



IN MEMORIAM

William Schaefer
Professor of English
UC Los Angeles
1928-2016

William David Schaefer, an emeritus professor of English at UCLA who served as executive vice chancellor from 1978 to 1987 under Chancellor Charles Young, died January 12 in Los Angeles after a long illness at age 87.

While Schaefer was executive vice chancellor at Murphy Hall, UCLA was rising in prominence in the national academic rankings into the top tier of public and private universities. In 1983, when the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils released its assessment of faculty and graduate programs, UCLA ranked No. 5 on the list of prestigious institutions, both public and private.

It was a remarkable showing that was highlighted by the Los Angeles Times. In an interview with the Times, Schaefer commented on the university's transition "when you move from second-best to best, when you move from the best of the minor leagues to the real major leagues. You're playing in different competition. ... What you're really doing now is playing hardball, major-league ball with the Ivy League schools and the major public universities of the country."

Born in Dighton, Massachusetts, Schaefer earned three degrees in English: a B.A. from New York University (1957), and an M.A. (1958) and a Ph.D. (1962) from the University of Wisconsin. He won a Fulbright Award in 1961-1962 and spent the year at Bedford College in London.

He started his 28-year career at UCLA in 1962 when he joined the faculty as a specialist in 19th-century poetry. In 1970, he became a full professor. In 1969-71, he served as chair of the department.

“He was a superb chair,” recalled Maximillian Novak, who was vice chair of graduate studies in the English department at the time. “It was a time of student revolts, the Vietnam War, all kinds of difficulties. We had some senior professors who were somewhat unhinged by it all. Bill was able to keep the English department on an even keel and to keep a sense of humor throughout all of these difficulties.”

"When Bill was chair," recalled Professor Henry Kelly, "we had more than 50 assistant professors, and he famously began to promote us as 'the best young English department in the nation.'"

In 1971, Schaefer left UCLA to become executive director of the Modern Language Association. In 1978, he returned when he was appointed UCLA's executive vice chancellor, a position he held until 1987 when he returned to teaching in the English department as a professor of Victorian literature. He retired in 1990.

Among his professional awards were a summer faculty fellowship and a Humanities Institute Award from the University of California. He wrote the book "Education without Compromise: From Chaos to Coherence in Higher Education (Jossey-Bass, 1990). Schaefer's oral history is available through the UCLA Library.

He is survived by his wife, Josephine; daughter Kimberly Scot; two grandsons, four great-granddaughters; and his brother, Louis.