A Tribute to David H. Everson (1941-1999)

David H. Everson

by Jack Van Der Slik, *Professor Emeritus*

April 20, 1999 was a sad day for friends and colleagues of David Everson. That Tuesday afternoon Dave was doing what was typical for him, working out on the treadmill. This day he collapsed and died, just 57 years old and planning an early retirement from the university so he could give more attention to his creative writing.

Many of you knew Dave as an unflappable lecturer on politics and public policy, or as a quiet and trusted administrator, or as the obliging editor of *Comparative State Politics*. But, I want to tell you more and express my tribute and appreciation for him. Dave and I started our first full-time university jobs together on July 1, 1967, both freshly joint appointed to the Government Department and the Public Affairs Research Bureau at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. In 1970, he and his wife, Judy, moved on to become founding faculty members at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Illinois. With Dave's encouragement I joined SSU in 1981 to be part of the Illinois Legislative Studies Center, which he directed. We worked jointly on lots of projects: for four years we co-wrote a weekly column on Illinois politics, we co-directed five summer Taft Seminars for high school social studies teachers, and we co-hosted 40 public television interviews with Illinois political insiders. I succeeded him as director of the center, but he continued as a major force there until 1995 when he became Associate Chancellor of UIS. His energetic work contributed much to the transformation of Sangamon State into a campus of the University of Illinois.

There were many facets to the jewel that was Dave Everson. He was ever the dependable partner and colleague. His insights were keen, unconventional, and often humorous. He cared about the rights, needs, and feelings of others, but not with a cloying kind of concern. He could kid others, but mostly himself, by saying, "I care, but not that much."

Dave was a jock and liked jocks. He extended himself at baseball, running, tennis, and basketball, but in recent years, mostly at golf. He played hard, but not so much to beat someone else. He was fueled by his relentless pursuit to do better at something than he had done before.

He exhibited a personal carelessness that endeared him to students and co-workers. Perhaps a rumpled shirt tail showed; his pant cuff might be stuck under the elastic of his sock; his tie could be cockeyed or sagging far below his shirt collar; or his hair would be flying sideways. He revealed himself as unpretentious, informal, and approachable by anyone. Along with his accessibility, Dave was a good listener. Gleaning information from others, he would work those thoughts into his own unique insights while giving generous credit to others. As to himself, he was careless about taking credit for his accomplishments. Lists of his own articles, papers, convention activities, monographs, and the like simply were not very important to him.

Dave was not narrowly specialized in his written scholarship. He authored, co-authored, and co-edited a half dozen political science books, and published numerous essays and reviews. He was well read in democratic theory, electoral politics, political parties, lobbying, and legislative processes. He loved political biographies. Doubtless he knew more about lobbying and lobbyists in Illinois than any other political scientist. But the main beneficiary of his knowledge and good humor about those topics was an endless stream of students who were eager to take his classes or do a thesis with him. Dave made teaching and learning a joint venture, and students held him in great affection for the way he shared that enterprise with them.

One of Dave's engaging skills was in telling stories. Frequently over the years the staff and graduate students of the Illinois Legislative Studies Center performed as the supporting cast of the Mighty Everson Art Players. Dave wrote, directed, and starred in these productions which resembled bits for *The Tonight Show*. His skills and creative imagination were professionally recognized in the publication of a half dozen murder mysteries by Ballantine and St. Martin's Press. Not surprisingly, his fiction, which always used themes and images from Illinois politics and popular culture, revealed the same dry wit and incisive commentary that long endeared him to his students and friends.

For those of you who did not know Dave well, you missed an authentic good guy and a very gracious friend. For his son Chris he was a pal, a dad, and a tremendous mentor. His wife Judy was, as Dave said, his *sine qua non*. Dave, you will be missed.