

Allan F. Omilian (1987-2010)

This tribute was offered by Cindy Sowers at a Residential College faculty memorial to Al Omilian.

Al was an Arts and Ideas major with a specialization in Creative Writing and Cultural Studies. But he was also a Renaissance man with a strong interest in the sciences as well as the arts. He took several very challenging upper-level courses in Biological Anthropology, covering topics such as Human Evolution and Primate Behavior. I first met Al when he was an incoming freshman. In the fall of 2005, he took my First Year Seminar, Tradition and Innovation in Classic Modernism: Picasso Nietzsche and Eliot.

Every First Year Seminar instructor wants their class to be lively, and this one fit that description. With students like Scott de Orio, Al Omilian, and Theresa Dreyer, I had my hands full. In fact, sometimes I couldn't get a word in edgewise! Hey guys, I would cry out "I'd like to say something! I am the teacher, no?" I described this class to Cynthia Burton (our administrative assistant in the RC Office) as my "wild horses" class. The students galloped along at top speed, and I clung to the saddle - barely.

Imagine my thoughts when these very students turned up in my winter term course on Shakespeare! Here we go again, I thought - another wild ride. And indeed, this class was even better. Al hit his stride; the vestigial reserve of a first semester freshman was overcome. One time we were studying the Gonzaga family, major patrons of the arts in Renaissance Italy. At the next class Al showed up wearing his Gonzaga sweat shirt. I of course knew about the Italian branch, but nothing about the basketball connection. Al had to fill me in on that!

Al was witty and fun; but he was also a true intellectual; he liked to think about things in depth. For example, he wrote a great paper on the theme of power, using Titian's paintings, Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, and Machiavelli's Prince as examples. This paper illustrates Al's nature and scope as a Renaissance man: imaginative, wide ranging, analytical, and politically astute. He made his mark in every way.