PETER WEIL NAMED ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR EMERITUS

Professor Weil was instrumental in establishing the Department of Anthropology and its foundational curriculum, and was an outstanding teacher, an innovative researcher, and a devoted member of the university community. He remains an engaged member of our department community, re-directing his research into new areas and supporting student and faculty initiatives.

During his tenure in Anthropology, Professor Weil published 25 scholarly articles, book chapters, and technical reports. Seventeen of these were juried articles and book chapters, and eight were technical reports for institutions related to U.S. AID, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the national governments in West Africa, Gambia and Senegal. His published research on development and local-level politics and on art and ritual are the most significant for the long term. For example, one of several publications about development issues is his 1986 chapter on the relationships between the dramatic rise of women’s total fertility to nearly double historic levels, on the one hand, and governments’ and international donor agencies’ agricultural development policies, on the other. This chapter, in combination with others in the volume, resulted in a major policy reevaluation and significant changes in agricultural development policies on Africa. As to politics, his articles on the manipulation of parties by the national government in local Area Council Elections are now part of the online conversation about how Gambia became a dictatorship and the options for action resulting in democratization in the future.

An example of the importance of Professor Weil’s publications in aesthetic anthropology is his work on the culture history of Mande women’s masquerades and related rituals, which constituted a breakthrough in the study of art in Africa. His substantive 1998 paper inaugurated the study of masquerades both created and performed by women in Africa and the African diaspora. Its submission to African Arts, the top scholarly journal on the subject led to a debate that resulted in a special issue exclusively devoted to women’s art in Africa and historically related societies in the Caribbean. These two publications led to a paradigm shift in the study of African art, and today the significance of women and their role in the creative history of African societies has been established. In addition, his 1971 article on masking has become a standard in the anthropological and art historical literature on African art, and is regularly assigned in graduate courses.

Beginning in 2006, Professor Weil shifted his research focus to the culture history of the typewriter. He has published 31 articles in a popular magazine devoted to typewriters. While serving a lay audience, the magazine has high standards of scholarship and requires the use of well-documented data and graphics. Until 2012, the editor was a full professor and chair in the Philosophy Department at Xavier University, and consulting editors were primarily professionals in engineering, scientific, and other fields. The current editor is also editor of the technical research magazine and medical school alumni magazine for the University of Vermont. In his retirement, Professor Weil now has time to further develop this research interest and is working on a book about typewriters and the origins of modern office cultures.
While teaching at the University, Professor Weil worked as primary mentor on full-year long research training projects, senior theses and directed study projects with at least a dozen undergraduate students. Most of them subsequently attended graduate school and became professional researchers and analysts both within and outside academia. In addition, he served as a secondary mentor on student research training committees and projects (both undergraduate and graduate) every year of his teaching career at the University. In addition, the University loaned Professor Weil to USAID for a full year in the late 1970s to join in teaching social science analytical approaches to approximately 80 development professionals from all over the world. Professor Weil taught anthropology to more than 15,000 students in his 43 years in residence at the University. Most of these students were taught in introductory classes containing 100-400 students.

Professor Weil was a founding member of the University Faculty Senate and served on that body for several years. He also served on many committees for the College and/or University, including promotion and tenure, research, and program development committees (especially for the University’s Title XII and for the creation of a College course, “The Shaping of the Modern World”). Moreover, Professor Weil served as chair of an ad-hoc Dean’s committee to investigate accusations of academic and financial corruption against a unit of the College. In addition, he served a term as Director of the African Studies Program. In the Anthropology department, Professor Weil served on innumerable committees and chaired two hiring committees. Lastly, he served as Acting Chair of Anthropology in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Between 1979 and 1981, Professor Weil served on the Research Education Review Committee of the National Institute of Mental Health. Likely the first scholar from the University of Delaware to serve on this prestigious Committee, it was a special honor for Professor Weil as an anthropologist because the organization had primarily been created at the urging of Margaret Mead. The Committee included professional research scholars from all social science fields. Professor Weil’s responsibilities involved evaluating hundreds of applications from all fields of social science, on-site visits to evaluate graduate training programs at universities across the United States to evaluate their graduate training programs, and meetings in Washington, DC, to debate the merits of both institutional and individual research training proposals.

In sum, Professor Weil has had a distinguished career at the University of Delaware as a founding member of the Department of Anthropology, an African scholar, a teacher, and a dedicated member and contributor to the University community. He continues to share his expertise with faculty and students, and to develop his research in new directions.

We congratulate Professor Weil on this latest honor. He joins Anthropology emerita faculty members Daniel Biebuyck, Norman Schwartz, Kenneth Ackerman, and Svend Holsoe.