REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR JACK OTIS

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Jack Otis, professor emeritus and former dean, social work, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
JACK OTIS

Dr. Jack Otis, a former dean of the School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin, died at his family’s home in Nevada City, California, on January 5, 2010, at the age of eighty-six. After retiring in 1993, Jack and his wife Patty traveled extensively, visiting China, Tibet, Thailand, Bali, Argentina, Russia, Norway, and many other countries.

Jack was born in Brooklyn, New York, where his immigrant father, Abraham Osipowitz, and his mother, Esther Goldberg, owned a delicatessen. His parents immigrated to the United States from Antipolia, Poland.

Dr. Otis served as a combat engineer in Japan during World War II. He attended Brooklyn College and received advanced degrees from the University of Illinois, Urbana. Jack chose social work as a profession as he felt it was the best way he could directly help people, and, therefore, his first emphasis was clinical social work. After more experience, Jack realized that there were broad problems that needed attention if a person wanted to do good in the world. This fostered Jack’s interest in broader social problems and social policies that would provide help to a larger number of people. He served as a consultant from 1961 to 1965 to the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, chaired by U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. He was deputy director of the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development during the Kennedy administration.

Jack joined the faculty at the School of Social Work in 1965, as its third dean. He was dean of the School of Social Work from 1965 to 1977 and professor from 1978 to 1993. During his twenty-eight years at the University, he transformed the School of Social Work from a small fledgling M.S.S.W. program to a nationally-recognized educational program with bachelors, masters, and Ph.D. programs, as well as the Center for Social Work Research, Learning Resource Center, and the Continuing Education Center for Professional Development. Jack worked effectively with the University and with the Council on Social Work Education to build academic programs at all levels that exceeded national standards.

Dr. Otis was instrumental in establishing national standards for the accreditation of undergraduate social work education. For several years, he was a site visitor and member of the Council on Social Work Education Commission on Accreditation. His publications include “Business Civilization and The Family” and “Corporate Society and Education.” His definition of child labor is published in the Encyclopedia of Social Work. Reviewing his accomplishments, Dean Barbara White said, “His intellect, creative vision, and leadership created the foundation for future achievement of the School of Social Work.” When asked his opinion of what America needed to do to continue to be great, Dr. Otis replied,

America needs to live up to its early ideals that inspired so many people to come to this country who were oppressed and poverty stricken and came to live a better life — that, to me is the meaning we should continue to have and be a model for what freedom means by not only how we treat people from other countries but also how we treat our own people.

Dean White recalled that “Dr. Otis continued to support the school and its students up to the time of his passing. His contributions will always be recognized and his memory cherished.” In 2007, Dean Otis created the
school’s Social Problem and Social Policy Lecture series, which has featured such speakers as Mark A. Potok, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Intelligence Project. Potok’s talk on hate crimes drew a large crowd to the University as did the inaugural lecture on drug legalization by Jack A Cole of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition. The third lecture tentatively scheduled for the fall of 2010 will be on climate change, a topic about which Dr. Otis felt passionately. Prior to the lecture series, Dr. Otis sponsored student policy paper awards.

A colleague, Diana DiNitto remembers Jack:

as an individual committed to social policy and change to achieve America’s ideals of social and economic justice. The Dean Jack Otis Social Problems and Social Policy Lecture Series will stand as a tribute to the legacy Dr. Otis leaves for the School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin, and social workers and all others who value true democratic ideals, especially opportunity for all.

Another colleague, State Rep. Elliott Naishtat, a former student of Dr. Otis, was greatly influenced by Dean Otis. He recalls:

Over the years, Jack Otis mentored countless social work graduate and undergraduate students, including me. He taught us all aspects of social policy formulation, focusing on the need for all social work practitioners, regardless of their concentrations in direct services or policy and planning, to be prepared and willing to enter the arena of social policy development, implementation, and evaluation. He emphasized the importance of this type of involvement at the city, county, state, and national governmental levels. Jack Otis was largely responsible for the career path I chose. But for this highly intelligent, dedicated, concerned, caring, and visionary professor, dean, and public servant, it is unlikely I would be serving in my 10th term as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, focusing my attention on health and human services, and the needs of low-income families, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and all vulnerable populations. We all owe Professor Jack Otis a debt of gratitude.

Jim Schwab, another former student and colleague, recalled:

While I eventually became a colleague of Jack’s in the School of Social Work, I also had the opportunity to have him as the instructor for my first social policy course as a student in the M.S.S.W. program. Dr. Otis introduced diverse perspectives on ways to think about social policy that expanded the course beyond the historical perspectives on social programs and social welfare. Dr. Otis was a demanding and exacting thinker who offered an experience I have never forgotten.

Dean Jack Otis had a profound, positive influence on the development of the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin, taking it from a small graduate program to a school with a full range of academic programs, research, and training units. His mark on the school, the social work profession, colleagues, and students will remain an ongoing tribute to his memory.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Clayton Shorkey (chair), Diana DiNitto, and James Schwab.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Social Work, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on June 4, 2010. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.