DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR WILFRED DUNBAR WEBB

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Wilfred Dunbar Webb, professor emeritus, government, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM WILFRED DUNBAR WEBB

Wilfred Dunbar Webb, professor emeritus of the Department of Government at The University of Texas at Austin, died on July 31, 2007, in San Marcos, Texas, at the age of 97.

Webb was born May 2, 1910, in Quitman, Arkansas, the older of two children of Willis Dunbar and Ida Jenkins Webb. He attended public school in Winthrop, Arkansas, a town to which the family had moved as a consequence of his father's career as a school superintendent. Wilfred graduated from Winthrop High School in May 1927. In the fall of that year, he matriculated in the University of Arkansas, receiving his B.A. in political science in 1931, his M.A. in political science in 1933, and his LL.B. in 1935. Wilfred worked in the legal profession for less than a year, quickly perceiving that he had no interest in pursuing law as a career. Thereupon, he entered the Ph.D. program in government (political science) at The University of Texas at Austin, receiving the doctorate in 1940.

Dr. Webb accepted his first academic appointment in the fall of 1940 as instructor in political science at The University of Arizona. He left that position in January 1943 to enter the Chicago branch of the U.S. Office of Emergency Management. He remained there for only seven months when he moved to the Bureau of Governmental Research in New Orleans where he remained until September 1944. While in New Orleans, Webb served as a lecturer in political science at Tulane University from September 1943 to March 1944.

In September 1944, Dr. Webb returned to The University of Texas at Austin as a research assistant in the Bureau of Municipal Research and as a lecturer in the Department of Government. There he was to remain for the rest of his academic career. In 1947, he was promoted to associate professor and in 1968 to professor. He retired in 1971.

During his years at UT, Professor Webb served his academic and civic communities in a variety of capacities. The city of New Orleans appointed him a consultant in the spring of 1946 on the reorganization of the city's government, and again as a consultant on the drafting of a home rule charter for the city in the summer of 1951. For two years (1955-57), he served as a member of the City Planning Commission of his hometown of Austin. At UT, he held the acting directorship of the Institute of Public Affairs (1951-52) and the assistant deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1962 to 1968. Duke University invited him as a visiting professor for the fall semester 1959-1960.

Wilfred Webb led a full life, not only as a scholar and teacher, but also as a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. While pursuing his doctorate at UT, he met and fell in love with Margaret McKnight Davis, known to one and all as Bridget. They married in September 1938, and from that marriage, two children were born, Teresa in 1942 and Warren in 1945. As a family, the Webbs traveled over much of the west: camping, hiking, and fishing. Wilfred loved to trout-fish. He and Bridget also bought various properties in the hill country west of Austin in the 1950s, giving some of them whimsical or romantic names. On one site Wilfred built a tree house for the children, naming it Tigger Hill after a character in Winnie the Pooh, and a second piece of land they named Torquillstone after a castle in Ivanhoe. Daughter Teri said the inspiration for the names came largely from her mother, but Wilfred was invariably pleased with the results. After retiring, he and Bridget moved in 1973 to Wimberley, southwest of Austin. There they remained active in civic affairs, gardening, working on
hobbies, and staying physically active. They read a great deal, and widely, and Bridget wrote a weekly nature column for the local newspaper. In the late 1980s, they bought a house in San Marcos to be closer to medical facilities, and in 1997 they moved again, this time into a retirement community. They remained active physically and mentally until the end, Bridget dying in 2001, and Wilfred six years later.

Wilfred Webb specialized in state and local government and public administration, and his research and teaching embodied those special interests. Like all his colleagues in the department, he regularly taught in the required sophomore course in American and Texas government, but he also taught advanced and graduate courses in municipal or metropolitan government and intergovernmental relations.

He published a number of monographs on those matters, but he and two or three other colleagues also produced a rich and extensive book of readings in American Government that attracted widespread interest and went through a number of editions in the 1950s and 1960s.

Webb’s lectures were beautifully organized and always centered on what the student needed to know. He was a soft-spoken man, full of insights and humor, and his teaching embodied those same qualities. His lectures were well prepared and larded with both memories and witticism. All his students admired him, and many loved him.

He was an admirable and respected colleague, thoughtful and helpful but never insistent or demanding, and he never failed to respond when called upon. No one was surprised when he was asked to become assistant dean of arts and sciences during the last years of his career. He was a colleague to be cherished and a faculty member of whom The University was always proud.

Wilfred always felt a drive to create things of beauty. In an early biographical data sheet for the Department of Government that requested information on hobbies, he listed furniture: design, construction, and repair. In point of fact, he made tables, desks, and handcrafted wooden boxes, and repaired a number of antique pieces that he had purchased. Later he made, designed, and crafted two crossbows. He and the children enjoyed practice shooting with the bows, but they were never used for hunting. After he retired, Wilfred turned his hand to jewelry making, using a variety of materials: wood, bone, stone, silver, copper, and brass, some for women, some for men.

One final word must be said of Wilfred Webb. He was not a man of religion in the organized sense, but he held deep moral, if not spiritual values. For younger colleagues who sought his advice and counseling, Wilfred Webb’s door was always open. He never pushed his ideas on friends and colleagues, but once was never left in doubt as to where he stood on an issue. He was tolerant of contrary views but did not suffer fools lightly. He disliked organized religions of all types, but he counted among his close friends people committed to a variety of faiths. He advocated a strict separation of religious practice from public life, objecting to chaplains in the armed forces, chapels on military bases, and religious services in prisons. But his disdain for organized religion did not mean that he lacked faith or principles, for he sincerely believed in what many regard as a basic Christian value: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Karl Schmitt (chair), James Roach, and William S. Livingston.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on January 22, 2009. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.