

A Short Tribute to Denis McQuail
by Janet Wasko, University of Oregon

I am pleased and honored to be asked to participate as the North American representative on this panel that is dedicated to remembering Denis McQuail.

I have also been honored to be the only North American board member of the *European Journal of Communication* – a journal for which Denis was a key founding editor and Editor Emeritus. I can only hope that he approved of my involvement with that important project.

I didn't have the pleasure of knowing Professor McQuail as well as others on this panel, but was familiar enough with him to respect his work and especially to appreciate his fine sense of humor.

Others who worked more closely with him will provide more details, but I want to highlight just a few of his contributions that have been especially important to North American media studies.

Most of us are well aware of his skill at *codifying the field* in his seminal work, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Amazon.com says: “*McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* is the indispensable resource no student of media studies can afford to be without.” It is highly likely that the volume has been a success for Amazon as one of the most well-known (and often purchased?) books in our field.

Even though it may be indispensable, some readers have not been so appreciative, as indicated by a few comments on Amazon's site:

American students may need to be aware, however, of the differences in British language patterns.

Sam: If you like academic reading – Enjoy!

Professors really need to look into the books they're giving their students and realize that this book is too hard to read for the majority of students who do not do extreme academic readings....

Successful textbooks have a clear hierarchy that breaks information down into manageable chunks: headlines, subheadlines, bulleted lists, sidebars with definitions of key terms, bold words within paragraphs that indicate an important concept. This is page after page after page of text.

For those of us who do “extreme academic readings,” McQuail’s volume has been an indispensable text and a notable contribution to our field.

Professor McQuail also contributed to the development of normative considerations in the study of media, which has played an important role in North American media studies. University of Illinois professor, Cliff Christians (who coauthored the book, *Normative Theories of the Media* with McQuail, Theodore Glasser, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert White), has noted that normativity was a “defining feature of [McQuail’s] illustrious career.”

I also want to recall that Denis McQuail was an active member and participant in the International Association for Media and Communication Research. He served for many years on the Publications Committee and made important contributions to the organization.

Again, my colleagues on the panel will offer more details about Professor McQuail’s work and stories about their friendships with him. I will only offer some final thoughts that are based on my limited history with Denis, as well as other drawing on other scholars’ remembrances of him. I will suggest some things that we can learn from Denis – reminiscent of a list that Eileen Meehan and I developed for Herb Schiller, “Ten Lessons We Learned from Herb.”

“Ten Lessons We Learned from Denis”

1. Be serious...
2. ...but always keep a strong sense of humor.
3. Always be aware of the closest pub.
4. Enjoy good food, good wine, good friends.
5. Avoid backstabbing.
6. Work hard, but enjoy your work.
7. Take notes. Always.
8. Don’t be afraid to cross the Channel.
9. Be accessible to younger colleagues.
10. Above all – be modest.