

**J. Dennis Willigan
(1938-2005)**

Footnotes, November, 2005

J. Dennis Willigan, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Utah, died June 29, 2005. He is survived by his wife, Laurel Wright, and his two step-daughters, Jessica and Seneca Perri.

Dennis joined the Utah department in 1977, with a doctorate from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Dennis co-authored *Sources and Methods of Historical Demography*, with Katherine Ann Lynch in 1982.

Dennis' statistical research on under-representation of racial, ethnic, and gender groups in jury pools resulted in changes to federal and state jury selection procedures. His testimony in a class action lawsuit helped protect Native American civil rights.

Apart from historical demography, Dennis contributed to affect control theory, collecting a 1977 dictionary of sentiment measures for 1,074 social identities and behaviors from students in Belfast, Northern Ireland. At the time of his death, he was attempting to field a similar study of Navajo identities and behaviors.

A genial colleague, Dennis welcomed and supported junior faculty in the Utah department. As undergraduate studies coordinator, Dennis fostered curriculum integrity, effective teaching, and faculty responsibility to students. On the University's Institutional Review Board, he worked to educate medical-science board members about social science research. Dennis worked with the University's Bennion Community Service Center, and the Utah Campus Compact recognized him in 2004 for his innovative course on policy and poverty, offered through the Center. He participated in the university's Civically Engaged Scholar group, devoted to integrating research, teaching, and service in order to address social issues.

Outside of academia, Dennis worked in environmental organizations to block federal attempts to contaminate pristine areas with radioactive wastes. Dennis was a backpacker, mountain climber, river runner, backcountry skier, and he led numerous Wasatch Mountain Club and Sierra Club backpack and cross-country ski trips.

Dennis and his wife Laurel experimented in a remote desert area of southeastern Utah with irrigation technology developed by Israelis in the Negev Desert. A goal of the project was to demonstrate how Native American family farms in the Southwest could reestablish economic viability. In recent years Dennis traveled the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona, studying Native American methods of shamanic healing. He credited shamanic healing with his own success in fighting off cancers for more than a decade.

Dennis had a passion for story telling and dramatization. During graduate studies, Dennis returned from summer visits to Belfast with stories of whizzing bullets and huddling children. He turned his dissertation defense into theater, with key references displayed like rare books around the meeting room. On an evening in 2002 he regaled affect control theory researchers with tales of his Navajo travels, and informed them that his shamanic mentor had named them "the word people" in the Navajo language.

His flaming red hair, his contagious grin, his bedazzling charisma now are memories only—but enduring memories for his university colleagues, his students, and his far-flung friends.

David Heise, Indiana University, and Michael Timberlake, University of Utah