

Thursday, August 7, 2008

Bill Connellan to give last lecture on Aug. 14

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

When Associate Professor of Journalism Bill Connellan began teaching journalism classes full time, he decided that he would only teach for five years before retiring. Connellan is completing his fifth year and will deliver his last lecture on Thursday, Aug. 14 at 9 a.m. in 204 O'Dowd Hall.

Connellan came to Oakland University in 1963 to study political science and history. He later covered the higher education beat for The Detroit News. Connellan returned to OU in 1970 and founded the journalism program in 1972. He taught part-time and served in a number of administrative roles in the Office of the President and the Provost's office before switching to a full-time faculty position in 2000. From 2001-04, Connellan took a leave from OU to serve as a senior vice president of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"When I decided to teach full time, I set a five year time frame. I'd seen plenty of examples of people who worked in administration go back to faculty positions and they were tired. It wasn't a happy time for them or the students. While others have done it quite successfully, I didn't want to be one of those who lingered too long," Connellan said. "I'm going out at the top of my game."

Connellan's OU career began as a student and that's when most of his favorite OU memories were created. His first memory is then-chancellor Woody Varner visiting the incoming freshmen for a lecture in Hannah Hall. Varner told the students to look to their left and right and only half of the students they saw would remain after the first year. Connellan said this held true in his case; both of those around him were no longer students at the end of the first year.

During Connellan's sophomore year, OU went to the legislature for more funding for the university and they were denied. The 3,000 students on campus staged a rally and signed a petition that garnered more than 2,000 signatures. He was impressed and moved by the way the students were able to mobilize and take action.

Connellan said just being a student at OU in the 1960s was unique.

"It was new. It was experimental. Everything we did as students inside and outside the classroom was innovative," Connellan said.

As an administrator, Connellan remembers people on campus who wanted to make programs succeed. In his acting role as Director of Urban Affairs, he helped organize the opening of a prep school in Detroit for students who had a run-in with the law. A woman from Urban Affairs stepped up and offered to run the federally-funded program.

"The program did really well, basically because somebody said 'let me try,'" Connellan said.

When Connellan realized he was giving his last lecture, he contacted Garry Gilbert, interim director of the journalism program and visiting instructor. Once Gilbert learned of Connellan's retirement, he wanted to bring his class too, as did Holly Gilbert, adjunct professor of journalism. They decided to publicize Connellan's last lecture and invite the campus community as well as any alumni who might want to wish Connellan well in the next stage of his life. Connellan has revised his topic and he will now talk about how journalism has changed in the last 50 years.

"Professor Connellan is not going to get out of here quietly. He's a veteran of journalism and the university. It is a gift to the students to be able to hear his final thoughts on 30 years of experience," said Holly Gilbert. "I teach in the classroom next to him this semester. He's a dynamic speaker and his classes are always having a good time and learning."

As for what is next, Connellan plans to do some consulting work and continue his work in the community. In addition, he will continue his work on **writing OU's history**, a project he started to celebrate OU's 50th anniversary. Connellan said OU will always be a part of his future since it was such a big part of his past.

SUMMARY

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