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Charter faculty member leaves legacy of learning

By **Tom Schram**, contributing writer

When OU Philosophy Professor Richard Burke retires at the end of the 2004-05 academic year, an era will come to an end. The last active member of OU's original faculty, Burke will leave behind an important legacy: a \$500,000 endowment funding the Richard Burke Visiting Scholar in Religion, Philosophy and Society. The annual event will bring a major philosophy figure to campus for several days each year to speak and lead seminars on a subject relevant to current events.

Burke says the lecture is a way of returning a favor.

"Oakland University has given me a lot," he said. "It's been my whole career, and I wanted to give something back."

Burke hopes the lecture will put philosophy "back in the spotlight for a few days" each year. When Oakland University first began, there was more of an emphasis on philosophy, he said. "I think by losing that emphasis, we've lost something important."

Although details are still being determined, Burke envisions the lecture series as a three-day mini-course or a lengthy series of meetings with students. No matter what the format, he hopes it will involve serious, thought-provoking discussions between scholars and students.

"Philosophy is relevant to what's going on around us," Burke said. "A lot of people don't understand that. They think it's abstract." The lecture, which Burke hopes will tackle some of society's biggest issues from war to religion to sexual ethics, should bring that concrete nature home for students.

"Richard Burke's gift will have a far-reaching impact on our students, faculty and the community," said Dave Downing, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "His generosity will enrich our curriculum and highlight the important contributions of philosophy to the world in which we live."

The decision to fund the lectures was sudden, made last fall as Burke contemplated both his past and future with OU.

"I got to thinking about what I would do with myself and what I would do with my money," he said.

On a personal level, the lecture means that despite not teaching, Burke will still be part of the university, serving on the five-member panel to select the lecturer each year. Even more important, however, is the fact that he will be supporting the one true gift every educator hopes to leave behind: knowledge.

SUMMARY

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