

Note: English Department Chair Peter Parolin kindly agreed to say a few words at the retirement reception of Phil Holt on April 12, 2017. The following are his speech notes, not edited.

Saying goodbye to a colleague you've worked with since you first arrived in Hoyt Hall 20 years ago is a melancholy and difficult task for me, and the task is made even more difficult when the colleague is the inimitable, irascible, satirical, deadly serious, deeply humorous, classically trained, Plato loving, conscience keeping University of Wyoming watchdog, Philip G. Holt. Phil, I'm honored by your invitation to offer a few remarks today and I'll do my best to be worthy of your indelible contributions to the University of Wyoming.

I'll begin with a few biographical details just to make sure we all know who Phil Holt is; let's see if we know him as well as we think we do, and Phil, please feel free to jump in if I say anything wrong or omit anything important. Phil grew up in Bethesda, MD; he attended his beloved St. John's College as an undergrad; and then he went to Texas to pursue graduate studies. When one of Texas's finest profs left for Stanford, Phil followed him there and Stanford was where he began his long association with Greek tragedy. After receiving his PhD, Phil says he "sought a job as a commodity in a buyer's market" for 10 years at which point he landed a tenure track job at Georgia. He left Georgia after a few years, moved back to Annapolis and did scientific copy-editing in DC. The academy was never far away, and through a friend Phil got Library privileges at Johns Hopkins, which he treasured. He edged his way back to academia, he says he "lucked" into a lectureship at Irvine, though I am sure it was more than luck, and after 3 years there, Phil was offered the position at UW. Phil says "Losing your job in the late 70s was like a death warrant and I got a reprieve from UW in 1987, when I was 40."

So what has happened in Phil's life at UW? What are the highlights. Of course he chaired MCL, but department administration was not his highlight; instead he said that he values most of all teaching classics here and getting classics into the mainstream of education. He wanted to add on to the language offerings so he started classical civilization which hadn't been taught at UW in over a century. Phil told me that of the nine original UW faculty, one was a classicist; at Phil's departure, the 1 in 9 will be 1 in 500. For many years, Phil ran the vibrant summer classics institute which invited lifelong learners back into the academy and put them shoulder to shoulder with some of UW's great teachers as well as distinguished scholars from across the country. At UW he's taught Athenian Democracy, Greek Tragedy, The Trial of Socrates; Epic Poetry.

Through his teaching, he confronts time and again the fact that the ancients are powerfully contemporary; he believes and he helps students see that a good understanding of the past can help us understand the present. "Plato is so smart it scares me," he says, and that's something because I don't think of Phil as someone who scares easily. Especially intellectually.

Through his teaching, Phil has championed the values of a liberal arts education. Teaching language helps him and his students understand how other languages and other cultures work; language helps you understand how cultures build worldviews, and that type of understanding is essential for anyone who aspires to make a difference in the world. Sometimes people see

the liberal arts as an alternative to the real world, but as they said at St. John's, when you studied the liberal arts intensively, you were actually getting yourself ready for the real world.

Phil himself has put his civic-minded education to good use at UW, raising his voice over and over again on important issues that we confront, both in terms of our identity and values and in terms of the practical dimensions of working and studying here. I have no doubt that one of the places I will miss Phil most is on the faculty listserve where his witty pithy comments have reminded us what's important in life. I even did a Phil Holt search on my Outlook account this morning, and lo and behold, when a NYT story reported that the "Lack of Oxford Comma Costs Maine Company Millions," Phil replied, "Language skills in the news. Take note." When languages and other important programs came under fire at UW, Phil did not hold his fire, and his reminders to us were salutary: "a lot of our programs do good far beyond turning out specialists. ... In short, loading 16 (potential) program cuts tells us very little about how much money we are saving--although it certainly raises red flags about how much damage we are doing to the University in the heat of the moment"; when he worried that cuts in academics were outweighing cuts to athletics, he wrote, "I like football. Helping students participate in athletics is a worthy objective, but so is helping them participate in taking classes."

And even when the fights on the listserve were not about academics, Phil contributed his customary good sense. In the cyclists vs. pedestrians controversy of 2015, which to this day is my favorite ever controversy on the UW faculty listserve, Phil remembered to ask, "Does anybody have any information about how many serious incidents we've had—i.e., collisions between cyclists and pedestrians that required medical attention? Let's make whatever remedies we come up with proportionate to the extent of the problem." What a concept.

Then there are the occasional invitations I get from Phil invitations, for a pint here a bite of food there, but even in his private epistolary style, his mind never wanders too far from the bureaucratic constraints under which we labor. I'm particularly fond of this one: "Shall we get a Drink at the Alibi: Since there will be just the two of us, this gathering will likely be regarded as under enrolled, but I'm willing to take it on overload."

Phil will leave Laramie for Ann Arbor, MI, a great college town where he will be able to continue his engagement with the life of the mind, and with all those particular great minds from the distant past who speak with ongoing clarity to the present and the future. He leaves us a model of what it means to be a great faculty member and have a worthy life in the humanities – it's a message we would all do well to heed and a model we would all do well to preserve: For Phil says, "I leave UW thinking that I've had the most important job in the university. I work off a mission, not a job description." For your commitment to our collective mission, I thank you Philip G. Holt and I invite everyone to join me in a toast to his long and happy retirement.

been an acerbic commentator over the years on the value of humanistic studies

