In honor of Nordquist’s retirement, we thought we’d use this quiet news time, the end of 2008, and the beginning of a new semester to pay tribute to Dick. What follows are words about him and by him from over the years. Enjoy, best wishes, and happy holidays!
**Mark Finlay:**

Dick will be missed, for
- whenever a faculty member or student needed an advocate, Dick would **advocate** (and usually do so in a 4AM email rant)
  - whenever an unusual course needed to be taught at a bizarre time, Dick would **teach** (and with passion, creativity, and rigor)
  - whenever a colleague needed a letter of recommendation, a speech, or a ghost-written essay, Dick would **write** it (and with eloquence and wit)
  - whenever an obscure ad hoc committee needed a member, Dick would **serve** (and take indecipherable notes that would be the basis for real improvement)
  - whenever a hitherto unnecessary administrative post needed a leader, Dick would **lead** (and find a way to get to heart of the matter without adding yet another layer of bureaucracy)
  - whenever an unfunded good idea needed funding, Dick would **fund** it (and usually from his own pocket)
  - whenever a student needed to be motivated, Dick would find a way to **inspire** a love of learning (and as if the student’s life depended on it)
  - whenever the poker players needed a venue, Dick would **entertain** them (and bid foolishly so his guests would win the money)
  - whenever you needed someone to **express outrage**, (and you did not have the guts to do it), Dick would express it for you

Here’s to Dick, and to **advocacy, teaching, writing, service, leadership, funding, inspiration, entertainment,** and expressing outrage.

**Beth Howells:**

The first time I met Dick Nordquist, he asked me what a word meant. I can’t remember what word it was and I didn’t know the definition. It was during one of my first weeks on campus in fall of 2001. I was the newly hired Composition Coordinator, and as I was trying to figure out what that meant, my colleagues directed me to Dick. Of course, mine was one of the many positions on campus he had invented and served in years earlier. When I arrived at his office in Victor Hall at the crack of 1pm, he was eating breakfast and introduced himself by asking for a definition. I thought I was being tested. But what happened was quite different: we went over to a dictionary stand and looked up the word, talked about it, and Dick scribbled notes like mad after our discussion.

This initial moment, in some ways, serves as a metaphor, an illustration, an exemplum that would foreshadow our later interactions. It doesn’t matter what that word was because as he did on many subjects over the years, he demonstrated his respect for my knowledge and his desire to learn in that exchange. And I collaborated with him and walked away with new information. I learned that I could come to him and ask for advice or direction but would walk away feeling like I had helped him out in some way. Dick has this way of turning the tables and that element of surprise will be sorely missed in our campus exchanges, at faculty forums, at committee meetings, and all across AASU.
**Teresa Winterhalter:**
One afternoon after talking with Dick about my adjustment to life at good old Armstrong State College, he told me that "Armstrong has a long-standing tradition of eating its young alive." He said he was glad to see my taste for challenging the Old Guard. He then quipped that "growing older also has its benefits that way: they get used to seeing you around and figure you might just wander down Abercorn and get hit by a car or something." His levity and sardonic wit really helped me survive, and of course, his sound advice was the thing that saved me as I was making my way.

**Lorrie Hoffman:**
You are welcome to include this email for Dick. I have searched my briefcase, home and files here for an email he sent me that I know I kept, but like with most things, I can not find when I want to. It was about continuing the tradition of being (and let me use my own inelegant words....Dick said it much better) a rabble rouser, a thorn in the side of some at AASU who might just want to stay in a comfort zone, their own staid ways, doing things because 'it is the way we do things here'. I just want Dick to know he can count on me on that front. I liked the word he used (or did I just hallucinate this?)...we owe AASU some 'outrage' on some special issues that come up from time to time. So, Dick, thanks for carrying that torch for so many years.

**Keith Douglass:**
Dick is the kind of person I expected to be working with when I went into higher education, and he never disappointed, even when he was wrong and I was right. Although Dick made a lot of contributions to AASU, probably his most profound was helping to get rid of a lot of dead wood; a lot of us retired because we were afraid of being there after he left.

