

## **Remembering William J. Edgar, our Socrates**

### **A letter to the campus community from President Christopher C. Dahl**

I am deeply saddened to inform you of the death of our colleague and friend, William J. Edgar, Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, yesterday morning, November 10, 2011. He was 78. Bill will be remembered as a legendary figure who had a hand in many of the things that make Geneseo the college it is today.

Bill received his B.A. in psychology from Cornell and his M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy from Syracuse University. His undergraduate studies were interrupted by service in the U.S. Army, as first lieutenant, from 1952 to 1956. He began teaching at Geneseo in 1969, and, from 1978 until retirement in 2005, he chaired the Department of Philosophy. Bill won the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, in both 1974 and 1976 — the only professor in college history to win it twice. In 1979 he was named Distinguished Teaching Professor. In his 36 years on the faculty, he also chaired the College Senate and the Humanities Core Committee and was in large measure responsible for creating the Faculty Personnel Committee. In the 1980s, he founded Geneseo's Honors Program, now named The Edgar Fellows Program. With his wife, Associate Professor of Philosophy Stacey Edgar, he received the Geneseo Medal for Philanthropy in 2003. Always generous with their time and attention to students, Bill and Stacey also endowed the Edgar Scholarship Fund and created the Jennifer Wachunas Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Bill's primary scholarly fields were philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and logic, but he was interested in a wide range of philosophical questions. He published over two dozen articles and reviews in professional journals and delivered more than 50 papers and invited talks. He is the author of three books: "Evidence" (1980), "The Problem Solver's Guide to Logic" (1983), and "The Elements of Logic" (1989), and in 1991 he also developed a manuscript, "Mind and Matter," for one of his courses, which he used for many years. As he observed, "Most of those who write philosophy textbooks write for their colleagues, not for the students."

Above all, Bill was a teacher, in the extended and most efficacious sense of the word. Few, if any faculty members in the history of the college have had such a positive impact on the lives of so many students. Bill's teaching was truly distinguished. He challenged his students. He opened new vistas for them. He gave them the tools of critical analysis they needed and at the same time supported them in their intellectual and personal development. Over the years, he recommended scores of students for graduate and professional programs and national fellowships, but he was also willing, for example, to let students stay in the room over his garage when they were in periods of transition. He followed their lives after Geneseo, and today he is one of the professors that alumni ask about most often as they return for reunion or attend events across the country.

Bill's work as department chair and faculty colleague bore fruit in numerous areas. Not only did he found the Honors Program; he also played a key role in creating the Humanities Requirement, having taught the original prototype of the course and then shepherding the requirement through College Senate, as part of the Core Curriculum in the early 1980s. Bill's influence and example helped establish the tradition of interdisciplinary teaching at Geneseo that continues today. As an educational institution and as a community, Geneseo is a better place because of his presence in our midst. Every time I encounter a Geneseo graduate whom Bill taught and every time I catch a glimpse of the outstanding public liberal arts college we have become, I think of Bill Edgar. For 36 years, he was our philosopher-in-chief, our Socrates.

— Christopher C. Dahl