



**James D. White**  
**1942 ~ 2003**

# His lessons go with you ...

*There comes that special moment in every man's life when he is figuratively tapped on the shoulder and asked to do a very special thing, unique to him and fitted to his talents.*

—Sir Winston Churchill

To be a great teacher, you must have once felt that tap, a calling or feeling that comes from deep inside and pushes you to give more to your students. A great teacher believes in students' abilities, as well as in their dreams. Great teachers are compelled to encourage, challenge and support. They expect the most from students and won't settle for less than their all. A great teacher is one whose lessons stick with students long after they have exited the classroom door.

James White, professor of agricultural education, was such a teacher and so much more. He was a leader, a mentor. He was a student of life, a member of the Oklahoma State University family, a friend to the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources faculty, and of course, an inspiration and gift to his students.

"Dr. White wanted his students to know that he cared about them as people, as well as how they performed in his class," said Jim Key, professor emeritus of agricultural education. "He was interested in what they were accomplishing as students at OSU, and he cared about the great successes they would have once they graduated."

White dedicated a lifetime to teaching and would have retired June 30, 2004. White taught a variety of courses during his 32 years of teaching, but most noted was his work in developing the agricultural education leadership and service option.

His university teaching career was devoted to guiding students who desired to pursue careers in the cooperative extension service or to become agricultural education teachers.

White experienced OSU as a student and as a faculty member, having graduated from OSU in 1969 with a bachelor's degree in animal science. However, he felt a calling to help others and became certified to teach agricultural education in 1970, said Key.

"Dr. White said OSU was the greatest place in the world to get an education," said Key. "He had outstanding teachers in terms of who they were and what they believed. It

impressed him that faculty could have such an influence and have that spread to their students."

White served as a county extension agent in Texas County before teaching vocational agriculture in Davenport, Okla., for five years. White returned to OSU to receive his master's and doctoral degrees in agricultural education. He began his teaching career in the OSU agricultural education program in 1979.

"He was proud that the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources has an advising system where students and faculty work as a team to help students grow professionally," said Key. "He appreciated how this allowed students to have the maximum amount of contact with people in the industry."

Nearly 200 undergraduate students completed industry internships under White's mentorship. The capstone experience for the leadership and service option is a 12-week internship in a professional agricultural position. White met with students several months in advance and helped them identify an internship that would help them achieve their goals. He conducted on-site supervision visits during their internships and worked with students in the develop-

ment of their portfolios. The students were able to capture evidence of their performance in their portfolio, and students said it was helpful to reflect on their career aspirations.

"Dr. White reveled in his students because of what he saw as their possibilities," said Wesley Holley, former OSU professor. "I marveled at his memory of each and every student he had contact with through the years. In most cases, he could tell the most intimate details of each student's accomplishments and challenges with their internship."

White taught International Programs in Agricultural and Extension Education (AGED 4713) for 10 years and brought his own international experience into the classroom.

White was involved with international endeavors in Mexico, Honduras and Pakistan. He also worked with participants in training programs in Ecuador, India and Ethiopia.

"Dr. White stimulated the interests of students from diverse majors and encouraged students to travel abroad, experience other cultures and learn to think globally about the agricultural opportunities in other countries," said Ed Miller, CASNR assistant dean of academic programs.

In May 2001, White led a group of 30



Above: James White (left) receives the 1985 Honorary American Farmer Degree for his service to agricultural education and FFA. (Photo courtesy of Carol White); Left: James White pauses for a picture with his wife, Carol, and daughter, Dava. (Photo by Todd Johnson)

OSU students on a two-week study tour of Mexico. A group of Mexican students then came to OSU to be engaged in a study tour of Oklahoma.

White valued other cultures and wanted students to appreciate the experience of international education, said Key.

Manuel Corro of Veracruz, Mexico, served as White's teaching assistant for the international agriculture class for the last three years.

"As an international student arriving in a new culture, Dr. White helped and advised me," said Corro. "He gave me the right word at the right time. His guidance facilitated my adjustment to the Oklahoma environment and introduced me to American cultures and values."

White received many honors for teaching and international agricultural development. He once said a few of his most treasured included receiving the Honorary American Farmer Degree in 1985 and being named the Oklahoma FFA VIP recipient in 2002. In the spring of 2003, he was recognized by the Agricultural Education Graduate Student Association with the Outstanding Graduate Faculty Award.

