

# Robert Turner, English

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Robert Yongue Turner, emeritus professor of English at Penn's School of Arts and Sciences, passed away on January 16. He was 93.

Dr. Turner received an undergraduate degree from Princeton and a doctoral degree from the University of Chicago. In 1958, Dr. Turner was hired as an instructor in the English department of Penn's School of Arts and Sciences. Three years later, he became an assistant professor in the same department; in 1964 he was promoted to associate professor. During the 1960s, Dr. Turner taught one of Penn's earliest "television courses," the precursor to remote learning (*Almanac* April 1962 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v08pdf/n08/040162.pdf>)). In 1972, Dr. Turner became the chair of the English department, a position he held for three years, and in 1974, he was promoted to professor of English. Dr. Turner also taught courses in the College of General Studies (now the College of Liberal and Professional Studies). He retired from Penn and took emeritus status in 1996.

Dr. Turner specialized in Renaissance drama, with primary emphasis on Shakespeare. In 1974, he published a book with the University of Chicago Press, *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship*, which traced the development—from the didactic to the mimetic—of both Shakespeare's early drama and the early stage of English drama. Rebecca Bushnell, School of Arts and Sciences Board of Advisors Emerita Professor of English, refers to Dr. Turner's work on the Renaissance as "always insightful and deeply informed by both a sense of period and the text."

Throughout his career, Dr. Turner also published many peer-reviewed articles. According to Margreta de Grazia, Sheli and Burton Rosenberg Emerita Professor of the Humanities, "the last of his many articles on non-Shakespearean drama, on patronage and market forces in Phillip Massinger's comedies, was titled 'Giving and Taking', a telling title for someone who asked nothing in return for all he was ready to give."

Toward the end of his life, he was busy researching Jacobean tragicomedies by Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Webster, and Massinger. His research earned a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1974, and in 1963 he won Penn's Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. In 1966, Dr. Turner became an honorary member of Penn's Kite and Key Society. Dr. Turner was active at Penn, serving on University Council committees and writing letters to *The Daily Pennsylvanian* to engage with student activism.

Dr. Turner's colleagues and students overwhelmingly recall his generosity. Herman Beavers, Julie Beren Platt and Marc E. Platt President's Distinguished Professor of English and Africana studies, was in his first year as an assistant professor when he administered a graduate student's oral examination with Dr. Turner and remembers being anxious to prove his mettle. "I took note of Bob's ability to set the student at ease so that she could get through the exam (and in taking note, I felt my anxiety lift). His compassion for her struggle and his desire to see her succeed have been touchstones for me."

"In over 50 years at Penn," said emerita professor of English Phyllis Rackin, "I've seen many good teachers, but none to equal Bob Turner. When I first came here, I was assigned to advise undergraduate students, and the consensus among them was that Bob's classes were the best—not easy, but very, very good."

For Gwynne A. Kennedy, PhD '89, now an associate professor of English and women's & gender studies at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Dr. Turner's compassion also remains a touchstone. "At my university, I have been graduate chair in English and in women's & gender studies several times, and Dr. Turner has been my role model. I have tried to be as kind and encouraging as he was to me."

Dr. Turner is survived by a cousin, Lillian J. Howland of Gastonia, North Carolina. His funeral and interment were private.