

# Dr. William Stephenson

## Distinguished Research Professor of Advertising

By Arthur B. Pine



Dr. William Stephenson, the famous British psychologist who came to the University seeking freedom to do research, would like to give the same privileges to pre-doctoral students at Missouri—by cutting their course work in half.

Himself the recipient of two Ph.D. degrees, and an adviser to graduate students at Missouri since 1958, Stephenson thinks pre-doctoral students have "far too many courses to take" before they begin their dissertations. "Ph.D. students should have more latitude," he says. "For M.A. candidates the heavy course work in addition to the thesis is good training for further work. But when a student is working on a Ph.D., it's time he was truly on his own."

In place of half the course work, Stephenson suggests, more emphasis should be placed on the doctoral dissertation. "Students should spend eight hours a day on research for two straight years. That's the only real way to get at it. It's a good thing for students to do their research in collaboration, in some respects, with one or more classmates who are working in the same area. They learn from each other that way. What they produce is likely to be more thorough

and more valuable than what one man alone could produce."

To Stephenson, whose job as Distinguished Research Professor of Advertising at the School of Journalism gives him access to computers, IBM machines and graduate assistants, twentieth century research is impossible without the proper equipment and working conditions.

He has the highest praise for the University's new Datatron 205 Computer, which he and his students use considerably. But he would like to see more laboratory space made available for basic research into individual and mass communication, from which advertising research draws its sustenance. He wants Ph.D. students to have more physical equipment.

"Research students should have their own rooms," he says, "where they can hold conferences, work and keep their research materials, just like faculty members. They should be given keys, desks and private cubicles—bigger than just a carrel in the library—to do their work. At the Ph.D. level, the student should feel that his work deserves a place inside the University building—that he's not just a course-comer.



*Photography by Battaglia*

"The emphasis for pre-doctoral students now is that they are getting instruction rather than research experience. A recent White House Committee has made much the same observations about a certain misplaced emphasis in instruction in this country generally."

An emphasis on producing better results has been on Stephenson's mind for most of his 58 years. Twenty-six years ago Stephenson fathered the famous "Q-technique" for social science and psychological research—a radical method for measurement that bases itself on the centrality of the self and not on measuring individual differences in personality. The Q-technique, now widely accepted among world universities, may well be the only truly, basic method of measurement upon which social science, in its subjective respects, can rely.

To the graduate students learning the Q-technique in his classes in communications theory and research methods in the School of Journalism, Stephenson is one of the most frank, entertaining, enlightening and enjoyable professors in the University.

Speaking rapidly in a distinctively British accent, Stephenson is one of the most highly-animate men

on the graduate faculty. He smiles, winces, leans against the rostrum slowly, walks swiftly around in front of the room, scribbles half a name or the first part of a formula on the blackboard, and alternates between joviality and elegance. He explains communications research in terms of the people it seeks to describe and acquaints his students critically with famous psychological theorists, life-as-a-game, science and the value of the scientific method, brings academics to reality through everyday examples, cites instances from his own experiences and above all instills in his students an excitement for learning and a respect for science.

"I can't parrot back in 1-2-3 terms what he's taught me this semester," one M.A. candidate says, "but it's changed my thinking entirely and made me want to be more investigative and scientific."

To Stephenson, science is a way of life. Since his childhood, he has successfully compounded the arts with the sciences, fusing them in his own life to prove that they are interdependent.

The fusion began in grammar school near Durham, in the north of England—Stephenson's birthplace—



*The animated personality of Dr. Stephenson is reflected in the photographs on these pages. They were made when he appeared on "Missouri Forum" on the University's television station. Moderator is Dr. Edward C. Lambert, at right.*

## Stephenson continued

when he first felt a conflict between his ambitions for the arts and the sciences. He liked physics and general science as much as he enjoyed practicing his skills at essay-writing, Latin and drawing. His choice—to attend Durham University to study medicine—was only a temporary one. He studied physics instead and took a first-class honors degree (similar to the American magna cum laude) in physics in 1923. Later, Stephenson was to combine his science with psychology and become one of the most versatile figures in British psychology.

