

# NEVADA

Silver&Blue

The magazine of the University of Nevada, Reno

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## From the President

### 'Sharing a bench' with great Nevada faculty

Walter Van Tilburg Clark was one of the many great professors we have had on our campus over the years.

Clark, the acclaimed author of *The Ox-Bow Incident* and *The City of Trembling Leaves*, and a teacher of creative writing on our campus in the early 1950s and writer-in-residence in the 1960s, was known to have handwriting that was difficult to read.

His students would often stand in small groups after class, working together, probing his commentary for meaning, patiently excavating each of Clark's words with the care of archeologists.

The hard work was worth it, though. When the meaning of Clark's words was finally unearthed, his students would prize them. They were words that were reflective of the man, the teacher and his teachings: enormously insightful, thoughtfully encouraging, magnetically descriptive, with that special admonitory awareness that all great professors seem to naturally possess.

There are so many proud inheritors of the legacy of Clark and others like him on our campus today that they are far too numerous to list. Suffice it to say that our faculty of today are at the heart of what we do, for they carry with them our University's history and traditions. They are the continuous center of the enterprise, the people whose classroom lectures and research efforts and interactions with others are the touchstones that students remember years later, long after they have graduated.

When I think of our great faculty, and the example that they set for students, I invariably think of the life of a long-ago theologian, professor and university president, Mark Hopkins. Hopkins spent 36 years as president of Williams College in the 19th century. He was known as a masterful teacher, who welcomed dissenting opinion and heated discussion in his classroom. He illustrated his arguments with heaping helpings of diagrams and models, and was an adventuresome thinker. A former student from Williams, President James A. Garfield, once said of Hopkins' influence, "Give me a log cabin in the center of the state of Ohio, with one room in it, and a bench with Mark Hopkins on one end of it and me on the other, and that would be a good enough college for me."

Hopkins taught all of his students to think critically and independently. But perhaps more importantly, he also showed them a path to a fruitful, productive and satisfying life. Great faculty embody the Hopkins exemplar and engage everyone around them. Through their actions, they create a culture that often breathes new life into a campus, one that, in the words of the late Bart Giamatti, is always "mindful of potential, craving of realization."

During our Commencement ceremony on May 16, our campus took an important step when it honored the top K-12 teachers from all of Nevada's 17 counties with the President's Medal. The idea for the presentation came after we had asked our students, "Who inspired you to succeed in college?" Their overwhelming responses made it clear that at one point or another in their academic careers, they had probably "shared a bench" with their version of Mark Hopkins or Walter Van Tilburg Clark, and their lives were never again the same.

As I think of our great faculty and the rich inheritance of teaching excellence from our past that they have so clearly embraced, it has made me wonder: Who were your great influences when you were students here? We would love to hear from you about this. Email me ([mglick@unr.edu](mailto:mglick@unr.edu)) or write the editor ([silverblue@unr.edu](mailto:silverblue@unr.edu)) and share with us your memories of a professor who made a profound difference in your life.

Sincerely,

**Milton D. Glick**  
President

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Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

*Commencement 2009 was a time to celebrate everything—from great faculty to great students to great friends and family—that makes the University of Nevada, Reno campus a special place. Pictured along with President Milton Glick are Paul Bible '62, left, and Annette Whitemore '74, who both received honorary doctorates for their distinguished careers and many contributions to the life of the campus.*