**Lorie Roth:**
I have many vivid memories of Richard Nordquist, whom I have admired for 25 years. But there is one memory that trumps them all: watching him create what would become his widely acclaimed and best-selling textbook. Writing largely during the break between summer session and the fall term, Dick barricaded himself in the Writing Center (he was the director then) and labored from noon to 3 a.m. He had pilfered a cot from the Nursing Department and sometimes slept in the building overnight (he was on a first-name basis with the campus police). He locked the Writing Center door to discourage casual conversations, but occasionally we would press our noses up against the door window to survey the furious labor going forward. Mounds and mounds and piles of papers covered every surface. A few wrappers from Burger King littered the floor. Manilla folders and envelopes appeared and disappeared. Sometimes we would catch a glimpse of Dick’s dark curly hair and unshaven face bent over a yellow tablet. On the weekends, when Mr. Stegall turned off the air conditioning in the building, drenched in sweat, Nordquist typed and typed and typed (no computers in those days). Dick and R Crumb have something in common, both wonderfully maniacal, obsessive, driven, funny, creative, truly one of a kind in their fields. How lucky Armstrong was to have him.
DICK NORDQUIST, LETTER TO THE DMV:
27 March 1982

ECB
Motor Vehicle Division
P. O. Box 38165
Capitol Hill Station
Atlanta, Georgia  30334

Dear ECB (or To Whom It May Concern):

You must be the strong, silent type – your missive of 3-16-82 was brutally terse. I don’t really mind your inane threat (“Failure to comply . . .”), but I am troubled by the yellow Hi-Lited message C33: “Submit original bill of sale . . .” You’ve made me feel so damn stupid, I just want to weep. You see, I was fool enough to believe that the enclosed form from Country Trading Post marked “Bill of Sale” was, indeed, the “bill of sale” you required. My Bill of Sale has been signed by the seller, has been notarized, shows a correct chain of ownership, and IS NOT A PHOTOCOPY. Boy, do I feel like a jerk—I thought I was submitting the bill of sale, but as it turns out I was submitting only a bill of sale. I can just imagine all you folks down at Motor Vehicle passing my Bill of Sale around, slapping your thighs and guffawing and marking me down as a damn fool C33.

You’ve been kind enough to send along a blank MV-1. But shoot, you’ve got me feeling stupid again. I filled out what I could, but I got stymied about halfway down the form. It seems you want me to sashay over to Loxley, Alabama, to get Burne Wilson and Mr. Langham to fill out the rest of the form. Now this may strike you as peculiar, but I don’t get to Loxley all that often; in fact, I’ve been there just once – the afternoon last summer that my old Ford shot a piston and I bought Burne’s Chevy for 500 bucks to get me back to Savannah. Now I promise you, if those boys from Alabama should stop by here, I’ll have them fill out the form and send it right back to you. But that could take awhile. So I’ve got an idea. Since you folks in Atlanta are a lot closer to Loxley than I am, why don’t you slide on down there, stop at the Country Trading Post (you’ll find Merle there -- she’s Loxley’s Notary) and get the boys to fill in the form. As I recall, Burne can’t write too good, but he’s got a wife (who he “wouldn’t trade for a million dollars”—something he told me so many times that afternoon that I got to figuring he was ready to haggle over her) who’s fairly literate and (again, according to Burne) “fries the best damn chicken in Loxley.” They’re obliging folks and I’m sure everything can be taken care of in a single afternoon.

I’m sorry for being so stupid and messing things up the way I have, but I promise you it won’t happen again. I’m also sorry I can’t be of much help to you, but if you just drive on down to Loxley I’m sure everything will work out fine. You enjoy your trip now, and be sure to send me a card telling me how everything worked out.

Sincerely,
R. Nordquist
RESPONSE TO NORDQUIST'S LETTER TO THE MOTOR VEHICLE DIVISION:

3506 Buford Hwy., Apt. L 5
Atlanta, Georgia  30329

May 12, 1982

Dear Sir,

I could not let this day pass – with its endless stream of dreary repetitions – mind-dulling Revenue forms, without telling you that I loved your letter! I would like to dash off to Loxley; but they would most certainly dock my pay. A letter such as yours is as a fresh breeze in a humid swamp of muddled thinking. I thank you.

Dora McDavell

I’ll retire in a few years, and your letter will be one of the few bright spots in an overwhelming sea [of] mediocre humdrum junk.

ARTICLE IN THE INKWELL, APRIL 5, 1989
CODSWALLOP, CLAPTRAP, AND ARYAN FLAPDOODLE: A REVIEW OF THE ASC CATALOG

BY LUBBY JUGGINS (AKA DICK NORDQUIST)

Spit out that piece of gum, mister, and fetch your college catalog—right now. You’ve got it, the gray thing with the Tomb of the Unknown Student etched in white on the cover. Okay, flip through it and tell me if this isn’t the biggest load of codswallop, claptrap, and Aryan flapdoodle that you’ve ever seen.

