



Dr. Steven Gross

Even before I first met Dr. Steven Gross at New Faculty Orientation in August of 2001, I had already heard through a mutual acquaintance (once-removed) of his interesting research and superb teaching at the University of South Carolina. I was also told I couldn't miss him that first day on campus, because "he looks like Mick Jagger."

It turns out my sources had been correct on both counts. Steven's research was at the forefront of linguistic studies, more specifically on the lexical structure in first language attrition, how native speakers of a language reconfigure the grammar in the process of forgetting their first language, usually under conditions of immigration. This focus for Steven was as personal as it was professional, as Steven had moved to the States from Germany at the age of one, and he was a native speaker of an Austrian-variety of German.

I was lucky enough to be assigned the office right next to the one Steven had been offered in Burleson Hall (home of ETSU's English Department before it became the Department of Literature and Language), and he became a close friend as we began our journey together on what is known as the tenure-track. In the classroom he taught everything from "Beginning Writing," to "Grammar and Usage," to graduate courses such as "Descriptive Linguistics." Outside the classroom, his door was always open to students, and he spent countless hours tutoring those who needed extra help in basic composition or in deciphering the more complex codes of linguistic theory. Fortunately for those of us who focused on literature more than language studies, Steven was always able to explain in layman's terms what his research entailed. I'm sure the same patient and kind attitude produced the large numbers of students who fought to enroll in his much-sought-after courses. In fact, his classes generated so much

interest that our department decided to add linguistics as a minor, and it has been thriving ever since.

But Steven's service to ETSU came in many ways not confined to our department. Not only did he oversee the development of the Writing Intensive program here, but he served on numerous committees for both the University at large and the College of Arts & Sciences in particular. Perhaps the single most significant event in his career at ETSU came in 2006, when he was chosen to be in the initial group of faculty exchanges initiated by the Office of International Programs and the University's new Honors College to bring international scholars to campus from China. He traveled to Shandong Province and resided there from March through July of that year, teaching graduate-level linguistics and academic writing, as well as engaging in research. As he noted at the time, "I am excited about this opportunity because I feel it offers me a wonderful way to engage in mutually beneficial collaborative research in linguistics with Chinese faculty and graduate students. The visiting professors from Shandong University coming to ETSU will provide our academic community with opportunities for cross-cultural, globally-informed, interdisciplinary study."

Steven's comment suggests the single thing I remember most about him: he loved language, and he loved teaching and talking about it to a wide range of listeners, from students in the Guadalupe School in Utah, to adult learners for the South Carolina Literacy Program, to students at ETSU, to those enrolled in his courses in China. I just wish he were here now as I compose this tribute in order to help me find the right language to express the loss that I personally, and our department more generally, have felt since his passing in 2008.

—Dr. Robert Sawyer