of others. His mark on the LBJ School and on those who knew him was significant.
This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Emmette Redford (Chair), Leigh Boske, and Chandler Stolp.
Bibliography

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