“A Good Judge of Mind and Character”

Donald J. Winslow

specialized in 18th-century British literature

By Wesley T. Mott (CAS’68, GRS’69, ’74)

Donald J. Winslow was born into the academic life—literally.

Winslow was born on the campus of Lasell Junior College, where his father was president. He earned a BA and an MA from Tufts University, and in wartime 1942 he joined the U.S. Army Air Force Weather Service on the same day he was awarded a PhD from Boston University. Lasell and BU remained his extended academic families for the rest of his distinguished career.

Winslow, a professor emeritus of English, died on July 10, 2010. He was 98.

After the war, Winslow (GRS’42), who told his graduate students that he thought he had been BU’s first teaching fellow in English, returned to BU as a faculty member and chaired the English department from 1952 to 1962. His wife, Charlotte (Lindgren) Winslow (CAS’45, GRS’47, ’61), retired chair of the Emerson College English department, recalls that Winslow was especially proud of two achievements during his tenure. He hired Robert Lowell to teach poetry writing. “They had a special bond,” she says, “since Lowell, who was a Winslow on his mother’s side, was sure they were cousins. Don was less sure.” As chair, Winslow also oversaw the difficult task of uniting the several English departments then scattered in separate BU colleges. He managed the “delicate negotiations,” she notes, “with a minimum of hard feelings.”

One of Winslow’s former students, Helen Vendler, the A. Kingsley Porter Women’s History Professor at Harvard University, observes that a “sane and kind manner” were characteristic of Winslow. When she joined him as a colleague in the BU English department in 1966, she found that as department chair he had been “ahead of his time in hiring women.” Having encountered both flagrant and “more disingenuous” discrimination in her career, she was impressed that Winslow had already appointed two women scholars, Emily Brady (later Dalgarno) and Millicent Bell, both BU professors emeritae of English. In all of his appointments and dealings with colleagues, she says, he was “a good judge of mind and character.”

Winslow was known as the English department’s 18th-century British literature specialist, but his real literary love was the poet and novelist Thomas Hardy, one of my favorite writers. In the spring of 1968, my senior year, I treated myself to his Dorset, England, and country,” Dorset, England, and the Hardy Journal. He knew everything about the man and his work, from his monumental themes right down to minutiae of his local acquaintances, including his mail carrier and his barber. He conveyed Hardy’s sense of architecture, music, and place. Brilliantly organized and demanding—encompassing the shape of Hardy’s career and the several genres he mastered, his critical reputation and his imitators—that exhilarating course is still a model for my own teaching.

“My special interest,” Don once wrote to me, “has been Thomas Hardy and the artists who ‘did’ him.” He was equally interested in verbal forms of portraiture—biography, or what Don more comprehensively termed life-writing. His Life-Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms (University of Hawai’i Press, 1980, 1995), remains a standard in the field.

Craig Howes, director of the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai’i, wrote to Charlotte Winslow that less than two weeks before Don died, his influence was felt at the Seventh Biennial Conference of the International Association for Biography and Autobiography in Sussex, U.K. A young Dutch scholar spoke “on the history of biographical theory and criticism,” Howes wrote, “and your husband’s work, and his guide for life-writing, were both mentioned prominently as important moments in that history.” Indeed, he wrote, the speaker “clearly wished that the Winslow approach was more central to the field, in the wake of the post-structuralist and cultural studies approaches that have followed.”

A dedicated trustee of Lasell College, Winslow also published Lasell: A History of the First Junior College for Women as well as a sesquicentennial pictorial history of the college, and he organized the college’s archives, which now bear his name.

A fine scholar and beloved teacher, Winslow will best be remembered for his gentlemanly kindness to his students and colleagues. A decade before joining the BU English faculty, Vendler was deemed “an unacceptable candidate” for the Harvard PhD program in English because, as an undergraduate chemistry major at Emmanuel College, she had insufficient courses in English. She enrolled as a special student at BU, where Winslow suggested that she take some of her English courses.
A Dedicated Teacher, and a Perennial Student

James Cormier’s joy at being at MET was contagious

By Cynthia K. Buccini

For James Cormier, joining Metropolitan College as a part-time faculty member in 1991 marked a turning point. Cormier had been working in information technology, at jobs that required extensive international travel, says MET Dean Jay Halfond, and the idea of becoming part of an academic community appealed to him. As it turned out, he was well suited to his new career. Over the next two decades, he became known as a dedicated teacher, committed to the college, his fellow faculty members, and his students. In 1997, he was honored with the Metropolitan College Part-Time Faculty Member of the Year Award at MET’s graduation ceremonies.

Cormier (MET’85), who became a full-time senior lecturer in administrative sciences in 2004, died on October 13 after a brief illness. He was 65.

Halfond says the college has lost “somebody who cared about the core mission of Metropolitan College and cared about his colleagues and his students. And he really was a perennial student himself, because he was an expert in project management, a key area of instruction for us now. He was an all-around dedicated member of the academic community.”

Cormier was a highly engaged faculty member as well, according to Halfond. “Whenever we held a social event with students, we could always count on him to be there. I think, for him, this was a second career he always wanted to have.”

Cormier earned a BS in business administration as a part-time student at MET. In his faculty profile on the college’s website, he offered a recollection and some words of advice to new students: “When I started, it looked as if the road to that degree was without an end. I can remember thinking as I entered my first class that ‘a journey of a thousand miles is started with a single step’ (Chinese proverb). Get that first step out of the way and we’ll do everything possible to see you make the shorter journey across the stage at Commencement to accept your degree.”

He went on to earn an MBA from Northeastern University. He spent more than 20 years working at Digital Equipment Corporation, starting as an engineering services supervisor and holding several senior-level positions before joining IBM in 1995.

At MET, Cormier developed and taught a range of courses in marketing management, operations management and data analysis, advertising, electronic commerce, and management. He became a full-time faculty member in 2004.

“You could always turn to him and say, ‘I need somebody to teach this class or go to this place,’” he recalls. “He’d make the sacrifices necessary to make things work. And personally, he was a great friend. His joy for being here was contagious.”

When Becker spoke with Cormier’s wife following his death, she told him that “she wanted MET to know he valued his time here,” Becker says. “His goal was to be a teacher. He just felt it was the best job in the world. Being here made him the happiest he’d ever been.”

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Wesley T. Mott is a professor of English at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

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For one of the class papers, Winslow gave students the option of writing an imitation of an 18th-century poem. Delighted, Vendler wrote an imitation of William Collins’ “Ode to Evening,” which the professor asked to keep. “Years later, after his retirement,” she recalls, “he sent it back to me, saying what pleasure it had given him, and how proud he was of my career.”

Don always believed that the thousands of students whom he had taught in more than 41 years at BU were his true legacy. It was his habit to stay in touch with his students long after their BU courses ended. Though I had taken Don’s graduate seminar Horace Walpole and His Literary Circle in 1970, I went on to specialize in American literature. What a surprise, then, in 1996 to receive a congratulatory note from Don, who had seen a notice in *Bostonia* of a book I had published. After that, we stayed in touch with notes and an occasional visit at his Auburndale home. A couple of years ago, when my wife and I dropped by, Don produced a pile of our Christmas cards—many of which pictured our family. “When people visit,” Don said, “I tell them that this is my BU family.”

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