

In memory of Dr. David J. Hackett

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, our longtime colleague and friend, David Hackett, passed away due to complications associated with Covid-19. David was born in 1940, in Rensselaer, Indiana, and moved with his parents to El Paso in the late 1940s. After graduating from Austin High School in 1958, he received his BA in History from Earlham College and then went on to obtain a PhD in History from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. From there, he lived in Munich on a Fulbright scholarship, perfected his mastery of the German language, and developed a deep and abiding interest in the rise of Hitler, National Socialism, and the Holocaust. After briefly holding a teaching position in Kansas, he joined the Department of History at UTEP in 1971.

David taught at UTEP for nearly 40 years, served as the Chair of the Department, and offered some of the most popular classes in the College. His courses on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany were always packed and he offered riveting lectures based on his own research and travel throughout Europe. His colleagues remember him as a kind and gentle friend, a dedicated teacher, and a superb historian. Dr. Cheryl Martin recalls that he was a “gentleman and a scholar” who helped the Department dive into the digital age, as computers were replacing typewriters and as historians became enamored with quantitative methods. In 1983, David taught Dr. Martin how to use a new Kaypro portable computer, which was the size of a large piece of luggage, and just as heavy. He also embraced the use of IBM punch cards that faculty submitted to the campus mainframe to analyze research data for manuscripts.

His generosity in teaching new research technologies to his colleagues epitomized the kind of person he was more broadly. Dr. Carl Jackson, who had known David since the early 1970s, recalls frequent “Friday Seminars” held at the Kern Place Tavern on Cincinnati Street, where History colleagues would gather after classes to socialize and “talk history.” Dr. Jackson also has fond memories of numerous camping trips to the Gila National Forest, where, as Carl puts it, “we usually spent more time conversing around the campfire than hiking the trail.” Dr. Sandy McGee Deutsch similarly recalls David as a “wonderful scholar, teacher, colleague, and friend” who was deeply knowledgeable about the Holocaust, fascism, and German history. Of their interactions in the department, at dinner parties, or at the “Friday Seminars,” Sandy said that she “always came away from our conversations having learned something important.” As an MA student in the Department of History during the 1990s, Dr. Brad Cartwright credits David with directing him towards important archival material that helped Dr. Cartwright complete his thesis. This research, in turn, contributed to Brad’s acceptance into a PhD Program, and his eventual return to UTEP as Director of the Center for History Teaching and Learning.

David Hackett was a scholar of Nazi Germany who was best known for compiling, translating and editing The Buchenwald Report, which scholars thought had been lost after World War II. The report was an extremely detailed set of notes, observations, interviews, and other materials authored by German speaking US Army officers after the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp. David spent five years culling through hundreds of pages of yellowing, brittle pieces of paper and the hand written notes of the officers that comprised this report, which is considered one of the most significant documents of the war.

His dedication to this project, along with his desire to explain how the same people that produced cultural and intellectual masterpieces could also commit genocide on such a massive scale, reflected his deep concern for humanity. Dr. Nicole Etcheson, who taught at UTEP for more than a decade, recalls a story told to her by David that speaks to his sense of decency and morality. While an undergraduate at Earlham College in Indiana, David said he and some friends helped desegregate a lunch counter at a

local restaurant in the early 1960s. This little known act of social justice, in a hotbed of KKK activity, strikes one as particularly representative of David's generous, kind, and humble character.

With David's passing, we have lost a great colleague, teacher, friend, and mentor. As noted in the obituary published in the *El Paso Times*, his family wishes that donations be made to the El Paso Holocaust Center, in his name.

Jeffrey P. Shepherd  
Professor and Chair  
Department of History

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/obituaries/david-hackett-dead-coronavirus.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/elpasotimes/obituary.aspx?n=david-andrew-hackett&pid=197138117&fhid=7173>