



Meet Your Footnote: Jim Chesebro

by *[Ed Appel](#)*

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You could call him my mentor, I do believe, although by now he might wish to disavow any such relationship. Jim Chesebro---ubiquitous reviewer and association office-holder, Past President of NCA and ECA, editor of two communication journals, NCA Director of Educational Services, and author of scores of articles and books in the communication discipline---is, as Gerald Miller once said of him at a convention in Baltimore, a "giant in the field." He was my focal teacher at Temple U., 1977-1980. I studied Burkeology, dramaturgy, rhetorical theory and criticism, and popular communication under his tutelage. I T.A.'d for him in his course on "Sexual Communication," covering gender, orientation, the gamut of issues relating to the symbolization of sex in US American culture. It was a rich and original course that Jim put together entirely by himself.

Jim was a great, great lecturer. Being a left-brained and fanatical note-taker, I found his teaching style consummately stimulating and rewarding in all subjects. Jim's courses were chock full of clearly explained theory and apt and up-to-date illustrations from the political, social, and artistic arenas. He interlarded his talks with references to the most ancient and the most recent scholarship. He asked probing questions of his students, prodded thoughtful reflections on the topic at hand, as well as pontificated with eloquence and learning from behind the table or lectern. That hard work and deep thought accompanied his course preparation was always evident.

Jim wasn't reluctant to hand out "warm fuzzies," either, a trait that sharpened my fervor for all things Burkoid, rhetorical, and Chesebrovian. He once asked me for a copy of my copious notes so he could record what he had actually talked about in class, in detail. He said my essays in "Rhetorical Transactions" were the best he'd ever received. He called my oral exam at the end of an independent study of Burke the top intellectual performance he'd seen a long time. It was flattering, motivating feedback, but I would have admired the guy without it.

A star teacher, prolific scholar, and super-energetic leader in the communication field, "Urban Jungle Jim Chesebro"---that's what another of his doctoral candidates labeled him in a dissertation preface---has made his indelible mark. To me, he was "blue jeans" Jim, promoter of the "rhetoric of the T-shirt," both essayistic and sartorial. Carlyle of SARTOR RESARTUS fame would have been proud (I think). I never saw Jim even semi-formally dressed until SCA in Washington in 1983.

Jim's gone off in different philosophical directions from the days when I knew him. Today, we would probably communicate, "dialectically" as Burke and Merriam-Webster would have it, across "an abyss that divides." While I still grovel before the shrine of the Dramatistic Great One, I get the impression that Jim has taken up with foreign gods and gurus. Way back when, students earned their doctorate by taking on their teacher in a debate. Howabout it, Jim? Let's exchange polemical water balloons at twenty paces!

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