

# Working journalists legacy left behind

The death of Professor Emeritus John Stempel Thursday prompted a look back to a couple of the 30 years he spent as a teacher at the Indiana University School of Journalism.

**IMPACT OF THE MAN** on writing style is incalculable. By the time journalism students enrolled in one of his classes, such good teachers as Gretchen Kemp, Chris Savage and Poynter McEvoy had already drummed into their heads the history of American newspapers and the essentials of news writing — the who, what, when, where, why and how of a newsworthy event.

John Stempel was awesomely referred to by his students in those days as "St. John, the Journalist." Such was his reputation for being plain-spoken that if for some reason you were summoned to his office, you almost literally crawled in there on your belly. He also expected to have to tell anyone something *once* and only once.

**PROFESSOR STEMPEL'S** editing class was a mental exercise designed to toughen students for the media world as well as to teach the skills of the trade.

Classes began with a 10-point quiz on four daily newspapers. The questions were drawn from anywhere in those papers, including the sports pages, funnies, and occasionally the classified ads. He was trying to teach students that in order to be

## Looking Back

By Rose H. McIlveen

good reporters they needed to program themselves to read the newspapers from cover-to-cover every day. The more far-reaching message of that class exercise was that to a reporter nothing that happens in the world is irrelevant.

Apart from his own concise textbook on newspaper editing, Rudolph Flesch's *The Art of Plain Talk* and *The Art of Readable Writing* were the Bibles. Professor Stempel was a stickler for absolute recognition of the difference between fact and opinion and the danger of letting personal bias creep into the reporting of a news event. He used to say that reporters' opinions belonged on the editorial pages, thank you, and *nowhere* else.

**JOHN STEMPEL WAS** a stickler when it came to writing style. In those days stories written for the *Indiana Daily Student* were graded daily by faculty members, and any reporter, for example, who slipped a mental cog and spelled the IU-president's