

Beloved journalism professor dies at 94

By Adriana Gómez Licón

El Paso Times

EL PASO — Ray Small, former dean of UTEP's College of Liberal Arts, died Sunday. He was 94.

Up until 2005, communication students could still find the silver-haired "Dean Small" in his tiny office in the Cotton Memorial Building, where he advised them which courses to take.



"What amazed me is that who he was dealing with in the end was freshmen," said a colleague and communication Professor Barthy Byrd. "He advised students hour after hour after hour. It took us two people to replace him."

Small was born Aug. 2, 1915, in Winters, Texas.

Between 1942 and 1946, he was an officer in both the Air Force and the Navy.

His 65-year-old daughter, Andra Sherrill of El Paso, recalled when her father was traveling to Annapolis, Md., for his first military training.



Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso

This undated photo shows UTEP professor Ray Small at work.

"Because he had his uniform on, everybody was saluting him. He didn't know how to salute but he was wearing the uniform because my mother wanted him to," Sherrill said.

Small was hired in 1961 to be assistant to the president at Texas Western College and professor of English. He moved with his two daughters and first wife, Dolleen,

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to the Coronado Hills neighborhood. Dolleen Small died in the late 1980s. Small's oldest daughter, Marilyn Small Wilmeth, died of cancer in 1999.

In 1963, Small was appointed dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, a position that changed to dean of the College of Liberal Arts in 1967. He led efforts that divided the university into four colleges.

In 1979, Small moved to the communication department and taught full time for about a year and then became a part-time professor. He worked as editorial adviser and became acting director of the student newspaper *The Prospector* in the 1980s.

Around this time, he also owned *The Rathskeller*, which was a popular college bar in the late 1970s and early

1980s. It was located in the basement of Mesa Street Bar & Grill. An expired billiards license for the bar once got him arrested in 1978.

Small suffered a stroke that put him in the hospital in 1989.

He recovered and managed to walk after the stroke, but his left arm was left paralyzed.

In the mid-1990s when the communication department was in danger of closing, Small was also instrumental in keeping it afloat.

"His enthusiasm, tenacity and his infectious good spirits are qualities that I believe helped keep the department solvent," Amanda Kemp, a communication major at the time, wrote in a letter to the *El Paso Times*. "Small was such an inspiration to me, and to countless others."

He married his second wife, Victoria Small, about 12 years ago, she said.

Small received the Liberal Arts Outstanding Achievement Award for Exceptional Lifetime Performance in

2001. Patricia Witherspoon, former chairwoman of the communication department and now dean of the graduate school, presented him with the award.

"He was always dedicated to his students about advising, about potential careers, about writing, about editing. Almost any time I looked in his office there was a student there," she said. "He knew the catalog backward and forward."

Small retired in 2005 after 44 years of being a professor at the university.

He spent his last two years living at Ambrosio Guillen Texas State Veterans Home.

A service will be from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday at Harding Orr and McDaniel Funeral Home, at 320 Montana. He will be buried at Fort Bliss National Cemetery with full military honors.