

David Nordloh

According to Dave Nordloh, his chief claims to IU fame are that he was the youngest faculty member invited to participate in the Friday-afternoon football/card games held during the 1970s in Phil Daghlian's office, and that as the last winner before the game disbanded, he retired the bobble-head trophy. Dave's fullback was Longfellow, his quarterback Bret Harte, and his place-kicker (who had to be blind) Major General Nathanael Greene. Dave was also the only participant to have cheerleaders. The game broke up when some participants retired and others moved on—free agents before their time.

Dave recalls that game as playful, inventive, and friendly—a communal activity more than a competition. He also remembers later Friday afternoon departmental softball games followed by a drink or two, or three. He recalls these events not in the spirit of lament but as reflective of the qualities that he has valued most in his forty-two-and-a-half-year career at IU. He sees his various and extensive professional roles as those of connector, facilitator, and community builder. His central source of satisfaction, he says, has been in “enabling others to get something done, something productive for them.” His focus has consistently been outward, toward what was worth doing, “what needed to be done” (as he describes his work as director of undergraduate studies—three terms, no less), what would help others rather than what would draw the spotlight to himself.

As director of American studies from 1988 through 1994, Dave concentrated on “helping graduate students develop interdisciplinary courses and on creating bridges for students to faculty in other departments.” As general editor and textual editor of *A Selected Edition of W. D. Howells* for many years, he was fascinated with making available “what manuscripts tell us about how writers work, how their minds work.” In editing 62 volumes in the *Twayne's United States Authors Series*, he aimed to make the lives and accomplishments of important writers accessible to a wide audience in clear, jargon-free prose. As long-term (and continuing) co-editor of *American Literary Scholarship: An Annual (ALS)*—the central, annotated bibliography of work in American literature—he has served as mediator between the vast amounts of scholarship published every year and readers who want a guide through the maze. The goal of all his editorial projects has been “to make good editions and good work available not just to specialists but simply to people who read.” And in the countless dissertations he has directed, he has found his satisfaction not in creating a generation of Nordloh followers but in “helping students achieve clarity and coherence in expressing their own ideas.”

The playfulness that Dave valued in his Friday afternoon football games is reflected in his dry and wry wit; Dave has, according to emeritus colleague Terry Martin, “the best sense of humor in the department.” (Dave's wife, Barbara, asserts that even now she cannot always tell whether he is being serious or not.) Dave has always been a good person to walk away from a department meeting with; he has a wonderful gift for encapsulating our absurdities in a way that suggests skepticism but not cynicism. That stance—enough distance to provide perspective but not so much as to induce withdrawal—has served him well, enabling him to continue working without illusion but with considerable energy during one of the longest terms in the history of the department.

Dave's fantasy career is that of elementary school teacher, a position that would offer immediate and intense satisfaction—a nice alternative, he says, to the open-ended nature of his administrative and editorial work. He likes golf because it too provides immediate results—though he will not specify what those results tend to be. He gets similar gratification from carpentry, remodeling, and repair work in the two Bloomington homes that he and Barbara have lived in. He is proud of the fact that in their 18-year stay in their first home, he had to call a repairman only once (for plumbing help).

When Dave was contemplating graduate school, he had to decide between English and math; he chose English, he says, because “I didn’t like the idea of spending my time in the classroom with my back to students.” In a profession where the temptation to promote and advertise ourselves is a constant, where perspective is crucial but hard to maintain, I will miss the presence of someone who has a modest sense of himself and a much larger sense of what matters. Congratulations to Dave on forty-two-and-a-half years well spent!

In retirement, Dave plans to continue with his work as co-editor of *ALS*. He and Barbara are moving to North Carolina in part to be near Duke University, where *ALS* is housed, and in part to be closer to Barbara’s two brothers. Golf factors in too.

Ray Hedin