The English Department lost a beloved faculty member Tuesday, August 30, 2016, days after his 67th birthday. David was Director of Graduate Studies at the time of his death, and had previously served the department as chairman. In 2006, he traveled to London to chair the Film and Television Department at Brunel University for two years.

David’s scholarly interests included American poet Wallace Stephens and Owen Barfield, a member of the Inklings who influenced J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. He pioneered film and television studies and is best known for his literary explorations of shows such as Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, The X-Files, Twin Peaks, The Sopranos, Gilmore Girls, Mad Men, Lost, Breaking Bad, among others. He has written and edited more than 20 books on popular culture. He was often referred to as the “father of Buffy Studies,” and his expertise took him to various countries as a featured speaker. He had just hosted an international conference at MTSU on Mad Men, and was in the process of organizing an academic conference on the HBO series Game of Thrones.

His students and colleagues loved him as much as they respected him, and many students entered graduate studies at MTSU to study with him. His generosity is well-known among his students and colleagues, some of whom first published under his aegis.

Links:


Woodfin Chapel Memorial Announcement: http://www.woodfinchapel.com/m/?p=memorial&id=1847298
Eulogy delivered by Dr. Jimmie Cain at David’s memorial service:

Friday, September 2, 2016
10:00 a.m.
Woodfin Memorial Chapel
1488 Lascassas Pike
Murfreesboro, TN 37130

I literally would not be standing before you today if not for David Lavery. A bit over twenty years ago, he took a chance on a job candidate with a Ph.D. from a non-descript graduate program, someone who had been toiling at a junior college for eight years. I am eternally grateful to David for giving me the opportunity that has made my career and life so much richer and gratifying. But I owe David much more than that.

David proved to be a most helpful and generous colleague as well. Although I had been hired in part to serve as the director of the University Writing Center, David understood full well that to place me in that position before I had become acquainted with the department, the college, and the university would have been a disservice and might have jeopardized my chances for tenure. So, he gave me time to teach, publish, and earn the respect of my colleagues first. Even after his tenure as chair ended, he continued to play a significant role in my career. For one thing, over and over again he gladly served as an editor for me, reading carefully the essays and book chapters I forwarded to him and providing me with useful guidance.

Eventually we became collaborators, producing a special edition of the British journal Critical Studies in Television. Aside from his editorial assistance, David always made a point to attend my presentations, whether at conferences we were both attending or on campus. Finally, one of the highlights of my Modern European Literature class for the last twenty years has been David’s guest lecture on the German poet Rilke. When I ask students at the end of the semester to enumerate the strengths and weaknesses of the course, they inevitably extol David’s talk.

More importantly, however, David was a good man and a good friend. As so many of you have noted of late, David was the personification of good cheer and could lift one out of the darkest of moods. If any image of David will stay with me, it is of his smiling face as he shared a particularly ironic scene from the Stephen Colbert or Jon Stewart show. As Deborah Flanigan can attest, on days when there were just too many papers to grade or too many querulous students to manage, I could always find refuge in David’s office, and I am saddened that our strolls to La Siesta or the Boulevard for lunch, occasions for long talks about philosophy, cinema, and television programming, are now at an end. And I will miss his unalloyed joy as a husband, father, and grandfather. His deep and abiding love for Joyce, Rachel, Sarah, and his grandchildren was unmistakable.