

Gene Plunka earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Maryland (College Park) in 1978; his primary area of research was Modern Drama. After brief stints as a technical writer, associate editor, and community college instructor, Gene began his career at (then) Memphis State University in August 1983 and this year he has completed his 36<sup>th</sup> year at the (now) University of Memphis.

It is an understatement to say that Gene has been a productive scholar, for over this thirty-six year period, he has published nine books and over 60 refereed articles, book chapters, and book reviews in his field of Modern Drama that total over 4,000 peer-reviewed pages by the most respected publishers and in the most respected journals in his field.

The quantity of his work is matched only by its quality. Gene has received numerous awards for his work, including:

- the University of Memphis College of Arts and Sciences Research Award (1988-89),
- the University of Memphis Alumni Association Award for Distinguished Research (2005),
- the Amy and Eric Burger Theater Competition Award for Outstanding Essay in Theater (2009),
- the South Central Modern Language Association Award for his *Holocaust Drama: The Theater of Atrocity*, published by Cambridge University Press (2009),
- and The University of Memphis' Dunavant Professorship, a prestigious award granted to faculty members who "demonstrate exceptional achievement in teaching, scholarship, and service."

In addition to Gene's extremely impressive and distinguished scholarly work, he has also been a dedicated teacher. While he has taught numerous graduate sections of Technical Editing and undergraduate sections of Tech Writing over the years, his strongest professional passion is teaching Modern and Contemporary Drama. Over his thirty-six year career at the University of Memphis, Gene has taught numerous sections of:

- Poetry and Drama
- Modern Drama
- Contemporary Drama
- Contemporary American Drama
- Modern British Drama
- Modern American Drama
- Modern European Drama

As a teacher, the individual time and care that Gene Plunka devotes to his students in these courses is exemplary. If a student misses class, even without a good reason, Gene sends that student an email and invites that student into his office, even outside of his office hours, to bring the student up-to-date on what that student missed in class. He also requires his students, both undergraduate and graduate, to conference with him about their research projects and their working bibliographies. He carefully examines their bibliographies, makes recommendations,

and then follows up with the students' progress. Perhaps what is most impressive is the time that Gene takes with assessing his students' writing. Gene spends hours laboring over his students' work. It is not unusual for Gene to casually mention that he spent two or three hours reading through an undergraduate student's short paper either trying to make sense of it, checking the student's cited sources, commenting constructively throughout, and listing its strengths and weaknesses. The time, care, and detail that this exceptionally productive scholar devotes to his students is commendable and exemplary.

While Gene's scholarly output and quality are most impressive and his dedication to teaching is commendable and exemplary, he has also devoted, over the years, thousands of hours to the department, the college, and the University. Some of the University and College committees on which he has served include:

- the Behavioral Standards Committee,
- Graduate Faculty Status Committee,
- Eminent Faculty Selection Committee,
- Faculty Research Grant Committee,
- College Representative for the University Council for Graduate Studies and Research,
- and the College of Arts and Sciences Tenure and Promotion Committee, just to mention a few.

Within the department, Gene has tirelessly served in almost every possible capacity over the years, including

- Graduate Studies Director,
- Coordinator of the Literature Concentration,
- Chair of Upper Division,
- Department Representative for the College of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum Committee,
- Department Representative for the College of Arts and Sciences Council for Research and Graduate Studies, and, for the last twelve years,
- Chair of the Policies and Procedures Committee.

Gene's dedication and commitment to the department and its improvement is recognized department-wide. If Gene Plunka is responsible for a project or task, it will be completed thoroughly, accurately, and ahead of schedule. He is always in his office, always willing to offer his time and energy, and he always approaches any departmental responsibility with the same vigor, detail, and integrity that is also evident in his research and teaching.

In short, Gene Plunka has been a consummate professional who has made significant and meaningful contributions to the department, the University, its community, its students, and his chosen field for over 36 years. Your presence and contributions will be missed by many—as one signer of his retirement card notes, “there will be a hole in the department,” and this will be a hole that will be empty for years to come. With your departure this semester, all of us here wish for you the best of health and happiness, wherever you settle, in the years ahead.