Modern Foreign Languages & Literatures

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IN APPRECIATION — DR. JEFF MELLOR

One complaint you never hear from Jeff Mellor is that his students just won't talk. Jeff has a multitude of methods – mostly of his own devising -- to inspire, cajole or provoke his students to embrace the language and have fun with it. And one complaint you never hear from any student in a Mellor class is that it is dull. Jeff's love of puns, his off-the-wall sense of humor, and his quick wit have delighted generations of students of very different sorts – from high school teenies on up to his faculty colleagues.

Jeff came to UT in 1970 still at work on his doctorate from Chicago. He finished that in 1972, became an assistant professor. The late 60s and early 70s were a time when many people in languages had decided that language teaching was in sad shape and that students and the profession deserved better. Jeff was a founding member of the Tennessee Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German, an organization that devoted itself to bridging the gap between college teachers and the high schools. He has been on the Executive Council from 1971 to the present, he served as president in 1975-76 and devoted untold hours and energy to the organization's spring festival for elementary and high school students. He was also active in the Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association and served as president of the 1000 member organization in 1988-89.

One of his major interests at that point was in furthering the proficiency movement and oral proficiency testing, an art/science that had worked its way over from the U.S. State Department to the language teaching community. Jeff became a certified proficiency tester, centered a TFLTA annual meeting on the topic, and as a spin-off benefit, convinced UT in 1983 to adopt the SPEAK program to assess the oral ability of incoming foreign graduate assistants to undertake classroom teaching. He headed the SPEAK testing here from 1983 to 2006 and in effect singlehandedly solved a problem for UT that vexes many other schools throughout the country.

Nationally Jeff was most active with AATG. He was elected to the national Executive Council in 1983, he served on the national nominating committee in 1989 and chaired it in 1990, and he was conference co-chair of the international meeting of German teachers at Stanford in 1995. Putting a life-time of career experience to work, he served as editor of the organization's pedagogical journal, Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German, from 2000 to 2004.

Jeff became an Associate Professor in 1980 and Professor in 1998. Among his numerous UT awards are one in 1998 for Extraordinary Public Service – for his work with local schools -- and a Chancellor's Citation for Excellence in Teaching in 2004. He served as interim head of MFLL from 2004 to 2007 and chair of the German section from 2008 to 2012.

Highlights of his publishing life include a complete computer based German course and articles on German philology and lexicography. He has translated numerous scientific articles, some in co-operation with his wife, biologist, science editor, and children's book author Doris Gove. And his most recent project is a translation with former colleague Peter Hoeyng of an Austrian novel from 1922.

As Professor Emeritus, Jeff is into his second semester of post-retirement teaching. If you need any devilishly clever tips on how to get recalcitrant students involved or if you want some insights into establishing or maintaining a remarkably interesting, varied, and successful career, chat him up. He has always loved to share.

David Lee
Professor Emeritus of German

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