In Memoriam, Richard Nunan 1952-2021

Richard Nunan came to the College in 1984, and taught here for 36 years. He received his B.A. in mathematics from Vassar College and his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He specialized in political philosophy and especially philosophy of law, and he served as the editor of the American Philosophical Association’s newsletter on philosophy of law for many years. His 35 published articles included significant essays in gender studies and in film studies.

His teaching was equally versatile. Though he was happy to teach philosophy of law, he was just as happy to teach classes on such topics as symbolic and modal logic, the representation of LGBT individuals in film, medieval philosophy, and time travel in philosophy, physics, and film. He taught for many years in the Honors Western Civilization colloquium, and there lectured frequently not just on moral and political philosophy but also on the history and philosophy of science.

Richard’s record of service was extensive. He served as chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, as interim chair of the Department of Religious Studies, as pre-law advisor, and as chair of seven different faculty committees. On all of these committees, as a faculty senator, and as the AAUP representative, he was a tireless advocate for the quality of our institution and the importance of shared governance.

In everything he talked and wrote about, Richard combined a skeptical realism about how institutions actually work with an unstinting idealism about how they ought to work. It was an unsettling combination, and Richard was unsparing when things fell short of moral standards, as they so often do. But for all of that, Richard was an especially gentle and kind man. His contributions to our program and our institution were extraordinary, and he will be very badly missed.