



IN MEMORIAM

Peter M. Schäffer
Professor of German
Davis
1930–2003

Peter Moritz Schäffer died in a Sacramento hospital on June 28, 2003. He was born in Breslau (then in Germany, now in Poland) and came to the United States as a boy. He studied music, theology and literature in New York, Ottawa and at Princeton University, where he received a Ph.D. in German literature in 1970.

He taught at Princeton from 1970 to 1974, then at UC Berkeley from 1974 to 1976 before joining the UC Davis Department of German in 1976.

He was, in the deepest sense of the term, a Renaissance Man. He had mastered a large number of disciplines – linguistic, literary, historical, artistic and musical. The Renaissance Age was also that time in history in which he probably felt most at home. He remarked once to a colleague that his birth may have been a mistake, for he had been born four hundred years too late.

To those who knew him at Davis, he came as close to being a pure teacher as any university is likely to find. As a mark of his dedication to teaching, he placed a large sign outside his office door which proclaimed to the world “Students First.” That door was always kept propped open, so that even the most timorous student would not fail to recognize the friendly access being offered. Entering the office always became an educational experience, for once inside, students and colleagues alike found themselves transported to an enchanting world of yesteryear. The walls and glass cases were stuffed with a bewildering number of old leather-bound books written in Latin, English, French, German and Italian. No one could help but breathe the feeling of history and learning that emanated from this professorial study. Indeed, the visitor to this office almost felt that he or she were in that venerable tower of learning in which the title hero of Goethe’s *Faust* had spent so many years of his academic life. It could surprise no one that Peter took a particular delight in teaching a class on that drama by Goethe.

Peter’s dedication to his students received special recognition when he was presented with UCD’s Outstanding Adviser Award in 1989 and Outstanding Mentor Award in 1996.

In creative research Peter will be remembered, first and foremost, for his commitment to the study of the Alsatian humanists of the sixteenth century. These were German authors who wrote in Latin, and Peter’s knowledge of their works was truly remarkable. This came about, not least of all, because of his enviable proficiency in Latin. He had learned the ancient languages at a very early age from his father, who had been a teacher of Latin and Greek at a German Gymnasium.

In the last ten years of his life, to his considerable delight, he found himself teaching the Classics in addition to his courses in the German language and literature. He taught courses on Virgil, Cicero, Beginning Greek and New Testament Greek. Particularly popular were the courses he designed to help students expand their vocabulary by analyzing the Greek and Latin roots of the more difficult words of the English language.

He took an equal delight in also teaching, on an overload basis, courses in music as well as in medieval and religious studies.

No statement about Peter's life and work would be complete without a reference to his abiding interest in music. He was an accomplished pianist who gave recitals on the UCD campus and on the campuses of Georgetown and Princeton Universities and the University of Ottawa. He also performed in a Mozart Festival at the National Gallery of Art and at the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C. Frequently, he entertained his students, colleagues and friends with concerts in his Davis home.

He is survived by his wife Maria Kallai and sisters Susanne Manovill and Irene Stockton.

Clifford A. Bernd
Lincoln Hurst
David Traill