In Memoriam: Richard P. Kinkade

University Communications
June 2020

Richard P. Kinkade, a prolific and award-winning Spanish medievalist scholar who served as the first dean of the College of Humanities, died May 15. He was 81.

Professor Malcolm Compitello, former head of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, called Kinkade "one of the giants in the field" of medieval literature.

"Dick was distinguished as a world-renowned scholar of medieval literature and, at that level, he really helped with the department's international reputation," Compitello said in a tribute posted on the College of Humanities website. "He contributed very richly to the intellectual life of the University. He knew scholars in other fields and other departments and was one of those people who wanted to contribute in any way. I was always impressed by how professional he was and how well he worked with students."

As dean, Kinkade spearheaded the creation of the Humanities Seminars Program along with Dorothy Rubel, a humanities advocate who began auditing courses before working to formalize a lifelong learning program. Since 1984, the program has served more than 25,000 community members.

"It could not have gained the momentum or been brought to fruition without a very strong and supportive dean, and Dick Kinkade was just that," says Karen Junghans, chair of the program's board. "He didn't see education stopping with a college degree. He saw education continuing throughout life and he was so supportive of this program."

Junghans says she got to know Kinkade when he briefly served as a board member after retiring and was in awe at how his vision had blossomed into such a thriving program.

"He never lost his good feelings toward the Humanities Seminars Program," she says. "When he came on our board and saw what his vision had led to, he was amazed. From the number of students we had to the number of courses, it was enormous growth and he was just tickled pink at that."

Alain-Philippe Durand, dean of the College of Humanities, said the leadership of Kinkade and Annette Kolodny, who succeeded him as dean, established the importance of humanities research, teaching and outreach at the University.

"Dick Kinkade was an ideal leader to bring this college into existence," Durand said. "Having a world-class scholar as dean created a sterling reputation that has been our foundation ever since. He enriched the lives of two generations of students, faculty and community members. He was a great mentor to many of us."

Born in 1939 in Los Angeles, Kinkade moved to Tucson in 1946.
He earned his bachelor's and doctoral degrees from Yale University, and returned to Tucson in 1966 to begin his academic career as an assistant professor in romance languages. Kinkade went on to serve in leadership roles at Emory University and the University of Connecticut before he was appointed in 1982 as the University of Arizona's first humanities dean. He held that position until 1987, when he returned to teaching in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. He retired in 2018 after 42 years at the University.

Kinkade received numerous awards for his publications: the John K. Walsh Award in 2000 from the Modern Language Association Division of Medieval Spanish Language and Literature; the Order of Don Quijote from Sigma Delta Pi National Spanish Honor Society in 2000; and the Bishko Prize from the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies in 2004. In his 58 years in academia, Kinkade authored 13 books and more than 100 articles, reviews and papers. He directed dozens of master’s degree theses and doctoral dissertations. His latest book, "Dawn of a Dynasty: The Life and Times of Infante Manuel of Castile," was published in 2019.

"Richard Kinkade was a prolific scholar until the end. His last book was just published by one of the most respected academic presses in North America," said Carine Bourget, interim head of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. "I salute his impact on the field of Spanish studies, on the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and on the College of Humanities during his outstanding career."

Robert Fiore, professor emeritus of Spanish, says he first knew of Kinkade by reputation. Fiore said that when he was a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, a professor told him, “You've got to meet this Dick Kinkade, the best young medievalist in the country.” Later, Fiore said, Kinkade "was known as the best medievalist in the United States."

Kinkade’s widespread interests and knowledge ranged far beyond his field, Fiore said. Kinkade was a classical guitarist and pianist and a pilot who built his own plane. Fiore was welcomed as family by Kinkade and his wife, Kiki, who managed the Tucson Greek Festival, with Kinkade regularly pitching in to bus tables.

"He invited me numerous times to their table. I got to know his wife and kids and mother-in-law and became a member of the family. He was open-hearted that way," Fiore says. "What a privilege to know somebody like that."

Kinkade is survived by his wife; children Kathleen, Scott, Mary Elizabeth and Jonathan; and a brother and sister. A celebration of life service is planned but not has been scheduled.

A version of this story [3] originally appeared on the College of Humanities website.

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