No, No, I’m not talking about those brutal lists of degree requirements or even the moronic descriptions of courses that haven’t been offered in fifty-one years. Pure fiction, as everybody knows, like the pedigrees of the “full-time members of the teaching corps” (those matchbook wonders listed in the back).

What’s got me bouncing off the walls is all the hype and blather—the goofy promo stuff that’s supposed to seduce thousands of moist seventeen-year-olds into shredding their Duke scholarships in favor of a “beautiful campus, a friendly smile, and modern facilities” at rah-rah Armstrong State. Yipes!

Now, kid, look more closely. Every picture, it’s the same blondes. Half-day rentals from Miss Clairol. Tell me, have you seen any of those glowing geeks on campus? Of course not. For one thing, this is a commuter college, and people who work forty hours a week don’t have time to loll around the quad grinning insanely. For another thing, the average age of the Armstrong student is twenty-six, and—except for a college administrator or two—no potty-trained adult over the legal drinking age is still frosting his or her hair.

But the pictures tell only half the story. Try reading this guff. All our favorite clichés are here: “a career investment,” “a bright future,” “educational horizons,” “historic Savannah.” Prattle on and lather us with your foamy prose—prose that moves the lips and numbs the mind.

There are words here that make me choke back tears, words that make me want to donate my glands to science—right now. Check out the bold print on page eight: Oh, come on yourself. If this catalog is Armstrong, if this catalog with its grinning homogenized blondes and its Velveeta prose is life, book me a cheap seat out of here, right now.

But everybody knows this twaddle ain’t Armstrong and it ain’t life. It’s just the same twaddle found in every other college catalog. You know, just once, before they stuff my bones into a Hefty bag and drop me by the curb, I’d like to see a real, genuine, no-bull catalog.

I’d like to see pictures of real students—pimento eyed and sway-backed, lipstick on the chin and baby barf on the collar, staggering in for a 7:30 session with Dr. Demento. Or a shift worker smelling of kerosene and Top Job, passed out in his biology book in a library carrel. Or one of those dream-deferred students hurrying out of an N4 class to put the rug rats to bed so she can study and catch a few hours’ sleep before weaving downtown to the office the next morning. I’d especially like to see a lot of dark hair—frazzled, maybe receding—and it wouldn’t bother me a bit if nobody was grinning from ear to ear.

And, before they hang me, I’d just once like to read something honest in a college catalog. “This isn’t Myrtle Beach,” it might say, “and it sure ain’t the Ivy league, but if you’re ready to bust your buns you can get a decent education. You’ll have to endure a few professors who insist on working out their anxieties in your face, though most know their stuff and still manage to care—even at minimum wage.”

“You’ll probably never raid a panty, tap a keg, sing a fight song, or slurp coffee head-to-head with your favorite prof. And, Lord knows, you won’t ‘find yourself’ here. But after you’ve gone through hell—after years of bookstore ripoffs, professorial ironies, and inane courses—you just might make something of yourself here. But it ain’t Sears, remember, and there’re no guarantees.”

Then, at the bottom of the page, maybe directly across from a snapshot of a dental hygienist frantically dashing off an essay in a lavatory stall will be the new slogan:

Armstrong…

No B.S. here.
And you know, that’s just the sort of thing that could make me rip up a scholarship to Duke.

**ARTICLE IN THE INKWELL, APRIL 19, 1989:**
**Passing The Regents’ Test – the Lubby Juggins way**

Why do so many Americans keep household pets? How have your eating habits changed since you first entered college? Which do you prefer, a car or a pickup? What is your favorite piece of furniture in the whole world?

No, boys and girls, these are not brain-teasers from Socrates or tidbits from the latest hormone quiz in *Cosmo*. Rather, these little mind-stretchers are the sorts of banal topics that hundreds of ASC students will be taunted with next week on the Regents’ Test. Huddled like refugees in the Fine Arts building, with blobs of ink on their fingertips and beads of blood on their foreheads, panicky sophomores will scribble moronic five-paragraph themes on subjects that would bore even a college dean to salty tears.

Fortunately, I can say that I’ve passed the damn test – the proof is there on my transcript. But there’s no honor or glory in it. Passing the Regents’ Test, as everybody knows, is like passing a urine test: no wit or wisdom required. In fact, it’s a lot like passing a peach pit – all pain, no fruit.

