

# DR. HISTORIAN

**DR. VERNON SHEELEY ENJOYS HISTORY EVEN THOUGH HIS EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND IS IN COUNSELING. THE COUNSELING AND STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSOR'S LATEST PROJECT IS AN EXTENSION OF HIS PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARLY WORK, CHRONICLING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE KENTUCKY COUNSELING ASSOCIATION (KCA) FOR ITS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY IN 2005.**

Dr. Sheeley's peers have even called him "Dr. Historian." He has more than 550 files, the largest known private collection, on former leaders in the counseling field, including one on the American Counseling Association's first predecessor organization president, Frank M. Leavitt (1913-14). Dr. Sheeley began collecting the information in 1966. His peers have shown an interest in finding out about the history of the organizations to which they belong.

Dr. Sheeley has written a few preliminary articles for the KCA, and has already co-written a book to recognize the American Counseling Association's golden anniversary. *American Counseling Association: A 50-Year History 1952-2002* was published with two professors at the University of North Texas in 2003. An article with a similar title written by Dr. Sheeley appeared in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* in 2002.

Western alumnus Dr. Bill Braden, executive director of the KCA, said Dr. Sheeley is a treasure. "He is so respected that a couple of years ago, at the American Counseling Association, the then-president David Kaplan listed him as one of the profession's unsung heroes," said Dr. Braden.

Dr. Sheeley has researched a number of the former presidents of the KCA and written profiles of them, Dr. Braden said. The profiles include assessments of the accomplishments of the presidency. Dr. Sheeley also asked the presidents to project what the organization would look like in the future.

BY SCOTT SISCO

Photo by LaDonna Harmon



A sampling of publications and monographs written by Vernon Sheeley for members of the American Counseling Association

It takes Dr. Sheeley about a month to finish an article. He thinks about his subject, puts some ideas together then begins writing. Then, he thinks about what he wrote, rereads it, revises his work and repeats that twice. "By the fourth week, it's coming together," he estimated.

Dr. Sheeley is always working on something. He has published more than 160 works, including eighteen books and monographs in a Leadership Series. Most of these works are historical looks at the counseling profession.

The monographs in the Leadership Series are biographies of the leaders of the American Counseling Association and its divisions. The counseling profession didn't have anyone chronicling its history of presidents before Dr. Sheeley began doing so during his graduate work at Arizona State University and the University of Wyoming in the 1960s.

"I remind the profession where we came from — where we've been," Dr. Sheeley said. "I'll continue to do that as long as I'm here." While studying, Dr. Sheeley asked himself how he could contribute to the counseling profession and decided that researching and presenting the history of the profession was how he could contribute.

Dr. Sheeley began his career as a counselor in Los Angeles. He worked there for seven years without any course work in counseling. He had a bachelor's degree in social studies and a master's in American and British history from Case Western Reserve University. In 1960, he was told he couldn't counsel students any more until he had a degree in counseling. Dr. Sheeley's employer offered him a sabbatical so he could earn that degree, so he participated in an academic year institute at Arizona State, which was financed by a National Defense Education Act grant.

He went on to earn his doctorate at The University of Wyoming, where he began his examination of leaders in the counseling field. His dissertation was titled "Professional Organization Leaders in the Guidance and Counseling Movement: Some Implications of Their Personal and Professional Backgrounds."

Dr. Sheeley himself has been president of seven national and state counseling organizations, and has

served on numerous committees. He has also been recognized with several awards on campus. "You become known through what you're doing," he said.

He came to Western Kentucky University in 1968 as an assistant professor of education, teaching counseling classes. "My first love is teaching," he said. "Teaching is really a hobby for me. I really have fun with it." Dr. Sheeley doesn't just teach his students what they need to know for

a career as a counselor, he teaches them what they need to know for life, he said. "We all have talents, let's use them to the best of our abilities," Dr. Sheeley said.

He has learned some life lessons of his own the last few years while traveling around the country on Greyhound busses to conferences where he presented papers. Dr. Sheeley said he wanted to reacquaint himself with people who aren't as fortunate as he has been since it had been a long time since he was a counselor at an inner-city school in Los Angeles, so he traveled by bus to Greensboro, North Carolina; San Antonio, Texas; Tucson, Arizona; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Chicago, Illinois.

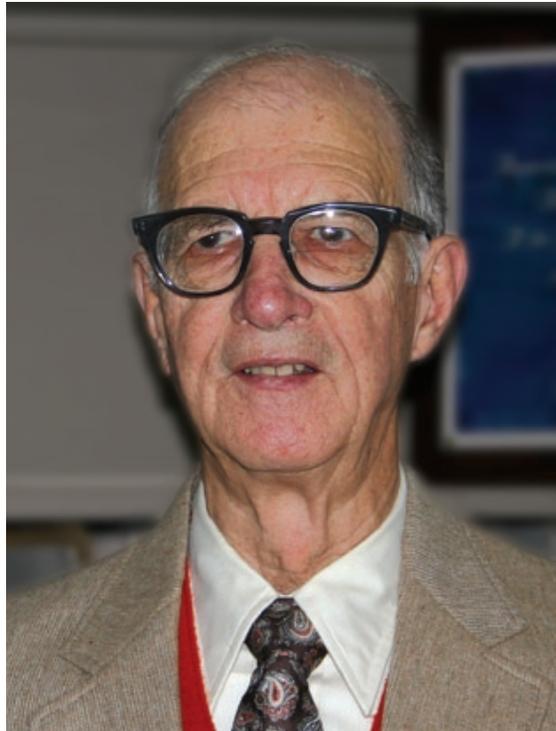
"After Chicago, I finally woke up and decided I was in dangerous territory," Dr. Sheeley said, "but it's been a wonderful experience."

Dr. Sheeley isn't cutting back on his research in his later days. "I'm still going on that full speed," he said. Now, most of Dr. Sheeley's presentations are done at in-state conferences. "When you're closing in on 28,000 days old, you're getting up there," he said.

Dr. Sheeley divides his time between this scholarship, community service, and teaching. During advising time, he's always available for his students, he said. Two members of Western's current counseling faculty were Dr. Sheeley's students. "That's how age is catching up with me," he said.

His students help keep him young. "If I weren't working with young people in classes, I might be older than I am," he said.

No, Dr. Sheeley isn't young any more — at least not in years — but he is far from retirement. "I'm not about to quit teaching," Dr. Sheeley stated. "I love it too much."



*Dr. Vernon Sheeley*