

Here is a video that Glenda Balas (Iowa Ph.D. 1999) and her son Jason recently completed about Sam Becker. We are very grateful to her for the great work. She has given us permission to post this on our website.

<http://vimeo.com/52056162>

Here is a recent post from Bruce Gronbeck, Professor Emeritus, about Sam.

Samuel L. Becker 1923-2012

Sam Becker died last week on Thursday, November 8, after voting for Barack Obama and a string of good Iowa Democrats. He was a first generation American born in Quincy, IL, 1/5/23. He grew up on the Missouri, was both an Eagle and Sea Scout, becoming an Eagle Scout in 1938; his pin he passed on to his grandson and namesake, who also achieved that honor. He earned all of his degrees from the University of Iowa, interrupting that progression only to serve in the Pacific theatre of the U.S. Army, earning a Bronze Star for bravery near Calugong and Luzon. In 1950, he joined the University of Iowa faculty after working a year at the University of Wyoming--his only other absence from Iowa, not counting leaves--and celebrated by married a local nurse, Ruth H. Salzmann.

It took him a long time to become "Mr. University of Iowa," though given his association with it as student, faculty member, department chair, University Faculty President, chair of too many departmental, collegiate, and university search committees (including a presidential committee in 1987-88) to mention, Acting Director of the School of Art and Art History, and Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs--the last two of these AFTER retirement--it is little wonder that the title stuck. Especially after being only one of three faculty members in contemporary times with buildings named after them when still on the faculty. He was working with the Emeritus Faculty group, adult education programs, and the UI Foundation fundraising efforts until his death.

His research was deep and, especially, wide--based on anything where he could find "an interesting question." He's certainly best known for his early work on persuasive communication, his pioneering interest in British Cultural Studies after a leave in England in 1963-64, his enduring interest in radio and television coverage of presidential campaigns, the "mosaic model" of communication that anticipated studies of postmodern fragmentary experiences of the mediated world, even unobtrusive measures such as foot-shuffling denoting interest in theatrical works. He finished his research life working on the prevention and succession of smoking among preteens and teens as a part of teams built out of communication, sociology, and Public Health researchers and funded by NIH.

Becker was a favorite teacher among graduate students and undergrads finding seats in his Mass Media and Mass Society course, whose textbook he wrote.

He was not afraid to challenge even student-athletes, and later became a member of Iowa's Board in Control of Athletics and Big Ten representative.

In NCA, he ran a great variety of committees and boards, was a president (1974), and helped select key officers including an Executive Secretary. He was a Mentor and served on panels until the convention (New Orleans) before his death. He had participated in both the New Orleans and the Wingspread Conferences that gave the SCA/NCA its basic structure, shape, and direction.

The Distinguished Service Award, appropriately, was named after him.

Sam Becker was humble, even tempered, frugal (he wore the same herring-boned grey sport coat to every NCA convention), and remarkably upbeat. He championed peace, social justice, and civic engagement as commitments that all democracies ought to pursue. He loved the people of his association, even though he forgot half their names. He was a committed maker of elderberry and mint wines--and the mint wines, especially, made a very nice apertif when cut with soda.

When asked what his great accomplishment as a university professor was, Sam pointed to his long list of Ph.D.s whom he's supervised. That included over sixty folks. We'll help him with the names of those he can't remember at the moment.

Rest in peace, Sam Becker. Put down your tennis racket. You've finally slowed down.