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UNC professor Stevenson, 65

MANDY LOCKE, Staff Writer

Robert L. Stevenson, a long-time UNC-Chapel Hill journalism professor whose curiosities lured him to scores of foreign nations to study media, died Saturday after a heart attack. He was 65.

For more than 30 years, Stevenson taught the intricacies of foreign media systems to thousands of UNC students.

Stevenson opened his condominium to many a newly arrived international student in Chapel Hill, fellow professors said. His dinner table often drew a diverse collection of foreign students eager to debate international matters.

"Bob was internationally minded," said Richard Cole, professor and former dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. "He wanted the world to live in peace and for everyone to understand different cultures. He made sure that happened in big and small ways."

By his own count, Stevenson had lectured in more than 25 countries and logged more than a million frequent-flier miles. By his career's end, stamps from 60 countries filled his passport.

In 2004, he toured China at the invitation of the State Department's public diplomacy office, lecturing at universities and media companies. He logged his adventures in a Web-based journal, its entries capturing his understated and often dry assessment of each scene.

"Michael Jordan is in China, so identification of UNC is easy," he writes while describing a lecture in the city of Jinan.

Stevenson spent his entire career at UNC; his fellow faculty became the lifelong bachelor's family. On his birthday, he would bake himself a cake, take it to the school and share it with colleagues, said Philip Meyer, a fellow professor and friend.

In a tenure review two years ago in which Stevenson reflected on his career, he wrote, "I will leave a large part of my life and soul on this campus."

Colleagues say Stevenson was a consummate scholar and a solid lecturer. Stevenson disagreed.

"My teaching has always been marginal," he wrote in the same tenure review. "I try, but decided some years ago that I really don't have the temperament to do what it takes to be a pop star in edutainment."

His gift, he wrote, was mentoring and teaching graduate students who have since launched their own teaching careers.

Stevenson's heart had been failing him for some time. He brushed death more than once in recent years and was sidelined by an attack last summer during a teaching stint in London. After beginning to teach a course this fall, he eventually handed over his lecture notes to a colleague and asked that he finish teaching the class.

Stevenson's health battles brought a measured assessment of his career, which he described in his

tenure review through the vernacular of radio humorist Garrison Keillor: "When I look back on my professional and personal life at UNC, I find that it's not so bad, it's good enough and in the end, I am what I am."

Stevenson will be buried in his native Wisconsin. UNC faculty and students will remember him at a memorial service not yet scheduled.

Staff writer Mandy Locke can be reached at 829-8927 or mandy.locke@newsobserver.com.

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