

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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The biographical sketches were written by
colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Contents



Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

Marguerite Ann Browning	Page 1
Stanley Alan Corngold	Page 4
Robert Peter Ebert	Page 7
Walter Hermann Hinderer	Page 9
Peter Grant Jeffery	Page 11
Austin Newton	Page 14
Robert Anthony Pascal Jr.	Page 16
Michael Rothschild	Page 18
Stuart Carl Schwartz	Page 21
James L. Seawright	Page 24
T. Leslie Shear Jr.	Page 26
Yoshiaki Shimizu	Page 28

Robert Ebert



Robert Ebert was born in Mount Vernon, New York, in 1944. He attended Union College, initially intending to study engineering and mathematics. He soon found himself drawn to the humanities, and especially to the study of language. He earned a B.A. from Union in 1966. After attending the Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in 1966–67 as a Fulbright Fellow, Bob entered the graduate program in Germanic linguistics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he was awarded an M.A. in 1968 and a Ph.D. in 1972. His first position in his field was as assistant professor of Germanic philology and linguistics at the University of Chicago, where he taught from 1972 until 1979 (with a year as a visiting assistant professor at the University of California–Berkeley). Bob came to Princeton as an associate professor of Germanic languages and literatures in 1979, and was promoted to professor in 1987.

In his five books and dozens of articles, Bob established himself as the leading scholar of Germanic linguistics in North America. His early work, including his first book, *Infinitival Complement Constructions in Early New High German* (1976) was informed by the principles of generative grammar. As his career developed, he drew increasingly on models in sociolinguistics. The major results of this new combination were two now-standard volumes on the historical syntax of the German language in the period 1300–1750. These books, together with several widely influential articles on syntax and word order, led to increasing recognition among the large community of linguists in Germany. The mark of this recognition was the invitation to co-author the first comprehensive grammar of the language in the late medieval and early modern periods. The *Frühneuhochdeutsche Grammatik* is a cornerstone of every reference library in the humanities.

Alongside his remarkable scholarly career, Bob gave more than 15 years to leadership roles at Princeton. He served as director of the Program in Linguistics from 1979 through 1985. And he assumed the chairship of the Department of German in 1989, at what proved to be a critical moment in the department's history. In his 10 years as chair, Bob oversaw the gradual transformation of the department: a distinguished group of scholars who focused with near-exclusivity on literature were gradually supplemented with younger colleagues with interests in film, painting and photography, new media, and philosophy. If the Department of German is widely recognized as the leader in the field of interdisciplinary German studies, much of the credit is to be laid at Bob's door.

A recurrent theme in Bob's career at Princeton is his love of teaching. Whether leading a graduate seminar in the history of the German language, teaching an advanced stylistics course, or directing a senior thesis on early modern syntax, Bob brought the excitement and joy of scholarship alive for his students. He embodies the notion of devotion to his students and academic and intellectual integrity for a generation of Princeton students.