

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
DONALD J. BLASHILL**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Donald J. Blashill, associate professor emeritus, social work, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
DONALD J. BLASHILL**

Donald J. Blashill, age 67, of El Paso, TX, died Thursday, May 14, 2004, in El Paso. Don was born on the family farm in eastern South Dakota, the youngest of three children. Shortly after his birth, his father died. Then, in the first year of life, Don contracted polio that shaped his childhood including successive surgeries to his left arm and shoulder at the Shriners' Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa. Don's struggle to survive as a very young child and the family's economic struggles created an indomitable and even stubborn will to overcome any challenge. Poverty and illness honed his acute perception of persons facing hardship, and Don was a formidable advocate for those things that he thought would better a person or a community. As a youth, he was active in school, hunting, fishing, and working on the county fair carnival circuit during the summer. While more physically robust young men and women worked the summer harvest, Don sharpened his wits by traveling with shows that would lead him across the small towns of the American Midwest. In those years, Don developed a gift for spinning a yarn, and his teaching was always colored by elaborate anecdotes and often tales to illustrate a point or teach a student how to assess a situation. With some savings each summer and with scholarships, Don entered Augustana College in 1954. Upon completing his bachelor's degree, he entered the M.S.S.W. program at the School of Social Work of The University of Texas at Austin and graduated in 1963. Upon graduation, he assumed a post providing mental health services with the Indian Health Services at the Sisseton Wahpeton and Little Brule Indian reservations in eastern South Dakota.

He returned to Austin in 1965 to head the city's newly established Community Action Agency. The agency was initially part of the United Way where Don was hired by Vic Ehlers, a graduate of The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work and who had known Don when Don was a student. Within a year, an independent board was created by the community of Austin, and Don was named the first executive director. As the home agency of President Lyndon B. Johnson, that agency received considerable media attention and was regarded as a model for much of the country.

Donald joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin in 1967 and became the school's director of field training in 1968. During the 1960s and 1970s, he was a consultant to the Senate Select Committee on Poverty and assisted in establishing field teaching sites for the University in many communities across the south and southwest. He traveled widely in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas through responsibilities for the University. We recognize his contribution to social work education through his constant inclusion of multicultural content that could prepare social work students for practice in a diverse society. He used his experiences with Native American communities in South Dakota and community work in east Austin as a base for that. Another contribution was his work with a pool of practitioners whom he hired and trained as they evolved into educators.

In 1991, Donald assumed the role of coordinator of the school's graduate program in El Paso, Texas, and moved from Austin to El Paso. During those years, Don developed many innovative collaborations with The University of Texas at El Paso, agencies in El Paso and Juarez, Chihuahua, and rural communities in West Texas and New Mexico. He retired from the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin in 1998 and remained active with the school's programs through recruitment and teaching of graduate students placed in El Paso.

In 2000, Don joined the faculty of the social work program at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). While a member of the UTEP faculty, Don was appointed director of the Undergraduate Social Work Program and advisor to the students seeking careers in human services. Likewise, Don served as a consultant to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts at UTEP and the dean of College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Texas of the Permian Basin, providing both colleges with invaluable guidance on all aspects of social work education.

He was awarded an emeritus associate professor rank in 1997. We remember Don as a vigorous and passionate colleague with a great affection for teaching and for critical thought in committees, faculty meetings, and chance discussions in the office or in an agency. In both Austin and in El Paso, Don was an avid gardener, working the soil with the same tireless dedication that he devoted to his teaching. We also remember Don's passion for photography and his ability to create beautiful portraits of flowers and other objects of nature.

Don was a kind, sensitive, sensible man. He came to the school at a time when schools of social work were beginning to seek faculty with Ph.D.s and research interests. Don, however, was a consummate social work practitioner professional. His interests were in helping students develop practice skills. Although he had an appreciation for research, he felt it best to use his talents in shaping students in the fundamentals of social work practice. He was well regarded by students, respected for his devotion to teaching and practice, and his willingness to spend time with them. Although good humored, there was a seriousness about him that produced extraordinary results with his classes.

Don truly individualized students and helped them to pursue their maximum potential. The students responded well to him whether he was helping them draw out the essential meaning of a learning opportunity and its implications or taking them to task for something they should have recognized in providing client services but failed to do so. Whether acting as patient instructor or stern taskmaster, Don maintained the student's respect and admiration.

Don always brought a sharp focus to the tasks at hand. He had a keen analytical mind and faculty often sought him out for advice and counsel. He was always available and ready to assist when needed. Blessed with conceptual clarity, he never begrudged going beyond the call of duty, often serving as a mentor to students who needed his expertise in resolving both personal and academic issues. Don was among the last of the "traditional" social workers, believing strongly in community development as well as helping build interpersonal skills. The faculty was enriched by his presence.

Don is survived by his wife, Maria, of El Paso; his sons, Tracy, Patrick, and Sean; his sister, Helen; and his brother, Dick. A family memorial service was held on Saturday, May 22, 2004, at Cavalry Lutheran Church in Wallace, SD. A memorial service in El Paso was held on The University of Texas at El Paso campus on Saturday, June 19, 2004.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Michael Lauderdale (chair), Eunice Garcia, George Herbert, and Guy Shuttlesworth.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Social Work, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on September 13, 2004. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.