The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for David J. DeLaura, professor, English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
DAVID J. DELAURA

“With regard to excellence, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it.” Aristotle’s famous and stringent words in the *Nichomachean Ethics* come decisively to mind as a tribute to David J. DeLaura. His life was exemplary of what it means both to know excellence and to use it. David’s dedication to all the human excellences was at once astonishing and inspiring. Moreover, he displayed this dedication as much in his ebullient good humor as in his subtle writing, as much in the immense delight he took in other people as in his acute perceptions about the texts he taught, and as much in his indefatigable curiosity about the world around him as in his remarkable moral energy he brought to the many phases of his professional life. David used his excellence in pursuit of his own goals, and he used it, marvelously, to the advantage of the innumerable people whose lives he so dramatically influenced.

David was born in Worcester, Massachusetts on November 19, 1930, the son of Louis and Helen DeLaura, a family with roots in the community of Portuguese immigrants who settled in the New England area. He died suddenly in Lisbon, in the country of his forebears, on April 9, 2005. Somber though it is, David would have appreciated this symmetry.

David DeLaura belonged to a generation of professors who initiated profound changes in American university life beginning in the early nineteen-sixties. Having taken his A.B. (1955) and his M.A. (1958) at Boston College, he went on to do his doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin, one of the crucial sites of the impending academic transformation. He received his Ph.D. in English in 1960. From Madison he came directly to Austin to take up the position of instructor in English at the University. A sign of David’s phenomenal success is indicated by the fact that he was a full professor by 1968. His colleagues at the University, like his colleagues in the profession at large, realized from a very early stage that David, as a teacher, a scholar, and a leader, was doing extraordinary work. In less than a decade, David had become a key figure among the literary scholars of his generation as well as a key figure in helping to implement much needed institutional reforms at The University of Texas. Many faculty will recall the powerful leadership that David exercised in his department and through his service on the Faculty Senate and the University Council, as well as in his positions on both presidential and vice presidential search committees. He was a voice of steady persuasion and unflinching courage as the University community struggled, often tumultuously, to create more openness, more inclusiveness, and more defined responsibility in its governing procedures and in its academic life.

Perhaps the greatest example of the esteem in which David was held by his colleagues occurred when he was asked to represent the faculty in their virtually unanimous opposition to the Regents’ high-handed determination to dismember the College of Arts and Sciences. Despite David’s gallant efforts, the faculty lost this battle, but the creation of the College of Liberal Arts some twenty or so years later was a tacit validation of the faculty’s position. A more immediate success was the establishment of a departmental executive committee, a governing body that replaced the old-style, autocratic budget committee. David was at the center of the movement that produced this change, which became a model for other departments, and he used his growing academic prestige as leverage in its cause. Moreover, David’s commitment to the excellence of the University, while extending to some of the most urgent issues of the day, also included his ready shouldering of the most basic tasks of the profession. He chaired the Freshman English Committee, served on multiple recruitment committees, directed a
host of honors theses, and every year gave what became a legendary talk to incoming graduate students on the topic of understanding “the pattern of their conversion to English studies.”

David began his scholarly career just as a vital new appreciation of interdisciplinary Victorian scholarship in Anglo-American historical research and literary criticism had begun. David caught the spirit of this emergent inquiry, knew the questions to ask, trained his always penetrating eye on the materials coming to light, and quickly became a preeminent force in the field. Indeed, a fair case could be made, given the enormous influence of his published work, the stimulus he provided to other scholars through a stream of correspondence, professional meetings, and ever-expanding consultations with influential boards, presses, and foundations, that David was the dominant shaper of Victorian studies in his time.