Still, by telling the story of how I successfully discharged my colonic duty, just maybe I can spare you a little bit of pain.

It all started outside the testing room in the hallway, where a few hundred of us were lined up like groupies at a Kissinger lecture.

All at once this jerk invaded my air space as I was minding my own business, sucking on a number two pencil and crossing my legs to hide the pee stains on my jeans. You know the kind. Big smiley button for a face, a loud phony preacher’s laugh in all the wrong places. Lots of noise and teeth.

“Your first time?” he said, laughing horribly. Like this was a mixer at the prison and his dance card wasn’t full.

I grunted a “yeah” and ducked down to tie the laces on my loafers. Please, please, please go away. But the jerk knelt down beside me.

“Third time lucky for me,” he said, and then laughed so hard he blew a corn kernel through his cuspids. Oh, jeez.

“I got it all figured out,” he said. “Here’s what you gotta do.” And then, between volleys of laughter, Mr. Wizard proceeded to explain how to pass the Regents’: keep it short, no big words, use lots of semicolons, and at the end of the paper write “Have a nice day.”
I felt a terrible urge to skewer him with my number two pencil. But then the line started to move, and a few minutes later I was slumped over a desk staring at the exam booklet.

Chill out, I told myself. Just remember the advice you got from the dolly bird in the writing center. Think about topics, rehearse the introduction, use specific examples, don’t repeat yourself. For godsake, a child of six could pass this thing. So, get me a six year old! Or a college dean.

I could smell breakfast leaking out of my pores as I copied down my social security number and then read the first topic: “Discuss the position of the worker in the Soviet Union as it corresponds to the ‘association of free producers’ envisaged by Marx and the ‘Soviet democracy’ imagined by Lenin.”

Instantly, I felt a red rubber ball growing around my nose. A great conical hat springing up on my head. Baggy pants, big floppy shoes, and my Spirit pen turning into a bicycle horn.

I tried to write – honk, honk. The room shushed me. I had to write – honk, honk, honk, honk. Shhhhhhh!

Calm down, I told myself. So, you’ve hit the one unmoronic topic ever given on a Regents’ Test. Just remember what the dolly bird said: “On every test, there’s always one topic you’ll know enough about to write a decent, passing essay.”

And so, wiping the greasepaint off cheeks, I turned to the second topic: “If you learned that you had only six months left to live, how would you change your life?”

Six months to live…change my life. All at once, the room, the Fine Arts building, the entire campus vanished. Now the sundown sky was like honey, and a dusky native girl was dampening my brow with her tears and cloaking me with her long black hair.

Sipping Scotch malt, watching the waves retreat, listening to the music of the spheres, I felt for one heart-wrenching moment so utterly, so terribly, so wonderfully alive. All the dreck and disaster of my boring little existence had been leading up to this one incredible moment.

“Darling,” I whispered to my native girl, gently stroking her hip, “please take a message.”

And thus, at my request, she began to write: “Having been given just six months to live, I have decided not to complete the Regents’ Test. Instead, I shall spend these last precious days embracing my loved ones in the South Pacific…”

And so, you see, that’s how I passed the Regents’. By the skin of my teeth (a score or two), but, really, who gives a damn? Only Mr. Wizard, I suppose, who’s now on his fifth or sixth attempt. But as I said, it’s like passing a urine test – or a peach pit. Just ask that
dolly bird in the writing center.

**ARTICLE IN THE INKWELL, JANUARY 2, 1991**

**RICHARD NORDQUIST: ENGLISH**

**BY LORIE ROTH**

The Man – who said to me once when I asked him why he wasn’t joining the ongoing party at the Writing Center: “I am Catholic. I am not supposed to have fun” – reveals another secret: “Yes, I was in seminary, studying to be a priest, but I got kicked out.” Full of spit and ideals, he got his “lessons of reality in the seminary, perceived hypocrisy where he never looked for it, and came slowly to the realization that he did enjoy the opposite sex too much. But to his chagrin, “they wouldn’t even let us date!”

Richard Nordquist, Assistant Professor of English, will soon be Dr. Richard Nordquist. He expects to be defending his dissertation at the University of Georgia sometime soon.

He worked the last few years on it, stealing time from his other plentiful professorial obligations. As the “father of the Writing Center,” he has helped, cajoled, and inspired many a downtrodden student, taught plenty of classes out of his own textbook, *Passages* – it is his second, and is used at 160 colleges nationwide – and continues to dispense advice.

