

Memorial Resolution
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR EMERITUS GEORGE W. WHITBECK
(February 17, 1932 - September 20, 2004)

George Whitbeck was a “down easter” from Maine. He ventured to Columbia University for three degrees: a B.A. in history and Oriental studies in 1957 and master’s degrees in both library science (1959) and history (1962). After working in both academic and public libraries, he headed down the coast to complete his Ph.D. in library science from Rutgers in 1970. George joined the University of Michigan School of Library Science faculty upon graduation and subsequently ventured as far south as the University of Southern Mississippi, where he was both professor and chairman of the Department of Library Science. In 1975 he came to IU, where he served as Associate Dean of the Graduate Library School (later School of Library and Information Science, or SLIS) until 1987. He then devoted his time to teaching and research, retiring from the school in 1995. SLIS Dean Blaise Cronin remarked, “I remember the first time I met George and I remember the last time we spoke. Over the nearly twenty years between these two events I never changed my impression of the man; decent, caring, and professionally committed. We’ll all miss him.”

Faculty, staff, and students who were at the School of Library and Information Science during George’s tenure will recall him as the quintessential associate dean. He accomplished the myriad tasks that make an organization function – from scheduling courses, to maintaining contacts within the university, to connecting with the “real world” of Bloomington beyond IU. His 12 years in this post saw a major growth in enrollment and the evolution of the school as a nationally and internationally recognized institution. This was when the state-wide education program developed, and George Whitbeck participated actively and generously. He taught on many of the IU campuses, articulating his belief that the educational program should be brought to the students, even at the cost of inconvenience to faculty members.

George’s teaching focused on government publications, bibliography of the social sciences, research methods, and education for library and information science. His research reflects the areas of his teaching interest: the Federal Depository Library System for government documents; the processing of these documents in academic library collections; curricula for master’s and doctoral level education in library and information science, including continuing education and concerns about grade inflation. His most significant work compared American library education practices with those in other countries, particularly Great Britain and the Republic of China.

He was particularly active in the education of doctoral students, serving on numerous research committees. Ellen Crosby, one of these students, remembers being advised by her fellows, “George will get you through.” “And he did,” she says. “Initially reluctant, he nevertheless took on the task of guiding me through the intricacies of the dissertation itself. Other professors helped with the research questions and data analysis – George ‘got me through’ the process. It’s thanks to Dr. Whitbeck that I can write Ph.D. behind my name and I’m grateful for his help.”

Joyce G. Taylor, another graduate of the doctoral program, remembers how George “quietly pushed and challenged” her work, leading her to new horizons, allowing her to explore and discover. “My first impression of him was that of a gentle giant—one who commands but one

who was compassionate and understanding. George was genuinely interested in my research subject and goals; he proceeded to discuss seeing the 'big picture' in pursuing an advanced degree. I knew then that my future was firmly in place. Later George became my advisor for independent studies and finally, chair of my dissertation committee. For four years we consulted and planned. He was my instructor, my cheer leader and role model; later, I was a SLIS faculty member, he was a supportive colleague. His quiet encouragement was a welcome beacon in, at times, a sea of self-doubt and confusion.

Connie Van Fleet remembered George Whitbeck as "one of the kindest, gentlest, and most effective people with whom I have ever worked. I went to Indiana because of George. When I applied to doctoral programs, I was astonished that a professor would call every week to see if I had made a decision on a program and to offer his support and extend a welcome. That's exactly what George did. How could I have gone anywhere else?" A particular memory always brings a smile: "Upon finding out that my daughter had a rare medical condition that required evaluation and ongoing treatment, George sought me out to let me know about a children's hospital in Indianapolis. This was a kindness, but what so typified George was that he also had a map in hand with the route marked for me. It is this generosity with his time, his interest in each individual, and his willingness to attend to the small, but meaningful details that will always be at the center of my memories of George Whitbeck."

Colleagues recalled George's commitment to community service. He was active in the Kiwanis Club, to the point that some have a strong association between George Whitbeck and popcorn. After retiring, George continued his community service, including work with the Court Appointed Special Advocates of the Monroe County Family Services Association. He and his wife Ruth had recently moved to Texas to be closer to their daughter, Margaret, and her family. George welcomed the opportunity to help raise his first grandchild. George and Ruth's son, Paul, remains in Indiana.

When George retired in 1995, his colleagues Herbert S. White and Joyce Taylor wrote that his "professional colleagues have always relied on his insights in the areas of government publications and international library education. His colleagues at Indiana University, for whom he has always been willing to carry more than his share of the committee assignments, also came to rely on him as a supportive and caring friend who never offered an unkind word about anyone."

In recognition of George Whitbeck's contributions to the university and the profession, be it resolved that this resolution be part of the minutes of the Bloomington Faculty Council and that copies be sent to his wife Ruth, his daughter Margaret Shelton of Denton, Texas, and his son Paul, of Indianapolis.

Debora Shaw
Judith Serebnick