

Dr. Carl Levenson Legacy Endowment

The Idaho State University Department of English and Philosophy has announced the creation of the Carl Levenson Scholarship, honoring the professor of philosophy who taught for 35 years until his retirement in 2016.

The scholarship will be awarded annually to an outstanding undergraduate student majoring in philosophy or English, with a preference for philosophy. The endowment for the award was established by a donation from English alumnus Thomas Neel, who studied with Levenson as an undergraduate at ISU in the 1980s.

“I’m so grateful to Mr. Neel for establishing this award, and I am so glad to see Dr. Levenson’s many years of dedicated service to our program honored,” said Director of Philosophy Jim Skidmore. “With Dr. Levenson’s help, Philosophy has thrived at ISU for decades as a small but intellectually vibrant program. This award helps ensure that we can continue that tradition.”

Levenson began his career at ISU in 1981, having completed his Ph.D. in social thought from the University of Chicago the previous year. According to Skidmore, Dr. Levenson quickly developed a reputation for outstanding teaching.

He was named Master Teacher in 1985, and in 1993 he was named Distinguished Teacher, the university’s highest award in that category.

“As a colleague, what I so envied about Carl’s teaching was his ability to connect with students,” Skidmore said. “He wanted students to grapple with important philosophical works — those that had stood the test of time and would continue to be read for centuries to come.”

Levenson had a unique ability to bring difficult texts to life for his students, helping them connect the philosophical problems they examined to their own problems, Skidmore said.

“Connecting with students is still the most important thing,” Levenson said.

Levenson was also active in local faith communities and received the Francis Cole Award for promoting interfaith dialogue in 1999.

Neel, the scholarship benefactor, earned a B.A. in English, with minors in philosophy and French, from ISU in 1987. He worked closely with Levenson on Plato in his senior year, forming a life-long friendship with Dr. Levenson that continues to this day.

“He lived his philosophy,” Neel said of Levenson. “[Levenson] excited and invoked overwhelmingly positive responses from his students. He changed my life.”

Neel has roots in Idaho and connections with ISU that go back many generations, including the Stibal and Reid families. His aunt, pioneer author Agnes Just Reid, is recognized with a memorial scholarship in the Department of English and Philosophy.

Neel's mother, Colleen Stibal Neel, graduated from ISU's business program in 1957, and his aunt, Sherry Stibal Dunbar of Salmon, graduated from the nursing program in 1968. Neel's father, Rear Admiral W.C. Neel, and his mother Colleen were longtime ISU benefactors until their passing.

After he graduated from ISU, Neel went on to earn a master's in comparative literature, with an emphasis on English and French, from the University of South Carolina in 1990. Since 1991, Mr. Neel has worked in U.S. national security. He currently lives and works in Virginia, visiting Idaho frequently.

"ISU can be proud of Tom Neel — proud of his national service, of his capacity for adventure, of his abiding commitment to philosophy and literature," Levenson said. "He's a great student and a great friend. And I'm grateful for the gift he is giving to our department — help for students to come."

The Carl Levenson Scholarship continues a tradition in the College of Arts and Letters of recognizing long-serving faculty members with scholarships in their names.

"Scholarships like this one celebrate our outstanding faculty and their impact on our students," said Dean Kandi Turley-Ames. "It is only fitting that as we recognize their contributions with an endowed scholarship, students will continue to benefit from their educational legacy."

For more information on the Carl Levenson Scholarship Endowment, please contact Sonia Gomez, Director of Development, at 208-282-1404, soniagomez@isu.edu.