DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
JAMES F. M. STEPHENS

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for James F. M. Stephens, professor emeritus, French and Italian, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
JAMES F. M. STEPHENS

James F. M. Stephens Jr., Professor Emeritus of French and Italian, died on January 29, 2011, just a few weeks before his 89th birthday. He was born in Del Rio, Texas, on February 16, 1922, and received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from The University of Texas at Austin in 1946 and 1948, respectively. In 1954, he completed work for his Ph.D. at Yale University under the legendary German philologist, Erich Auerbach. After teaching for several years at Yale, he returned to UT in 1958, where he came up traditionally through the ranks to be named full professor in 1969. He retired from teaching, but certainly not from life, in 1987.

Jim's dissertation was a Structural Analysis of Rhodanian Speech (Provençal), and he retained a teaching interest in old and modern Provençal, as well as in the history of the French language throughout his career. But his scholarly interests quickly developed beyond traditional philology into the area of contemporary French theatre, and nearly all the dozen or so master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations he directed reflected this new direction.

Jim was widely recognized as a skillful and engaging teacher. His interests were always much more focused on his students and the department than on publication. He prepared his classes carefully and thoroughly, often traveling to Paris to take in recent theatrical productions, as well as opera and the lively art and culinary scenes there. This immediate contact with French contemporary culture enriched his classes and the lives of those students who took them. After his retirement in 1987, Jim endowed two scholarships for students, one in French and one in Italian. Even as his health was failing, he insisted on coming personally to the department to bring his check so that he could catch up with his many friends and on all the latest news.

His service to the Department of French and Italian was perhaps his highest achievement. When the department was threatened with collapse after the abrupt departure of its former chairman, Roger Shattuck, in 1970, Jim stepped boldly into the breach and held the department together as acting chair for a year. In 1978, he was elected chair of the department and served admirably in that capacity for seven years. These were among the best and most collegial years the department knew. Jim was a fair-minded, thoughtful, considerate, and open leader. His leadership style was one of listening, weighing, and deciding. He was open to different points of view and never had an "agenda" to push. He believed that colleagues who knew and respected one another worked better together, and, to this end, he saw that the faculty came together informally several times each academic year, an approach that seems too often forgotten today.

Jim was always actively engaged in life around him. He enjoyed the opera, travel, fine food and wine, good art and entertainment, and lively conversation. He was a generous, gracious, and humble man who connected easily with people of all ages. In his later years, he remained active and was a model of how to age with grace and dignity.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors William W. Kibler (Chair), A. Donald Sellstrom, and Jane Lippmann.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on May 13, 2011. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.