The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Joseph “Joe” E. Slate, associate professor, College of Liberal Arts, Department of English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Dean P. Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
JOSEPH “JOE” E. SLATE

Joseph “Joe” Evans Slate, associate professor of English, died on July 16, 2014, at the age of eighty-six after a short illness. Joe joined the Department of English at The University of Texas at Austin in 1959, where he taught for forty-five years until his retirement in 2004. A specialist in literary modernism, Joe’s teaching and research focused on the poet William Carlos Williams and on the author James Joyce. Over the years, Joe taught courses on modernist novels, poetry, and short stories. His published works include essays on Williams, Joyce, and the poet Hart Crane.

Additionally, Joe began teaching English courses on cinematic adaptions of literary works in the 1960s. An avid enthusiast of film, Joe was the original faculty sponsor of The University of Texas at Austin student film club. Many students and friends watched films at his central Austin home and enjoyed the trivia games he dreamed up, like the Anthony Quinn name-his-race contest. Many remember Joe's fancifully decorated office door at Calhoun Hall, behind which mountains of books barely left room for his desk and the student he was advising.

Don Graham, a former graduate student of Joe’s and currently J. Frank Dobie Regents’ Professor of English and American Literature here at UT Austin, described the powerful influence of Joe’s teaching. Graham stated:

I took a graduate course in Modern American Poetry under Joe Slate back in the late ‘60s. He knew everything there was to know about Modernism, and his reading of poems like “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” was absolutely brilliant. Under his guidance I published my first scholarly study in an academic journal. It was on Ezra Pound, and I would never have written it without Joe’s guidance. He was very supportive of graduate students, and I will always remember him for his sense of humor combined with a keen intellect and a sense of intellectual curiosity. There were also many great parties held at his home, accompanied by wonderful food and drink. Joe Slate was one of the good ones. He will be missed.

Other former students have described with similar enthusiasm and gratitude the enormous impact that Joe Slate had on their lives, together with his brilliance as a literary scholar, teacher and mentor.

In 1972, Joe married Patricia Bauer, future co-founder and longtime proprietor of Sweetish Hill Restaurant and Bakery. Together the two had a significant impact on the food scene in Austin for many decades. An enthusiastic and intrepid cook, Joe helped Patricia to develop new menus for the restaurant and to introduce Austinites to an expansive variety of cuisines. In Sweetish Hill’s locations, Joe’s was a familiar face—as greeter, caterer, preparer of the world’s best-smoked salmon, and always its greatest fan. Joe and Patricia opened their home frequently for food events.

Joe was gifted with a range of artistic skills—sketching for pleasure, illustrating books of poetry, or gifting his
unusual cork artifacts. He possessed a fine tenor voice—heard from the lectern or in the late hours of parties. He was an avid gardener as well as a talented forager, able to sort tasty mushrooms from the treacherous and locate edibles growing in the cracks of the sidewalk. Joe's cultural tastes were his alone. In music, he loved both classical opera and classic Austin. One of the last songs he requested by name was Jerry Jeff Walker's version of "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother." He was a grand-even heroic-walker, and never held a driver's license.

Born on New Year's Eve, 1927 in Lubbock, Texas, Joe lived on the family farm in Amherst until a move to Oklahoma City in 1936. He served in the U. S. Army from 1944 to 1945, studying Japanese in the Army Specialized Training Language Program in Minnesota. Joe earned a B.A. in English with minors in German and Japanese in 1949 and an M.A. in English in 1952 from the University of Oklahoma. He received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1957. Joe's academic experiences were greatly broadened through two Fulbright teaching fellowships: the first at the University of Vienna during 1973-74 and the second at the University of Montpellier in 1994-95.

Although Joe officially retired in 2004, he continued to teach others about his love of poetry for another decade. His “last student” was fifteen-year-old Madison Barchas, daughter of a colleague in the English department. Every Friday afternoon of Joe’s final year, Madison stopped by to read aloud to him—because by then Joe had lost the cherished ability to read. While there must have been a few initial sessions in which Madison actually did read aloud to Joe from books, his instinct to lecture surfaced in the presence of a young person, prompting animated reflections about William Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson. “I was only a freshman in high school but Joe addressed me as if I were a real university student of his. So instead of reading to him, I would listen to his lectures. I would then walk home carrying borrowed volumes of poetry—my ‘homework’ for Professor Joe. I loved our weekly sessions, in which he bestowed upon me the gift of poetry over and over again.” At the memorial service, Madison (identified in the program simply as “Joe’s last student”) read a favorite Emily Dickinson poem from a volume that Joe had given to her.

James Kelman, Scottish Man Booker prize-winning author and a dear friend of Joe’s, wrote the following tribute:

A number of western heroes have emerged from Lubbock, Texas. I see Joe Slate as one. He embodied that better side of the state, too often missing in the stereotype. While he took pleasure in local matters cultural and historical, it was from an utterly unparochial and cosmopolitan perspective. He was never afraid of being an intellectual or being seen to love art. He had a specialist’s knowledge not only of James Joyce and W. Carlos Williams but Cisco Kid and Pancho, and a majority of the movie novelizations ever written. The bulk of the latter were unreadable, according to Joe, although he had read them all. And been obliged to, I would say, otherwise on whose authority could he have made the judgment!

I have a strong image of him in the old house on Highland Avenue, smoking a salmon for one of Patricia’s nights, maybe a “pot luck.” There wasn’t all that much talking; partly why I found his company relaxing. If one had nothing to say then respect the silence. While I replenished the red wine Joe smoked the fish. I think he did anyway. I could hardly distinguish him for the mosquitoes buzzing around his fizzog. He never seemed too bothered by their presence. It shouldn’t have surprised me. Joe was as good around other species as he was with humankind. He had an unsentimental and essential love toward animals that we associate with country people. Maybe it was reciprocated by the mosquitoes, maybe they got as much pleasure as myself from the sound and the quality of Joe’s laughter.

Joe hated racism, elitism, sexism. He hated injustice. He did get irritated by stuff, especially humbug and the academic world has become suffocated by that.

I always thought about Joe that he could have climbed on a horse and galloped from Highland Avenue to some Higher Senate convened meeting of professors, upper strata bureaucrats and would-be statesmen, dismounted with precision and entered the meeting utterly unruffled. Obviously he would have been wearing an immaculate western suit, complete with leather boots, string tie and longhorn brooch, topped by a black Parisian beret borrowed from
Thelonious Monk. Joe would have taken one look at this Higher Senate convened meeting, and muttered: Oh sorry, wrong room.

His parents, Roberta Robinson Slate and Hurlburt Slate, and a brother, John H. Slate, preceded Joe in death. He is survived by sisters Marilynn McKnight and Phoebe Hicks; his wife, Patricia Bauer-Slate; daughter Bridget Slate; daughter Ann Slate Gaspari; and son John H. Slate; former wife Audrey N. Slate; grandchildren Ruby and Henry Slate, Isabella Dilger, Peter Gaspari, Christina Gaspari Sudderth, and Daniel Gaspari. He is also survived by many loving nephews, nieces, in-laws and cousins.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Hannah Wojciehowski (chair), Janine Barchas and Mia Carter.

Distributed to the dean of the Cockrell School of Engineering on February 9, 2015, and posted under “Memorials” at [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).