Rushing across the hall, clutching the books in one hand, the all-important cup of coffee in the other, he was once apostrophized as “the professor who always looks like he lost something.” But hurried as he may appear, and furrowed-browed in his concentration, he always stops and takes time to listen to you attentively.

“I am basically shy,” he wants others to believe and explains, as he perceives amused skepticism: “I am introspective; I love solitude, and I don’t like lots of people.” He sees the question mark on my face. “It’s different in front of a classroom; I know my territory and I am comfortable with that. When I lecture I see myself in the role of the teacher.” “The role?” “Sure. We create ourselves over and over. Don’t we all?”

So who is the real Richard Nordquist? “I’m a rebel, a nag, a pain in the neck,” he offers, “I annoy people most of the time. I point out things that need to be changed, and I don’t sip sherry with unimaginative administrators. Life’s too short, and so are they.”

He has contributed to a radical newspaper once, under a different name, has written magazine articles about social concerns, and names as one of his favorite writers H. L. Mencken, a man who surely upset a lot of people during his time. “A good satirist can inspire people even if it makes them angry,” Nordquist says and then cites Walter Lippmann’s remark: “He calls you a swine and an imbecile and increases your will to live.” Aside from being a bombastic outrage of a critic, Mencken also played a major role in the Harlem Renaissance and was a celebrator of good white and black Southern writers.
Nordquist gets very serious when he talks about what is important to him: good literature. “It is not only the classics; the field has opened up. There is plenty of good literature being written today – much of it non-fiction; and we as faculty don’t have to feel guilty anymore about teaching it. There are good essays, biographies, diaries, autobiographies, travel, and nature writings.

He names E. B. White, Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, and Tom Wolfe. He likes the new feminist criticism, calling it “intellectually very exciting and rejuvenating.” It is no coincidence that the title of his dissertation is “The Modern Essay: Non-fiction as a Literary Form.”

He has also thought about the student of today, the English major in particular, and the night student. “What I don’t like about [ASC’s] system…” – and he can draw from his experience with the European academic environment when he studied for several years in England—“...is too much spoon feeding. As a result, the students need to be directed all the time, while at this stage of their education they should be guided toward independence.”

Educational standards should be higher, he maintains, and improperly prepared would-be college students should be sent somewhere else. “Wouldn’t it be nice if Armstrong could distinguish itself by admitting better qualified people instead of more people? A college degree should be earned, not given to you as a result of an endurance test.”

He is a little worried that there are too many English majors on campus. He wonders if they possess the passion and nuttiness that are necessary to face possible difficulties later in the job-seeking period. “They should be reading so much and thinking so much and laughing so much that they just don’t care right now just what job they are going to end up with.”

He perceives this passion in many of the night students he has taught. “It’s the best kept secret,” he says about night classes. He marvels at the natural curiosity of students who possess a certain courage and must overcome great odds in order to pursue higher education at this point in their lives. “They realize time is not something to be wasted.”

Richard Nordquist was in a peculiar situation once himself. In order to pay for his college education at State University of New York, he washed so many dishes – 60 hours a week worth – that he started to think he was wasting his life away. He decided to go to the counseling center on campus, but somehow went into the wrong office door and ended up in the psychiatric section for troubled students. Leaning back in his chair, he laughs heartily.

Just how did he get kicked out of seminary? “I skipped benediction one day and went to the gym for a smoke instead. The prefect discovered me and chased me across the soccer field. “Maybe it didn’t happen quite that way, he reneges, “but if it didn’t, it should have.”
NORDQUIST’S APPLICATION LETTER FOR PROMOTION TO FULL PROFESSOR:

21 September 1996

Dr. Chris Baker, Head
Department of Languages, Literature, & Dramatic Arts
Armstrong Atlantic State University
Savannah, GA 31419

Dear Dr. Baker:

Thank you for considering my application for promotion to full professor. With a PhD in English (Rhetoric and Modern Literature), five years at the rank of associate professor, and twenty years of college-level teaching experience (the last sixteen of them at Armstrong), I am confident that I meet the minimum qualifications of a candidate. In the areas of teaching, scholarship, and professional service, I believe that I have fulfilled the terms of my contract.

