REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
JOHN ARNOLD WALTER

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for John Arnold Walter, professor emeritus, English, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
JOHN ARNOLD WALTER

John Arnold Walter, professor emeritus of English, died October 19, 2001. John joined The University of Texas at Austin Department of English in 1942. He left shortly thereafter to serve in the United States Navy in World War II. He saw duty as lieutenant and cryptographer with the Pacific Fleet in Guam, the Philippines, and Japan. Returning to the University in 1946, John taught literature and writing for the English department until his retirement in 1986.

John was born March 7, 1914, in Lacey, Oklahoma, a small town south of Enid, and graduated from Woodward High School in 1931. He did his undergraduate and graduate work in English at Texas Tech University, receiving a bachelor of arts degree in 1935 and a master of arts in 1937, with a thesis on Shakespeare criticism. John stayed at Texas Tech as an instructor of English until 1942, when he moved to Austin to begin his long and distinguished career as a member of the English department at The University of Texas. Although John taught a range of literature courses focusing on American fiction, he became best known for his teaching of technical writing. John was a founding member and officer of the national Society for Technical Communication, and in 1967 was given the organization’s highest honor, the title of Fellow. He also helped to organize the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, which he served as secretary, treasurer, and president.

John collaborated with his good friend and departmental colleague Gordon Mills in publishing a textbook titled Technical Writing (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1954). This was a groundbreaking book that made a real difference in the way technical writing is taught, and every subsequent textbook on the subject must be indebted to it. By 1981, Technical Writing, which went through five editions, had become a fixture in writing classrooms and in that year was named “Best Text” in the field by the National Council of Teachers of English. The book has been widely translated and used in universities across the country, not only in English departments, but also in colleges of engineering and other technical disciplines. Beyond university classrooms, Technical Writing found an important place in industry; such companies as General Electric and Westinghouse have used it to train their employees to write simply and directly, with a minimum of technical jargon. The publication of the book brought John more invitations than he could accept to advise companies about technical communication, and he brought back to academia from industry wisdom for composition teachers. In 1956, for example, he gave a lecture on “What Industry Expects of University English Training.” The same year he was named chair of an American Society for Engineering Education committee to improve instruction in technical communication. In addition to consulting with such companies as Tracor, International Data Systems, and Texas Instruments, John was named consulting editor for Technical Writing and Editing Journal and regularly taught workshops and presented conference papers on such topics as “Industrial Communications,” “Problems in Usage and Style,” and “Grammar and the Teaching of Composition.”

In 1964 John was named associate chair of the English department, a position he held for fifteen years. In this position he was responsible for the huge job of scheduling courses for the department, including determination of the number of courses and sections needed in any given semester and the assignment of faculty and graduate assistants to those courses. As associate chair under Acting Chair Willis Pratt and Chairs Clarence Cline, Neill Megaw, W. R. Keast, and Roger Abrahams, John served on a large number of departmental committees,
including the Executive Committee, the TA/TAI Committee, the Undergraduate Course Committee, and the Sophomore Literature Committee, all necessary for the department to meet its curricular responsibilities to the University. In addition, John himself served as acting chair of the English department during the academic year 1976-77. Over these many years of administration, John was always able to look on the amusing side of academic life and laugh in ways that made others laugh with him. He was known, for example, to approach colleagues with a big smile and ask, “Written any good books lately?” The laughter that always followed had the effect of reminding professors not to take themselves too seriously.

Upon his retirement in 1986, John continued to read widely, to travel, and to enjoy his hobbies of gardening, gourmet cooking, and listening to music. He also loved to sing in barbershop quartets, and often attended the national sing-offs in St. Louis. John did find time, on occasion, to visit the English department, where he was always warmly welcomed, not only because of his stature in the profession and contributions to the department, but also because of his friendly, outgoing personality and his wonderful sense of humor.

John Walter served the English department with distinction as coauthor of *Technical Writing*, as an excellent classroom teacher, and as an administrator willing to take on the tasks necessary to ensure that generations of students would be well served by the department’s courses. For the many ways in which John Walter made education work at the University of Texas, for his legacy of concern for clear, direct, and accurate writing, for his good cheer in dark times as well as bright, the Department of English will always be grateful.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James D. Garrison (chair), Joseph E. Kruppa, Joseph J. Moldenhauer, and Kate Frost.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on February 19, 2002. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).
Principal Books and Manuals


Selected Articles and Essays


“Communications Deficiencies of Senior and Graduate Chemical Engineers,” *Journal of Chemical Education*, 29 (August, 1952), 402ff.


“ATTW: In Retrospect and in Prospect,” *The Technical Writing Teacher* 7 (Spring, 1980), 91-94.

Editorships