The centerpiece of his scholarly work is *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (1969). Taking as his focus the pervasive conflict between moral and aesthetic consciousness in the nineteenth century, David used the tangled issues articulated in the major books of all three figures to open up a supremely illuminating account of how the “religious problems of the Victorian period centrally affected [its] evolving humanistic syntheses.” The book, as scholars have always recognized, is much more than a study of three writers. David essentially re-wrote the intellectual history of the period by identifying a prolonged, complicated, contentious, and often disguised conversation going on among “the Victorian sages,” who were constantly shaping and re-shaping their texts in sinuous debate with one another. The method of the book is nearly as important as its subject. Through application of what one reviewer called David’s extraordinary “textological ear,” which enabled him to discover a whole network of verbal echoes, reprises, and resistances in the works he probed, modern scholars could for the first time read the Victorian texts as though they were present at the original conversation. Moreover, David applied both this method and his richly detailed knowledge of a host of Victorian writers to map, lucidly and incisively, a long obscured set of nineteenth-century literary sub-cultures that exerted crucial influence at pivotal moments in the period’s cultural history. Two salient examples are “The Poetry of Thought” (1976) and “The Context of Browning’s Painter Poems: Aesthetics, Polemics, Historics” (1980).

David authored some of the most important critical essays ever written on Victorian literature and cultural history. Remarkably, while still an assistant professor, David was awarded the first annual William R. Parker prize for the year’s outstanding contribution to the *PMLA*, the premier journal in the field of literary studies. This was his 1964 study of “Arnold and Carlyle.” Over the years there followed a succession of groundbreaking articles and book-chapters including, “‘The Ache of Modernism’ in Hardy’s Later Novels” (1967), “Ishmael as Prophet: *Heroes and Hero-Worship* and the Self-Expressive Basis of Carlyle’s Art” (1969), and “Matthew Arnold and the Nightmare of History” (1972). David began to examine, later in his career, the connections between the concept of *Bildung* in German Romanticism and Victorian ideas of culture. He wrote prolifically on this subject as in “Heroic Egotism and the Fortunes of *Bildung* in Victorian England” (1984), all the while maintaining his elegant scholarship on the intellectual and biographical contexts that shaped the themes, conflicts, nuances, and even the vocabulary of nineteenth-century literature. It is a great misfortune that David never collected his immensely influential essays since they continue to be powerful and illuminating resources.

In 1974 David was appointed Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities and Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. Friends, colleagues and administrators at The University of Texas made a great effort to keep him in Austin. Though David struggled with his difficult decision, he very much wanted new challenges. David charged into his new position with his customary energy and dedication. From 1985-1990, he served as chair of the English department (and later as University Ombudsman). One of his colleagues at Penn has said that “as department chair and Ombudsman, his patience proved limitless, and his capacity to come to our aid in times of need had no boundaries.” He retired from Penn in 1999.

Always a great teacher, David was awarded both the Mortarboard Award for teaching and the Ira Abrams Award, the University of Pennsylvania’s highest teaching prize. This public recognition of David’s performance in the classroom mirrors the abiding gratitude that hundreds of his students and dozens of his professional colleagues have expressed in response to the generosity of his guidance and support over the years. Professor Vicki Mahaffey, who was both student and colleague, speaks for them: “David was my undergraduate teacher at Texas when I was there; I have known him since I was 19, and it was wonderful to have him as a colleague at Penn. I loved and admired him.” Yet another dimension of David’s buoyant collegiality, personal charm, and
warm humanity is reflected in the many accounts—often by virtual strangers—of his communal and caring spirit. In a typical reminiscence, Thierry Vourdon, a French school teacher who met David at a 1979 conference on Walter Pater, writes: “I just hope people will remember what a wonderful person he was. ... I happened to sit next to him for a dinner, and his kindness, humour, and patience (towards a young French naïve student so delighted to be able to chat with a Professor) made an impression that lasts to this day.”

David’s memory is dearest, of course, to his beloved wife of forty-four years, the former Ann Beloate, whom he married in Austin, to his children, Michael, Catherine, and William in whom he took such pride, and his grandchildren, Matthew and Caroline, who were the delight of his last years. We at The University of Texas can only extend our deepest sympathy to his family. They knew him, as did his friends, colleagues, and students, as someone who gave life to the present just as his brilliant scholarship gave life to the past. What man could do more?

Frater, ave atque vale.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors John P. Farrell (chair), Jerome Bump, and Betty Sue Flowers.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on September 8, 2005. 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/.
David J. DeLaura: Selected Publications


