

SENIOR PROFESSIONALS OF ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY:  
The First Ten Years, 1989-1999

Personal Recollections by Charles W. Bolen

Before retiring in 1988, the Dean of Continuing Education called me for a conference. He invited me to be a consultant to the College. Honorarium was consistent with collecting Social Security. After Dean Stockman guaranteed me sufficient time to travel and to "do my own thing", I agreed. After all, there were no assignments or specific duties. We consulted, mostly talked, on a weekly basis; but that was not very exciting for me. I needed a project or a goal.

At that time I was a consultant to the Florida Board of Regents. It was while working in Florida that I visited Eckerd College. They had a group of retirees in the St. Petersburg area that were mentors to select students. After talking to both some mentors and mentees, I decided this would be a good program for Illinois State University. Soon afterwards, I collected a select group of retirees who were enthusiastic about the possibilities of a town-gown relationship. One of the first individuals I talked to was Frank Matsler, former chancellor of the University Board of Regents, and equally important a former Montanan.

A board was formed to include the following founding board members:

J. Lewis Bailen	William Dunbar	Jean Hiestand
Frank Matsler	Wendell Oliver	Richard Perkins
Mark Sherman	Richard Stewart	Charles Bolen, chair
Calvin Stockman, ad hoc		

The board met with the Director of the Honors Program, Ira Cohen, Provost Strand, and President Wallace, all of whom gave their encouragement and support. After all we promised to do good things for the University. Except for an honorarium for the director which the University provided, we planned to be self sufficient.

With the founding board of enthusiastic members, many discussions took place to determine what Senior Professionals "should be and do". There was early agreement to develop a mentor-mentee relationship with students in the Honors Program. Discussions were held on starting classes for senior citizens which would be college level, no tests or term papers, but an opportunity to explore history, political science, cultures, and religions. A few years earlier, the University had developed MORNINGS WITH THE PROFESSORS with about thirty attending classes at the Ewing Cultural Center. At the time Senior Professionals was formed, MORNINGS WITH THE PROFESSORS was directed by Dr. Barbara Wallace, wife of President Wallace.

The by-laws were written. A program to mentor Honors students was developed with the Director of the Honors Program. There were two reasons the Honors Program was selected: 1) the students in the Honors Program are the ones most likely to provide future leadership and 2) the Honors Program, with around 1000 students, had an organization with whom we could work. This gave us a focus that was good for the

Honors Program and for the Senior Professionals, as well.

An ACADEMY OF SENIORS program was created to supplement Dr. Wallace's MORNINGS WITH THE PROFESSORS. The Academy courses utilized one professor, one topic for four weeks, two hours a week. The Mornings program had five professors, five topics, one a week for five weeks. It was also decided to make these classes a learning and social event with the registration fee to cover all costs. A break for coffee, tea and cookies was popular from the first. Only Snackwell no-fat cookies were used, for which there was a great response.

We combined the schedule of the Mornings classes with the Academy schedule in a mailing that was sent to all seniors over 65 who were property holders in the twin cities. Over 7000 flyers were mailed. As a result, Mornings enrollment increased from thirty to sixty-five scholars, and Academy classes had a satisfactory enrollment of ten to twenty-five students each. It was clear that there was a need for both types of classes. It was the desire of the board that tuition for these classes be as reasonable as possible and refreshments be included in keeping with the concept of socialization.

The board also stipulated in the by-laws that spouses were to be associate non-contributing members. Programs were planned for ad hoc lectures or discussions followed by refreshments. These were for members and spouses/friends only. One of the first general discussions was the appearance of the two school superintendents discussing a possible merger of Bloomington and Unit V school systems.

A determination of a policy for the selection of members was among the early board discussions. The University agreed to appoint Senior Professionals as adjunct professors without compensation. A college transcript and a resume highlighting career and community highlights were evaluated by the membership committee prior to review by the Provost, President and approval by the Board of Regents. Senior Professionals are to receive the same perks as faculty; among them a hunting license to park and library and recreational opportunities. Community service and personal involvement in professional organizations in the community, state and nation were recognized as professional equivalent to a college degree, although most members are college graduates.