To be candid, applying for this promotion has proved to be a curiously unsetting experience: the passage to full professor would seem only to authenticate my suspicion that in twenty years I have completed the transition not from “promising instructor” to “senior faculty member” but more cruelly from Young Turk to Old Fart. As a result, I’m finding it difficult to resist the urge to manufacture in this application the sort of mischief that would give you every good reason to reject my candidacy.

When you drive a rented car, you don’t worry about tune-ups and Turtle Wax; you just crank up the radio and stomp on the gas. And when you spend the night in a hotel room, you don’t reupholster the furniture or inlay parquet; you just do whatever you can to reach the morning with your spirit intact. That’s pretty much how I feel about my sixteen years at Armstrong: I’ve been renting the space, just hurrying through. When I first arrived here in 1980 as a Temporary Instructor of English (a precarious position that I clung to for four years), I never intended to stay long. And though my job title has changed every couple of years or so since then, in my mind the word temporary has preceded every one of them. Looking back, I have to admit that I’ve blundered my way through a fairly odd academic career.

Some things I wish I had done differently. I probably shouldn’t have attempted the first textbook for Macmillan (the one that took three years to write and sold about 213 copies). Instead, I should have hunkered down to complete my study of Mencken (which, by God, I will finish one day). I shouldn’t have taken four years to write my dissertation, and I certainly shouldn’t have let it sit so long before dismembering it for publication (though piece by piece, it’s slowly finding an audience). I could have been, let’s say, more tactful and polite in my dealings with the administration over hiring procedures, “Automatic F” policies, support for the Writing Center, advisement services, bookstore policies, campus lighting, freshman orientation, programs for reentry students, public relations, and
computer services. As Vice President Stegall has noted, there could be no more appropriate punishment for my sometimes indelicate protests than my recent promotion to Assistant Dean of Academic Services.

The truth is, I’ve been allowed to enjoy myself (albeit darkly) at Armstrong. The Writing Center was more rewarding in its first couple of years—when there happened to be no compensation or course reductions, when student tutors worked alongside faculty as volunteers, and when writing across the curriculum was (ever so briefly) a genuine campus movement. I enjoyed serving as a core curriculum advisor (at least until my advisee count approached 200); enjoyed teaching countless sections of ENG 025 as a tutorial course (meeting each student individually every day); still enjoy teaching classes at all levels and supervising directed studies, even without compensation; enjoyed my spell as ASC’s first composition director (and now take fond pleasure in seeing my prose merged with that of Rich Raymond and Helon Raines in the information sheet still distributed to composition faculty); enjoyed setting up the Gamble computer classroom (not suspecting that it would one day lead to the hideous job of campus AV Geek).

I’ve genuinely enjoyed organizing faculty workshops; cranking out long distance learning newsletters; teaching an advanced composition course over the internet; helping a Vietnamese immigrant learn enough English to pass the Regents’ Test (and eventually graduate from medical school); editing Lloyd Newberry’s collection of essays (though God knows I didn’t enjoy editing Mike Palmiotto’s criminal justice text); composing pseudonymous articles for the Inkwell when the student editors had a midnight deadline and a half page to fill; ghosting a few talks and articles for senior administrators (while always keeping the best lines for myself); hiring and guiding remarkable talents such as Peggy Horne, Anne Muller, Sandra Manderson, Margaret Brockland-Nease, Michelle Sisson, Catherine Blocker, Cindy Schroeder, Kim Simshauser, Bruce Habersham, and others. Most of all, I’ve enjoyed working with a lot of smart colleagues and a lot of dedicated students—people still impassioned about learning and about transforming their lives.

I have a couple of awards on the wall—Outstanding Faculty Member (1994) and Outstanding Staff Member (1996)—and (like everybody else) a drawer full of postcards from Dr. Buck saying that I’ve been named by one or more graduates as somebody who has had “a significant impact on their lives.” But after all is said and done, what I’m most proud of is the simple fact that (with the possible exception of Mark Finlay and the blond woman on the grounds crew) I can still outwork every other son of a bitch on this campus. And I still have no intention of staying very long. “Someday,” as Thurber dictated, shortly before his death, “when the clouds are heavy, and the rain is coming down, and the pressure of realities is too great, I shall deliberately take my glasses off and go wandering out into the streets, never to be heard from again.”