"Dr. White humbly viewed these awards, not as things he earned, but awards his students had helped him to receive," said Jim Leising, department head of OSU Agricultural Education, Communications and 4-H Youth Development.

White was dedicated to his students. He made an effort to meet all of his students



James White, better known as "Dr. White" to his many students, offered a smile and firm handshake to everyone he met. (Photo courtesy of Carol White)

to find out their names and hometowns. He motivated each of them by showing personal interest and genuine concern, said Key.

"Dr. White taught people, not curriculum," said Bruce Farquhar, former student and agricultural education instructor at Altus, Okla. "Through the process, he passed along pieces of himself to all he met."

Because he passed on so much of himself to students, they worked diligently to earn his respect.

"White said he gave his best to students and sometimes wanted success for them more than they wanted it for themselves," said Key. "He said it was a growing process where the two of them came together with regard to the student having confidence in him and feeling that he wanted the very best for him or her."

And his students knew White cared.

"Dr. White was one of those teachers who recognized the potential in each student," said Kendra Stanek, former student and public relations coordinator for the Central Rural Electric Cooperative. "He made you believe that you could do it, and before long, you actually had."

White wasn't afraid to open up to his students and share what he believed.

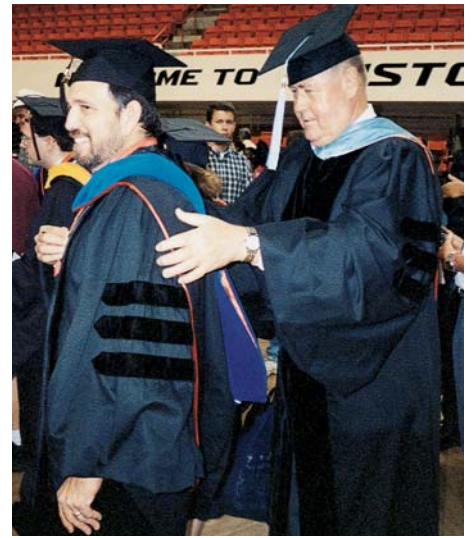
"On the first day of class, Dr. White said to all his students, 'I don't imagine your performance in this class has anything to do with your life, as much as making peace with your maker,'" said Brant Carpenter, agricultural education senior. "And that set in my heart and soul so deeply that a member of faculty would care enough about me as a person to put that into his curriculum."

But there isn't a course or degree program that could compare to the lessons White taught students in his battle with cancer. Although White was diagnosed with bone cancer in 2001, he continued to teach and mentor his students. He taught students some special life lessons that can't be learned from a textbook.

"Another course had been chosen for his life," Key said. "He hoped that his students learned from his illness. If something bad happens to them, it isn't the end of the world. There is still life to live. They can either be like the rock that is polished by the friction of life or the rock that resists the friction and is ground to dust."

White was truly a blessed man to have such a strong and supportive family.

"His wife, Carol, and daughter, Dava, were his all in all," said Key. "He couldn't have asked for better. The quality time he



James White (right) makes adjustments to international student Manuel Corro's doctoral academic attire. (Photo courtesy of Carol White)

was able to spend with his family was a blessing from his illness."

White's family, friends and students were all amazed and inspired by his determination, strength and faith during the difficult times with his illness.

"Dr. White truly lived up to the meaning of the word admirable: deserving of the highest esteem," said Milford Jenkins, former student and Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources senior director of development with the OSU Foundation. "Just being in Dr. White's presence was a humbling experience."

His teaching philosophy was simple.

"James White had the biggest heart and the strongest grit of anyone I ever met," said Key. "He always said he was trying to help people help themselves. The bottom line included having a genuine, caring concern for the students, a positive attitude, and the self-discipline and love for the subject matter to make it interesting for his students."

Surrounded by his loved ones, James David White, 61, died Nov. 16, 2003, at his home in Stillwater, Okla. A few months prior to his death, he shared the following:

"My advice to students is to realize there is a whole world waiting for you. Don't ever give up on yourself or your goals. Look up. Put it all in the right perspective. Then, you will be a whole person." ♦ *By Robyn Sites, Mountain View, Okla.*

*Dr. White, thank you for sharing your calling to teach others with us. Thank you for tapping into our hearts and our minds. You were a great teacher, and we will carry your lessons with us throughout our lives.*