REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
MICHAEL P. THOMAS

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Michael P. Thomas, professor emeritus, educational administration, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
MICHAEL P. THOMAS

In 1962, Michael P. Thomas joined our faculty bringing with him new outlooks, insights, and theories to the field of educational administration. As the only assistant professor, he stood alone in challenging the status quo when the field was undergoing a major shift toward adopting theories, research methodologies, and new conceptual frameworks from the social and behavioral sciences. He paved the way for the creative contributions of the many young professors to follow him throughout his more than 40 years of service to The University of Texas at Austin.

Grounded in a classical education with majors in English and philosophy, received in 1953, from St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, and after military service, Professor Thomas began his professional career as a high school teacher in 1956, and later as a college instructor at Oshkosh State College and the University of Wisconsin. He went on to complete a M.S. degree in 1956 and a Ph.D. degree in 1960 at the University of Wisconsin in educational administration with a minor in philosophy. His educational background and experience coming into higher education informed his scholarly work, teaching, and service. Dr. Thomas’ contributions were far reaching. He pioneered organizational theory as an area of study in educational administration, taught ethics in administration, conducted organizational designs and community surveys for schools and school districts throughout Texas, and provided leadership to several state, national, and international organizations. His service had a positive impact at all levels of the University and throughout the profession-at-large. But perhaps, the work he treasured most was as a mentor to the many graduate students and novice professors with whom he came into contact over the years.

His scholarly work tended to be “practice-sensitive,” applying organizational constructs and theories to problems of practice within schools. He enjoyed a reputation for professional integrity in our field’s community of scholars. His studies were concentrated on the organizational design of major school districts in Texas and other states and were recognized for their educational impact. He achieved the highest professional recognition among practitioners and scholars locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

A couple years after becoming a member of our faculty, Professor Thomas became active in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which continued on until he retired. He served as state director of the Texas Committee on Secondary and Middle Schools for 20 plus years and was a central figure in the rewriting of the standards for accrediting secondary and middle schools. Recognition for his leadership and contributions resulted in serving twice for six-year terms on the Regional Secondary and Middle School Commission. Again, because of his thoughtful and energetic leadership, he was sought after to serve on the Latin American Commission and worked with schools throughout Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. In addition to his international service with the Latin American Commission, he was invited, in 1997, to be a member of a small committee to plan the UNESCO Congress on Information and Education held in Moscow, Russia. From 1990 until his retirement, Dr. Thomas was also a commissioner on the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission, serving as president from 1999-2001.

Dr. Thomas also was active in the National Council for Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), the American Association of School Administrators (ASSA), and the University Council for Educational
Administration (UCEA). For NCPEA, an organization that traditionally met during the summer so that families could attend, he served on the Board of Directors and also as executive secretary for 10 years. He always enjoyed telling stories about how he, his wife Jeanne, and their five children would pack their car up and travel to all corners of the U.S. for their annual summer outing at NCPEA. At AASA, he regularly served on panels and presented papers, but, this organization’s major function, for him, was to provide an opportunity for renewing acquaintances with and mentoring so many of his former students. Lastly, his department was one of the founding members of UCEA, and Professor Thomas considered his role in bringing UCEA headquarters to our campus, just prior to his retirement, a crowning achievement. In addition to the prestige this initiative brought to a department that has been consistently ranked as one of the top departments in our field, it also provided professional opportunities for students and faculty on our campus and within our department and college.

Although his professional influence spanned local, state, national, and international arenas, Professor Thomas’ college and department was the true center of his professional universe. At the college level, he directed the Continuing Education Office of the College of Education for many years. Indeed, he managed the outreach activities for the college for a quarter century. And as an associate dean for administration, he enjoyed a reputation among his peers for dedication, fairness, and sound judgment in the management of resources and support services for the college from 1994 to 2004. Within the department, Professor Thomas served two terms as department chair. The first was a nine-year stint from 1972-1981, and the second was during 1998-99. In addition, he assumed the title, department chair ad interim from 2004 to 2007. That our department is ranked third nationally among public research universities is in no small measure a consequence of his leadership.

Over the nearly five decades Dr. Thomas served our great University, countless students aspiring to be principals, superintendents, and professors benefited from his excellent teaching and sense of ethical responsibility for insuring that all students achieved their highest level of success. He had a way of assisting students and junior faculty in attaining greater effectiveness by engaging them in ongoing conversations, demystifying graduate school, and providing constructive and supportive feedback. As one junior professor recently put it,

He shaped a variety of policies and management procedures during his long tenure at our University, but most importantly, Mike helped shape people and he helped shape careers. If the measure of a person is the condition of the people they leave behind, Dr. Michael P. Thomas stands as high as anyone who came before or who will come after him.

The memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Jay D. Scribner (chair), Jeff Wayman, and Martha N. Ovando.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Education, the executive vice president and provost, and the president June 9, 2009. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.