I do hope that the information I have provided in this application is useful—as grounds for dismissal if not for promotion. Student and administrative evaluations of my work over the past sixteen years are on file in your office. I’m enclosing a current c.v. as well as examples of my professional writings and the unedited texts of some recent public
performances. Dr. Sara Connor and Dr. Carol Andrews have kindly agreed to send you letters in support of my promotion. Again, thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Dick Nordquist
Associate Professor of English and Assistant Dean of Academic Services (Temporary)

ARTICLE IN ARMSTRONG MAGAZINE 3.1 (SPRING AND SUMMER 1997)
GOING INTO THE ZONE WITH A MADMAN
BY ROBERT STROZIER

“I was mad,” Nordquist recalls. “But I also wore sensible shoes.” Fresh from the University of Leicester (England), via Rochester, NY, Nordquist was the maddest of young turks in his fanatic concern for students, brusque speech and manner, and fiery intolerance of laziness and indecision. Add fearlessness. “Almost to a fault, he is not afraid of stepping on anyone’s toes,” says Bill Megathlin, dean of academic and enrollment services and Nordquist’s immediate supervisor. “He can be irascible, but he’s a 100% team player. At times it’s best just to stand out of his way.”

“Mad,” Nordquist chuckles. His lapis eyes drift reflectively. “I’ll be a full professor soon,” he snuffles in modest pride and self-derision, “the devolution is complete: Young Turk, Old Fart—like that.”

He sips a tar of coffee from a bleak, beaten mug. “I have a softer, fuzzier mission now,” says Nordquist, assistant dean of academic services. Colleagues who know him as a hybridized Demosthenes-Mencken will not easily believe it. Ever since his arrival “we were aware of this high, hard energy among us,” says Megathlin. “And I’ve never known him to be discouraged by bureaucratic obstinacy.”

Nordquist’s reputation among students has a similar substance and shine. He created the position of composition coordinator to assure better cooperation and understanding between English and developmental studies students and faculty. He increased part-time faculty positions to help work the Writing Center, and devised orientation programs for Writing Center tutors to assure even teaching quality. He wrote a proposal that focused the writing curriculum and compiled a student essay book to be used as a reader in composition classes. When a student drive to repeal abusive textbook prices developed, Nordquist became their spokesman and leader.

In the classroom he can transform the “most hardened and cynical of students,” says former colleague Lorie Roth. His pedagogic method is a mélange of Aquinas and Casey Stengel, Socrates and Huck Finn. A former student makes this evaluation: “You can’t sit and suck your thumb in his class, or loll on the sidelines. You really want to play his game, cheer, and throw roses.”
The simple magic of hard work at play. Nordquist is always busy getting into work and stirring up something. Both planned and serendipitous assignments are his trademark. A few years ago IBM offered grant money for twelve computers to establish a writing lab. Wary but willing, Nordquist was corralled by an administrator intimidated by the prospects of grantsmanship. He attended the grantwriting session as an anxious innocent. Instantly afterwards, he wrote his first grant and got the award. The Gamble Hall Computer Center was established.

Whether it is issues of curriculum, scholarship, counseling, or proselytizing for special programs for evening students, Nordquist is relentless. Idealist, pragmatist, artist/artisan, he starts to work at the “crack of noon,” says his friend Rich Raymond. And can work hard enough to make nearly any observer uncomfortable. “I have always had to ‘go into the zone,’ as Joyce Carol Oates says. I really daydream a lot,” Nordquist explains, “so when I crank up I must go manic and work frantically non-stop just to finish what must be done.”

Lorie Roth has seen “the zone” phenomenon up close. “It is a stupefying experience to watch him at work,” she says... The process Roth describes epitomizes Nordquist, as well as the character of his written work. “His prose,” says Raymond, who worked over a decade with Nordquist, is reflected in the “energy and purpose of his gait and wit.” Raymond’s observation is a bullseye. Afoot, Nordquist burns a path—commuter train, rollercoasting racer—from office-to-class-to mailroom-to-cross-campus meetings. Barely terrestrial in his flight, the ex-NYC cabbie flashes like sound through the hallway throng.

“One of these days,” says Frank Clancy of the Department of Languages, Literature, and Dramatic Arts, “some relaxed meditative philosopher-type will be floating down the hall, and Nordquist will thunderbolt right through him. Neither one will ever notice it.”

Such concentration and will account for the founding of the Writing Center, the second most-used service on campus these days. In September 1981, Nordquist had to convince college powers of the need for a Writing Center. “It can’t wait. We need it now,” he urged. A what? Sorry, no money for that. Sounds nice, but... Nordquist was in the wallow of those days where his contract said: You are temporary. You will not be rehired. “I sort of expected to be permanently temporary,” he remembers. “I always believed I would be gone the next year. I couldn’t even afford a bottle of Scotch.”

