IN MEMORIAM
DAVID THEODORE SISTO

David Theodore Sisto, who was a faculty member of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for 21 years, died in Round Rock, Texas, on November 13, 1998.

Professor Sisto was born in White Cloud, Kansas, in 1910. He attended high school and junior college in Paris, Texas. He came to The University of Texas at Austin in 1928 and received his BA in June of 1930, majoring in Spanish and German. He began teaching Spanish at Spur High School in Spur, Texas, in 1930, a position he remained in until 1942. During this time, he completed all of the course work for his MA by attending summer school at UT for four consecutive years, 1930-33. The MA was awarded in August of 1933. He spent the summer of 1936 at Texas Tech University in Lubbock collaborating on the preparation of *Course of Study in Spanish for Texas Secondary Schools*, which was published in booklet form by the Texas State Department of Education.

From 1942 to 1944, Dr. Sisto worked at the U.S. Office of Censorship in San Antonio and Fort Worth. He served as a translator-examiner in Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese. He returned to high school teaching in 1944. He taught Spanish at Orange High School in Orange, Texas, until 1946, when he enrolled in the graduate program in the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Iowa.

Dr. Sisto received his PhD from the University of Iowa in February of 1952. His dissertation focused on character analysis in the works of the Uruguayan novelist Carlos Reyles and was directed by Professor E. K. Mapes, an early authority on Spanish American literature. During his seven years at Iowa, Professor Sisto taught both Spanish and Portuguese. In addition, he supervised the beginning spoken Spanish courses.

In 1954, Dr. Sisto applied for a faculty position at The University of Texas at Austin. Professor Mapes, in his letter of recommendation, stated that Professor Sisto was “a good teacher and a productive scholar of considerable promise.” He added, “Mr. Sisto is particularly to be recommended from the standpoint of character and personality.” Professor E. W. Ringo wrote: “I am glad to recommend him as an excellent teacher, very competent in organizing his materials, and in guiding teachers and informants under his direction. He commands the respect of his students, and shows great patience and understanding when dealing with the student who needs his personal attention.” Professor Ringo also praised Professor Sisto’s character: “David Sisto is a man of sterling character, quiet, but firm in his convictions, absolutely dependable in the execution of tasks assigned to him and willing to take suggestions of a constructive character. I have found it a pleasure to work with him.” He joined the faculty of the UT Department of Romance Languages and Literatures as an assistant professor in September of 1954.

Professor Sisto brought to UT his keen interest in language acquisition, as evidenced by his subsequent scholarship in that field and by his career-long dedication to the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese language courses. His classes were always well attended, so during the many semesters in which he taught three language courses he would have regular contact with some ninety students. An immediate benefit of his interest and expertise in this area was the revision of the first semester course undertaken by Professor Sisto soon after his arrival in Austin. As part of this process he created new recording material for classroom listening drills and for the language laboratory. As chair of the Spanish language course committee from 1956 to 1958, Professor Sisto was charged with formulating and implementing the aims and objectives for the first two years of Spanish at UT. After his promotion to associate professor, Professor Sisto elected to teach an introductory course on early
Spanish American literature, a field that included the gaucho literature on which he focused his scholarly attention. Professor Sisto also regularly taught an advanced Spanish grammar writing course that still serves as a demanding introduction to the Spanish major. Nevertheless, during his time at UT Professor Sisto continued to teach Spanish and Portuguese language courses, applying his expertise and skill in classes filled to capacity.

Dr. Sisto’s research interests were varied and his contributions were important to the early development of the field of Spanish American literature in the 1950s and 1960s. He published several articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish American fiction, focusing throughout his career on the works of Venezuelan author Rómulo Gallegos, Uruguayan novelist Carlos Reyles, and the gaucho fiction of Argentina, including, first and foremost José Hernández’s poetic masterpiece, *Martín Fierro*. His studies often were comparative in nature, discussing common influences in Spanish American and English romanticism, discovering philosophical and literary affinities between Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós and Gallegos, and tracing source material from Renaissance Spanish fiction to the modern novel in South America. His articles were published in some of the finest journals in the field, including *Hispania, Revista Iberoamericana, Symposium, Romance Notes*, and *The Modern Language Journal*. He was a frequent contributor to encyclopedias and an active reviewer of books on Spanish and Spanish American literature. Dr. Sisto also published many studies in the field of Spanish language pedagogy during his career, including essays on the sequence of skills in language learning, reading tests, aural testing, and grammar for beginning students. He reviewed several Spanish language textbooks and developed pedagogical materials for use at The University of Texas.

One semester after his arrival in Austin, Professor Sisto was appointed supervisor of Spanish 406, an opportunity he used to rebuild and revise the entire course, including the creation of new recording material for listening drills. He also served as the chair of the placement test committee. Additional departmental duties included service as acting chair for the summers of 1960 and 1961, executive departmental secretary (1960-61), and faculty departmental secretary (1962-64). Outside the department he served as counselor in the Student Division of the Office of the Dean (1968-69), an experience that allowed him to perform undergraduate advising (1972-74).

Dr. Sisto was a member of many professional organizations, including the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). He was a member of the hospitality committee when the annual meeting was held in Dallas in 1958. In 1969, he served as vice president and program chair for the Texas chapter. He was a member of Sigma Delta Pi, the National Spanish Honor Society, serving as a member of the awards committee in 1958. He also belonged to the Modern Language Association, the American Association of University Professors, and the Texas State Teachers Association. His biography appeared for several years during the 1960s and 1970s in the *Directory of American Scholars*, the *National Directory of Latin Americanists, Dictionary of International Biography, Who’s Who in the South and Southwest*, and *Who’s Who in American Education*.

In April of 1942 Professor Sisto married the former Polly Clemmons. Their son Anthony (Tony) was born in 1947. The professors and colleagues at Iowa held Mrs. Sisto in the same high esteem they held her husband and mentioned her in their letters of recommendation. C. E. Cousins, who was professor emeritus at the time, said, “Mrs. Sisto is an exceptionally fine woman. . . . We shall regret losing both . . . .” Professor Ringo characterized the couple as “good citizens who take an active part in the life of the university and the community. They are friendly people who enjoy making new contacts.” Professor Mapes wrote, “He and his wife are among the finest young people who have been connected with the department in recent years.” In Austin, Mrs. Sisto ran a well-respected nursery school for many years. She died in 1980.

Professor and Mrs. Sisto loved traveling to and camping in the national parks, an activity they continued to enjoy after Professor Sisto retired from the University in 1975. It is not surprising that their son Tony went on to become a park ranger with the National Park Service.

Professor Sisto is survived by his son Tony and his niece Mary Jo Hindman.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Madeline Sutherland-Meier (chair), Matthew Bailey, and Cory Reed.