Response to the classes was positive and encouraging. An educational committee was formed to select topics of classes and instructors. Most instructors were Illinois State University faculty, but there have been classes taught by businessmen, lawyers, judges and Illinois Wesleyan University faculty. The instructors enjoyed working with seniors. Teachers and students reflected this joy. When the College of Continuing Education was eliminated in 1991, the Senior Professional board took charge of the MORNINGS WITH THE PROFESSORS classes, as well. We had a close relationship with the Mornings program, so it was an easy transition.

To foster involvement and interest in Senior Professionals, an annual banquet was planned. Our first banquet was at the Sheraton Hotel. This was an instant success with planned discussions concerning the purpose of Senior Professionals. Some excellent ideas surfaced with the board incorporating many of these suggestions.

With much discussion by the board, a mentor-mentee program was launched. There were some spectacular results from this intergenerational union. Board member Dick Stewart had a most successful relationship with Ryan Koehl, a successful campus leader who gained much from the conversations with Dick and the contacts which Dick provided with community business and civic leaders. Dick set the model of mentoring which others followed.

The following year the board authorized the selection of two mentees to each receive \$1000 awards from Senior Professionals. Two students in the Honors Program were selected by a committee of board members and Honors staff. The first awards were given at the banquet at Bloomington Country Club. It was a joy to hear of the accomplishments of the students. Consistent high grades, campus leadership and volunteer community service were typical of the Honors students. Senior Professionals of Illinois State University is proud to recognize and honor gifted students. A little later the number of awards was raised to three outstanding students. Again, the achievement of the students selected gave us the feeling that America will continue to prosper with potential leaders like these Honors students.

There was a lot of discussion in the board concerning the relationship of Senior Professionals to the University. Originally attached to the College of Continuing Education, a new relationship had to be established when President Wallace eliminated the College of Continuing Education. It was clear that the University wanted the group to survive and grow. To insure the preservation, the Senior Professionals of Illinois State University was attached to the Office of the Provost. Plans to move our office to Hovey Hall were discussed. I was not particularly happy about this since it would isolate members from a home base. When a new unit called Professional Development was organized, it seemed logical for that to be our base of operations. When Stacy Marshall-Kern was hired to head the unit, we, at last, had a center from which we could operate. Stacy was happy to have us attached to her unit. The University was pleased with our town-gown relationship and with our classes which were popular with the community. Since Stacy was to develop conferences and services for the community, the Senior Professionals fit right in with her vision for Professional Development. It was a happy arrangement. Senior Professionals now had a base, equipment to use such as computers and copiers as well as staff that assisted us in our planning and organization of classes. After having served as board chair and director for five years, I retired completely from the University. The University agreed to continue funding the part time position. After conducting a search, it was the unanimous choice of the board to hire Norma Ashbrook as director. This was the best decision the board ever made. Norma has done a superb job in juggling the diverse membership into a cohesive group, ready for growth and program extension.

Our biggest change in operation occurred soon after Ernie Hoffman became board chair. He instituted a retreat for the board held at Andy Spelios' lakeside home with Stacy Marshall-Kern leading us in an examination of mission and goals for the group. It was a very helpful all day retreat. We discussed a number of things: clarification of mission and goals, membership, budget and a structure to implement the goals. A committee structure was created. The following committees were formed: Education, Membership, Mentoring and University Relations. The

committees and chairs were appointed by the board from the membership with each committee having a member of the board as liaison to the board. This procedure worked very well. -

The first appointed committee chairs were Ed Lundeen, education; Joe Van West, Membership, George Eovaldi, Mentoring; and Dave Wiant, University Relations. Under able leadership of these chairs, the committees functioned even better than we had hoped. These four committee chairs were invited to attend board meetings. In 1998, a year later, the by-laws were amended to add committee chairs to the board.

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*Charles W. Bolen served as the Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Illinois State University from 1970-1988. Upon his retirement, he conceived the idea of establishing the Senior Professionals of Illinois State University as a resource to the University and the community. In addition to being the founder of Senior Professionals in 1989, he was its first director (until June 1995) and chair of the Board of Directors (until July 1996).*