

MICHAEL CLARK DOWNS

18 June 1939 – 24 January 2001

On January 24, 2001, the university community suffered an irreparable loss. Michael Clark Downs, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science, passed away suddenly.

Professor Downs came to our then fledgling campus in 1966 as a resident lecturer. He was to be the second member of the Indiana University Political Science Department. He had completed his undergraduate work at Aquinas College and was, at the time, a doctoral candidate at the University of Notre Dame. He flourished here and, thus, so did we. He quickly established himself as a truly great teacher and faculty advocate and authored a highly regarded book. He was awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor. In turn, we were rewarded with his wit, his helping hands, and his moral leadership.

A man with a good liberal education, Michael Downs shared with us not only his remarkable range of knowledge and skills, but also his sense of wonder about the human condition. His love of language and the outdoors was apparent to all, and so was his fondness for snowstorms. He could, with equal grace, broker agreements, navigate rules and regulations, counsel a troubled heart, discuss the intricacies of baseball, and build homes in his beloved Upper Peninsula. He had a golden pen and a generous spirit.

We are his beneficiaries. He labored long and hard on behalf of the university. He was Speaker of the Indiana University Faculty for 11 years, Presiding Officer for three years, chair of the Political Science Department since 1978, and the campus representative to the University Faculty Council since forever. His service on other committees at the system, campus, and school levels number over 100. He led us, prodded us, or provoked us on every grand effort undertaken from the merger of the two Senates and academic restructuring to distance learning initiatives and university operating agreements. Several generations of chancellors, vice chancellors and deans of Arts and Sciences relied on his sound advice and respected his well-thought-out criticisms. So did his colleagues. He was always available. He was invariably successful in resolving disputes, but his integrity was never in question nor his devotion to the faculty.

Professor Downs' presence at the university also benefited the greater community. His counsel and insights were no less in demand as a practitioner of politics. He loved its rough and tumble. He served as Vice President of the Allen County Election Board since 1974, as chair of the Indiana State Election Board Voting Systems Advisory Committee, and on countless committees for the city of Fort Wayne and the state of Indiana. He remained always a loyal son of the Democratic Party.

We feel his loss deeply, but how can he best be remembered? Perhaps by recalling that Michael Downs was, above all else, a teacher. When they entered his classroom, students quickly discovered that a liberal education involves more than the development of skills of analysis and expression. It demands a sensitivity to the nuances of aesthetic and moral values. Professor Downs' lectures enabled students to gain a thorough, integrated, broad view of the subject matter at hand by placing it in the texture of common experience. He challenged students to think critically and to make reasoned judgments. Most importantly, he listened and understood. He evoked the very best in his students, helping them acquire the courage, imagination, and clarity of thought necessary to realize their potential and act as ethical

human beings. Here was the true measure of his life and its meaning to this institution and the community beyond.

The Senate shares the grief and happy memories that Michael Downs' death brought to his wife, Mary; his children, Philip, Sarah, Andrew, Nancy, Emma, and Gabriel; his grandchildren, Rebecca and Gavin; his sisters, Claire and Kris; and his niece, Susan. We honor him as a great man of this time and place.