

Dennis R. Hall was appointed assistant professor in the Department of English in 1970. The College of Arts and Sciences elected him to the Faculty Senate in 1985. He served in this body until 2012, as member and chair of several Senate standing and ad hoc committees, including the executive committee 1996-98, and as Faculty Senate Chair and University Trustee 1998-2000—in total more than 300 Senate-related meetings. At a lunch gathering of old Senate chairs at the Louisville Antique Mall, someone complained about their exclusion from the friendly relationships obvious among the citizen (non-university) trustees, and Dennis responded “Would you want them for friends?” capturing his overall principle, demonstrated throughout his service career across the university, that one could work effectively as a colleague without necessarily being a friend.

Dennis went to prep school at the College of St Vincent in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, also the home of Rolling Rock brewery, and then he proceeded BA at the University of Notre Dame and PhD at The Ohio State University, where he concentrated on 18th century British literature. He had a broad, deep familiarity with literature in English, a thorough grounding in classical and modern rhetoric, a commitment to popular-culture studies, and an astonishing competence, seldom publicly displayed, in Latin invective. At UofL he taught more than thirty courses in undergraduate and graduate literature, in doctoral rhetoric studies, and, across the board, in popular culture, the field in which he gave more than 100 presentations at scholarly conferences and published more than forty articles and book chapters, along the way also compiling and editing three major reference works in American popular culture. He served as director or reader of 14 theses and more than 50 dissertations and as teaching mentor to more than 30 GTAs and teaching fellows in the university’s composition program, which he also directed for five years. Besides constant, regular and effective service on departmental standing and ad hoc committees, over the years he was active on 15 college committees, and more than 30 university ad hoc committees (in addition to the usual Board obligations during his trusteeship).

This monumental record in CV particulars is not what Dennis most distinctively and memorably brought to the university. From an institutional perspective, he was a subversive, constructively working with energy and focus to address its educational and governance responsibilities but also to undermine its pompous, overblown manner in doing so. For this second task, his studies of 18th-century satire gave him many tools such as stiletto ridicule of administrative bloat, whether in verbal style or bureaucratic ramification. This he did, for instance, during a 1987 term as department acting chair, in a faculty

memorandum announcing a new “restroom trip policy” that allocated to each faculty member 20 monthly credits (to be monitored by a soon-to-be-installed voice-print recognition doorlock) with specific penalties for overstaying a single visit but also with a provision that “restroom trip credits can be accumulated from month to month.” Sometimes a single word sufficed, as in a 2001 budget presentation to the A&S faculty, when he presented faculty salary comparisons as expressed in “millipitinos.”

Beyond the campus, he and his spouse Susan were generous hosts of black-tie New Year’s dinners, country-dances, and other entertainments in all seasons, most of them having a quiet agenda to integrate new faculty into our community, including a celebrated annual “walk and gawk” promenade to the Spring Drive curb of the Barnstable Brown Derby Eve party. Not that everything was a party: Dennis once invited colleagues to join in the Hall move to Windsor Place, which required moving a dozen dressers (some with drawers full) from the attic of their three-story house high on Yale Drive to the truck four steep flights of stairs below, and then back up a like number of steps on Windsor—all with suitable refreshment from Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The dressers were only one manifestation of his avocation of “Collecting” at garage sales and flea markets as well as in his bids for lots offered at the university’s annual stock-room clearances, once including a dozen oak chairs, useful at parties, from the old Louisville General Hospital and, as he neglected to note, a dozen stainless-steel IV stands, which he and Susan later transformed into unusual holiday presents to colleagues; in another instance, his bid won him an out-of-date but fully-equipped and still operable dental chair.

In all of this, Dennis was more than a model university citizen: he was a humane and a humanizing force for the university, generous to all whom he perceived as working toward our common goals, dismissive of any, regardless of rank or standing, who were not. After Susan’s death a decade ago, his disability from the onset of Alzheimer’s disease became rapidly apparent, so we have missed his wit, his advice and his company for longer than the date of his recent death would suggest. To those of us whom he honored with his friendship, his death on January 30 was an incalculable loss.

Thanks for the kindness of your attention.

Dale B. Billingsley

5 March 2025