The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Alvin A. Nickel, professor emeritus, art and art history, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
ALVIN A. NICKEL

Alvin Albert Nickel, professor emeritus in the Department of Art and Art History, died at his home on August 27, 2011. He was born March 8, 1926, in Winneconne, Wisconsin, the son of Ralph and Nellie Nickel. After graduating from Winneconne High School in 1944, he was accepted at the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) receiving a B.A.E. in 1952 and an M.A.E. in 1960. During this time, he received the Daniel Vandergrift Award. He served as crafts director for the U.S. Government in Germany, traveling throughout Europe, documenting the art and design of museums and galleries in Germany, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, France, and England. This was followed by work as a designer for the Container Corporation of America and Marshall Field and Company of Chicago.

His interest in art education began at the SAIC Junior School, where he taught children’s classes in art. This was followed by teaching at the Elgin Community College, Elgin, Illinois, Larsen Jr. High, Elgin, Illinois, and the SAIC Young Artist Studio.

In 1960, he was hired by The University of Texas at Austin to teach art education and fabric design, especially batik and other fabric printing techniques. His special knowledge of Indonesian batik processes quickly positioned him as an authority, and his classes became essential for design students, not only within the art department, but from other related disciplines as well. What made his knowledge so special was his enthusiastic, and frequently hazardous, search for the actual sources of these ancient techniques and the artists and cultures that produced them. Never content with merely researching a topic through books alone, he was determined to experience first-hand how these fabrics were made and designed and how the culture influenced their production. Whether traveling in a dugout canoe to reach a remote village to see a special printing or weaving process or locating artists specializing in unusual techniques, he brought all this invaluable knowledge back to his students.

He also made use of this specialized knowledge in his own work, which frequently took the form of powerful nine-foot-long wall hangings. Rejecting pre-drawing, he worked directly on the fabric with a brush. Batik, a very difficult and unforgiving art form, requiring the application of hot wax to fabric to block the later application of various dyes, requires patience and forethought to a high degree, taking years to master. An article about Nickel’s work in Designers West commented on the forceful and distinct nature of his designs, making use of archaic and iconic symbols such as the sun and geometric shapes. His works were represented in numerous exhibitions, including the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Tucson Art Center, the Museum West, San Francisco, and the Dallas Museum of Art. His art was also published in The Creative Eye (Fearing, Martin, Beard), Art and the Creative Teacher (Fearing, Beard, Krevitsky), Contemporary Batik and Tie Dye (Meilach), and Art and Artisan (Designers West).

There is little doubt that teaching was his special gift, and he will be remembered by his students and colleagues as the most caring and giving of individuals. There was never a request for help made of him from student or
colleague he did not try his best to fulfill. He will be sorely missed for his perennial good humor and companionship.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Rebecca Brooks (chair) and Jarvis Ulbricht.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Fine Arts on August 23, 2012, and posted under “Memorials” at http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.