

Lawrence K. Williams

March 8, 1930 — February 3, 2005

Professor Lawrence K. Williams was a valued faculty member of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations for 45 years. Born in Bellows Falls, Vermont, Larry received his B.S. degree in Psychology from Tufts University in 1952, his M.A. degree from the University of Illinois in 1954, and a Ph.D. degree in Social Psychology from the University of Michigan in 1960. From 1954-56, he served in the U.S. Army as a research psychologist. Larry joined the ILR School as an Assistant Professor in 1961, and was promoted to full Professor in 1969. At the time of his death, he was Professor Emeritus in the Department of Organizational Behavior and had recently completed teaching his popular graduate course on organizational change. For 21 years, from 1969-75 and from 1982 until his retirement in 1997, he also served as the ILR School's Director of Graduate Studies.

As a social psychologist with a capital "P," Larry was recruited to the ILR School by Professor William Foote Whyte, who was then in the process of building the Department of Organizational Behavior and offered him a generous research budget to study white-collar automation in New York State. He subsequently published research on the effect of cultural differences on workers' attitudes, motivational constraints in industrial retraining, and the impact of technological change on individuals and organizations. In the 1960s, he and Professor Whyte were co-directors of a longitudinal and comparative research project, "A Study of Change in Peruvian Villages." Speaking of that project, Larry said that he was most proud of the book that they coauthored, *Toward an Integrated Theory of Development*, which became the basic training manual for the Peace Corps.

Larry was a beloved teacher and his courses were always popular with students. During his long career, he served on the committees of over 250 graduate students and acted as chair for more than 70 of them. As Director of Graduate Studies, he also took a personal interest in every student who entered the MILR Program. Students' remarks on his passing reflect a great affection for Larry as a teacher and mentor. Melissa Siebrecht wrote,

"Professor Williams was one of the kindest, most approachable teachers I've ever known. . . . Thank you for the advice and for posing the thought-provoking questions; especially for helping me to understand myself better when it came to issues of change."

Pete Fisher commented, "I really enjoyed Dr. William's class last semester. . . . I will never forget the fun we had learning about different cultures."

Devan Scott remarked, "As a non-traditional student, I received great support from Professor Williams. . . . I am grateful for the support and continue to see the results today."

Professor David Lipsky described Larry as a “connector,” someone with a special gift for bringing the world together. One way Larry brought us together was through his mentoring of junior faculty, serving as the ILR School’s institutional memory by connecting our past, present, and future. Professor Lipsky remarked,

“When I was an assistant professor, Larry was a kind of tutor. He especially taught me about the mysteries of the ILR School and the University. Larry knew as much about our institution as anyone I’ve ever met.”

Professor Lee Dyer remembers,

“The one thing that struck me about Larry, perhaps more than anything else, was how helpful he tried to be to junior faculty. When I came here the department hadn’t had an assistant professor in a number of years and really didn’t know what to make of me. Larry often ambled down the hall and stepped into that breach by offering a number of helpful hints, especially about time allocation, faculty relations (okay politics) and research. . . . Without question, his efforts helped to make my first few years on the ILR faculty a whole lot easier than they would have been otherwise.”

Janice Guthrie and Jennifer Borel described Larry in ILR Connections (Summer 2002) as

“a frequent source of information on anything ILR related . . . His current, unofficial titles include historian, lexicographer irregular, and quipster. Our motto when the written record proves inadequate is, ‘Ask Larry!’”

As the ILR School’s Director of Graduate Studies, Larry was most proud of being one of the founders and directors of GOALS, a foundation to support under represented minority graduate students in Human Resources and Industrial Relations. Together with representatives from sister programs, Larry designed, raised funds, and managed the foundation.

One of Larry’s hobbies was gardening, and he served as the ILR Gardener for many years. As Martha Smith observed, “When I look at the ILR gardens . . . I’ll think of him and how much he loved life.” His love of life was also reflected in the many organizations he supported with his generous contributions of time and money. These include the Family Reading Partnership, Heifer International Projects, the Sierra Club, Tufts University, and Cornell University. He also was the Past Commodore of the Ithaca Yacht Club, Treasurer of the Condominium Association of the Commodore Club in Naples, Florida, and a Board member of Ithaco.

Larry will be missed for his kindness, sense of humor, and endless array of stories. As Julie Sadler remarked, “He could always make me smile . . . [He] will be sorely missed around the halls of ILR.” Larry was one of those special people who always made you feel better when you talked with him. We looked forward to seeing him at work every day, stopping by each morning to check in, coming to lunch, and telling stories about the ILR School in the old days. He loved to tell jokes, and was an amazing punster. Indeed, almost every conversation with Larry

would start with a joke or story. After he retired, Larry spent the winter in Florida, which left a void in Ives Hall. We looked forward to his annual northern migration, and his showing up in Ithaca on or about May 5, like the swallows returning to Capistrano.

When asked, "How are you today?" Larry's common refrain was always, "Adequate." But Larry was so much more than adequate. He was a generous colleague, supportive mentor to his students, and a kind man to all he met.

His wife, Jean Starliper Williams, and their son, Jeffrey Freeman Williams, predeceased Professor Williams. His cousins, Susan Smith of Williamsburg, Virginia, and Tom Orth of South Mountain, Pennsylvania, as well as his companion and domestic partner, Jeanne Mueller, Professor Emerita, College of Human Ecology, survive him.

George Boyer, Tove Hammer, William Sonnenstuhl