Professor George J. Kienzle: Pioneer in Medical, Dental and Science Writing

by Robert B. Stevenson, D.D.S.

Professor George Kienzle served as Director of the School of Journalism at The Ohio State University from 1958 until 1965, when he died of cancer at age 54. As an educator, George Kienzle’s creed was “responsible journalism.” He was a vigorous exponent of a realistic balance between theory and practice.

Under his direction the number of students majoring in journalism at Ohio State more than doubled, and the faculty increased from six to 20 members. The graduate program grew to 45 students enrolled, involving internships with newspapers and the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Kienzle organized courses in science writing for students of medicine and dentistry with help from Zollinger and Drs. Carl O. Boucher, Rudy Melfi, William Lefkowitz and Linden Edwards. Students from pharmacy, nursing, hospital administration and later agriculture also attended. Kienzle’s studies of medical and dental journals were supported by substantial grants from the National Institutes of Health.

Journalism teacher Robert McGiffert tackled dental journals at Kienzle’s request, and he found them, “wordy, pompous and complex.” McGiffert blamed writers imitating the predominant style, which traditionally confused complexity with scholarship and professional accuracy with professional jargon. “It wallows in repetition, redundancy and unnecessary detail.”

McGiffert went on to earn his master of arts degree with a thesis based on the annual dental journalism workshops hosted at Ohio State, which were attended...
Kienzle served five times as campaign chairman, Franklin County Unit, for the American Cancer Society, and for three years was the vice chairman of the ACS Ohio Division. A member of Sigma Delta Chi, national journalistic society, he was also president of the Public Relations Society of America’s local chapter.

After his battle with cancer the New York Times carried a lengthy obituary. Active pallbearers were Paul Barton, McGifft, and other journalism faculty. Honorary pallbearers included Jack Fullen, Willard Kiplinger, and Drs. Letkowitz and Zollinger.

Professor Kienzle’s untimely death left a legacy of people who will carry on his campaign for accuracy, clarity, brevity and common sense in the advancement of medical and dental knowledge.

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