Nevermind. He set up tutoring shop in his windowless office-warren and invited his students, your students, anyone who needed help in composition to seek counsel. Extra chairs were borrowed from classrooms for the queues of students who multiplied geometrically each day—two, six, two dozen, three score and ten—up and down the hallway all day long, all week, the weekends. Administrators and bewildered traditionalists heard rumors and ambled in conservatively to see the three-legged snake in this hallowed-hall county fair. Traffic hazards evolved. Other faculty began to join Nordquist and his cohorts. What on earth was going on? Student tutors volunteered. One shift—twelve to fourteen hours a day. The Writing Center was born.
In 1997, the Writing Center—comfortably thriving in the heart of Gamble Hall—is still busy. It delivers more than 7,000 tutoring sessions annually with a full-time director, dozens of student assistants, and faculty tutors. “Remember when we first started that tutoring ‘scam,’ we were the kids in a treehouse,” says Nordquist. “New kids on the block, let loose.” The characteristic snuffling laughter, the moonbright eye a-crackle. Still on perpetual prowl for “some new skin” to wriggle into.

UPON DR. BUTLER’S FAREWELL:

(Before I begin to speak, as Groucho Marx might have said, I have something to say to you.)

On some happy occasions over the years, I’ve had the pleasure of collaborating with Dr. Butler on a few presentations and articles. “Collaborating” simply meant that he had all the ideas, and I was expected to dress them up with a few metaphors and a couple of apt quotations. Well, thinking he might appreciate such ornamental assistance for this occasion, I presumed to jot down some stray thoughts—a few metaphors, a couple of apt quotations. Then, when Barbara Randall let me know—in no uncertain terms—that Dr. Butler could very well say goodbye all by himself, thank you very much, I decided it would be a shame to let these notes go to waste. So what follows, briefly, are a few excerpts from the farewell speech that Dr. Butler will not be giving this afternoon. I won’t attempt an impression, so just imagine, if you will, that Dr. Butler himself is speaking.

When I arrived here in ’85 and found thirty-odd faculty in Gamble Hall, sharing two telephones, one manual typewriter, and what I pretty well supposed was a case of Mad Dog 20-20, I couldn’t help but grin: there was no way on earth, even in a coma, that I could fail to improve working conditions for faculty at Armstrong. Just a little give and take, I thought—as in any relationship, just a little give and take.

But of course that’s simply untrue. As many of us discovered a few years later in our “partnership” with that neighboring clown college in a Bulloch County cornfield, relationships demand not that we give and take—but that we give and give and give—and even at the last, as we flop into our graves exhausted, be told that we didn’t give enough.

Over the years, in that same generous spirit, I’ve welcomed you all into my office, smiled warmly as you’ve picked my pockets and babbled interminably about the Global Centers for World Peace and Cha-Cha-Cha that you might command if only you had an electronic white board, a couple more faculty positions, a pay raise, and maybe a laptop or two. Yet I take some quiet pride in the fact that while most of you schlepped out of my office empty-handed, you also left with the sense that somebody was listening to you.

Likewise, I take pride in my efforts to internationalize the campus and encourage faculty to travel abroad. I sent Jim Anderson to Argentina, Nordquist to Estonia, our dear dean
Jim Repella to China. So for goodness sake, you can’t blame me that somehow, against all odds, they found their way back again.

During my spell at Armstrong, we were the first in the university system to build a campus-wife network and to put a computer on the desk of every faculty member who wanted one. Put another way, if it weren’t for these initiatives, Selwyn would have to stay up nights tacking individual notes to everybody’s office door.

Still, whatever I’ve given to Armstrong over the years pales in comparison to all I’ve received. Maybe at times we’ve had more than our fair share of frustrations here in this small university at the edge of the state, but I sincerely believe that there are no useless efforts. Even Sisyphus, after all, was developing his muscles.

“Life is an offensive,” the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said, “an offensive directed against the repetitious mechanisms of the universe – a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience.” Or, as the freewheelin’ Bob Dylan put it more simply, “You can be in my dream if I can be in yours.”

Farewell, God speed, happy trails.

If you would like to donate to the Armstrong Foundation in Dick’s honor, be aware he has designated fund #231 as the most appropriate place to support his interests and initiatives regarding Faculty Development. Feel free to forward any donations to Diane Sellers in the dean’s office and she can facilitate their deposit.