

Professors Dunson and Fisher retire after a combined 77 years on campus

Dr. Linton Dunson

Dr. Linton Dunson retired this spring after 42 years in the government department. His impact on Wofford College, past and present, can best be seen in the lives and the minds of his students.

Friend and former colleague Dr. George Martin '59 is not alone in identifying Dunson as an iconic figure in the history of Wofford College.

"Linton has had an enormous influence on students," says Martin. "He has the combined capacity for scholarship and the ability to be a first-rate teacher. He embodies what makes Wofford special — scholarship and character. He believes that you don't take a job where you can't make a difference. That is the satisfaction Linton found at Wofford. He made a difference, because a campus like Wofford gives someone like Linton the opportunity to be himself."

In 1970, Dunson was awarded the Fred A. Gosnell Sr. Professorship of Government, but his interests stretch into political philosophy, history, aesthetics, nature, and political science.

Dunson's work on Wofford's Milliken Arboretum and his advocacy for the restoration of Old Main reflect his love of aesthetics, especially the interplay between form and function, and beauty and convenience.

No matter how involved he was in the beautification of Wofford, though, the most important work Dunson did was in the classroom "I still recall Dunson's lectures," says Dr. David Tyner '76. "They were models of clarity and organization, and they conveyed his love for American political history and institutions, particularly the Constitutional period. He was a

model professor, and his love of teaching and learning inspired me to follow in his footsteps and become a professor."

Dunson is a man of many interests and he encourages students to follow their own paths. He believes that unity is at the heart of a liberal arts education—a unity that permits freedom of thought.

"Dr. Dunson's cogency, organization and self-evident love for the subject matter surely made him one of the best professors Wofford has ever known," says Josh Whitley '05, a recent graduate of the law school at the College of William and Mary. "It was that love that has caused students to become lifelong learners. Dr. Dunson's immense intellect is matched only by his endearing and sincere humility."

Dunson's teaching, however, has not been confined to the classroom.

"Dr. Dunson has a deep knowledge of natural history," says Tyner. "A walk in the woods with him is as stimulating and informative as listening to his lectures on American government. Over the years, I brought him many botanical samples for identification, and I was always impressed with his encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world."

Great teachers, it seems, inspire different students in different ways—some are inspired to be lawyers, some to be historians, and some to be philosophers.

"Linton believes that what matters is who you are in the place where you are," says Martin. "It was never about reputation or about what people elsewhere thought of him. He is interested in personality, character and people more than ideas. He is interested in the facts and details that make our government work. Most importantly, he believes



Dr. Vivian Fisher walks through lines of cheering faculty at Commencement.

in the authority of history, the power of the past to guide the present."

Dr. Vivian Fisher

Dr. Vivian Fisher retired this spring after 35 years at Wofford College. Fisher would be the first person to say that, in a college classroom, "the text is everything." Her friends, colleagues, and students might add that high standards, high expectations, and hard work played a large role in her classes as well. Often, the nature of that hard work played out in a variety of ways.

"She says she's spent a career fighting entropy — rearranging classroom chairs, rebuilding old houses, bringing order to student sentences, student paragraphs, and student papers," says Dr. Clarence "Ab" Abercrombie, colleague and friend. "I think she has some vision of an Order that she considers an essential part of being fully human."

Fisher arrived at Wofford from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in the fall of 1973 to teach Victorian literature, but she soon fell in love with the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats.

In the early years, Fisher was too busy developing new courses to dwell on the fact that she was the only tenure-track woman on the faculty.

"Vivian and I came to Wofford in 1973," says John Lane '77, who teaches in the English department. "[It was her] first year as a hip young English

professor and mine as a freshman. We've been friends a long time, and I've learned a great deal in her steady presence — about Romantic poetry, Joseph Conrad, World War I, historic preservation, and even rescue techniques in white water paddling."

Thoroughness and conscientiousness, peppered with tenacity, have marked Fisher's teaching since the beginning.

"I was Vivian's student here and worked as her student assistant for two years," says Dr. Carol Brasington Wilson '81, who is now an associate professor in Wofford's English department. "Even then, I was struck by the care and high standards she brought to the teaching of writing and literature. At that point in her career, she didn't have photocopies of students' secondary sources to speed up her grading of research papers, so she would bundle up the entire stack and head to the library to re-research each student's paper. Even at 19, I wondered how she got through them!"

"From Vivian," Wilson adds, "I learned that instructors' holding very high standards are in students' best interests. More important, I think, I learned that the best partners for very high standards in any classroom are encouragement and sincere interest in the students' success."

One important thread running through both Fisher's teaching and her favorite books is an abiding desire for social justice.

"Vivian has the deep-rooted conscience of an old-time Ala-

bama liberal," says Abercrombie. "On some days I think that 'To Kill A Mockingbird' really stars her as Atticus Finch. She cares about justice and about service—but she'd be damned before she'd have you express it just that way."

As a part of a War Year lecture in the fall of 2006, Abercrombie paid tribute to his dear friend, saying, "Some people have said that Vivian Fisher is a genteel Southern lady on the outside, and one of those 'steel magnolias' down underneath. This afternoon I'll tell you that the claim is incorrect. Vivian is indeed a genteel Southern lady on the outside. On the inside, however, she is an Abrams M1A2 Main Battle Tank with a uranium penetrator locked and loaded in its 120mm gun."

Fisher is a literature professor who, according to Abercrombie, would've made a great biologist, historian, or dean of an agricultural college. She likes snakes and loves cats. Her hours outside of the classroom have been spent restoring old houses and digging in the rich soil of her garden. Since the 1980s she has worked on a history of Historic Hampton Heights, a project that has grown into at least three books worth of material and a Web page.

Fisher says that she will miss her students and interaction with her colleagues. A self-professed loner by nature, she worries that she won't get out and talk to people. But that doesn't mean, of course, that she won't stay busy.

"I'm going to read," she says. "And I'm going to re-read."

both stories by Jeremy Jones

In the late 1980s, Dr. Linton Dunson teaches a government class.