At the age of 24, Stephenson had earned a Ph.D. degree in physics—a subject which overtook medicine as his first love at college. "Topping" his exams, he continued his research, having had several scientific papers published by the time he was 25. He received a college fellowship and used it in 1926, to study psycho-physical methods—a subject that he thought would give him a fringe area for his physics—at University College at London University. Studying under the famous psychologists Dr. Charles Spearman and Sir Cyril Burt, Stephenson earned a Ph.D. in psychology in the Arts Faculty at London University in 1929—his second doctorate, at the age of 27.

On Christmas morning of that same year, in "the old priory church on the moors at a place called Muggleswick, where we both had cottages," Stephenson married Miss Mamie Richardson, a fine arts graduate he knew from Durham.

Together, they began married life on Stephenson's salaries as a part-time research assistant to Dr. Spearman, part-time tutor and free-lance journalist. "I did articles for the London Evening Standard," he says. "I used to write articles on dreams and the like, applying psychology, and ran a series of psychological

tests called 'Psycho-zigs.' I also wrote some articles for the Sunday Chronicle."

It was then that Stephenson became interested in the mathematical methods of psychology, many of which are used in operations of research today. "I developed a major interest in factor analysis," he says. "Dr. Spearman taught me very little psychology, but a great deal of methodology."

With math, science and psychology in combination, Stephenson would have a natural opening in statistics and marketing research. But that would come later, after more study.

In 1935, Stephenson was appointed assistant director of the new Institute of Experimental Psychology at Oxford. He received another degree—an M.A.—at Corpus Christi College at Oxford. During the next 13 years as an Oxford don, Stephenson became well-known as a research psychologist. He was Oxford's first Reader in Experimental Psychology and was involved in developing the Honors School in Psychology, Philosophy and Physiology at Oxford.

Between 1940 and 1946—the war years—Professor Stephenson had no students. Instead, he was kept busy working for the British government in psychological research. For the Central Trade Test Board in the Air Ministry, Stephenson developed the mental testing system used by the RAF and WAF. In 1943, when he completed the system, he returned to Oxford.

The British Army next commissioned him to work as a consultant to the Director-General of the Medical Services. With a War Office appointment as brigadier-general, Stephenson visited India to advise on the caliber of Indian officers and wrote training manuals for instructors in the British Army.

By 1947, with the war over, Stephenson held jobs as

an Oxford Reader in Experimental Psychology, an army officer, and a consultant for motivational research for the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in London—"to eke out expenses so I could live at Oxford." Probably, he was the highest-paid psychologist in England at the time.

That year, Stephenson received an invitation that would later make him take out an American citizenship and leave England for permanent residence in the United States. The American Psychological Association granted him \$1,000 to visit this country to tour U. S. psychology departments. His \$1,000 got him as far west as Chicago, where he later stayed for a year as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago—"to get a better look at the U. S."

After looking, Stephenson decided that "the opportunity for my kind of work was better here than in England. In England, there was not much opportunity for graduate research; most of the colleges are only undergraduate. At Chicago, there were a number of excellent post-graduate students. For the first time, I felt I had freedom to do what I wanted." His family joined him in Chicago.

Stephenson stayed a second year, also doing marketing research for Chicago advertising firms, serving as a consultant to a trade-mark law firm working on his Q-technique. His study of human behavior at Chicago kept him in contact with some of the greatest psychological and sociological minds in the country: Carl Rogers, David Riesman, Everett Hughes and others.

Stephenson spent two summers as a visiting professor at Berkeley and a spring semester as a Walker-Ames professor at the University of Washington in Seattle. In 1955, he left Chicago, chiefly for financial reasons. "I simply had to make some money," he says. "My children were getting older and I had to keep my head above water. My salary wasn't enough."

He considered working at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., but couldn't find a house in Maryland. The housing situation was easier in Greenwich, Conn., and Stephenson accepted an offer with a research firm. "But that," he says, "though most fascinating in its research opportunities, was too time-consuming; I didn't have enough time to do work in my own field."

The time and freedom Stephenson wanted were available at Missouri. The D'Arcy Advertising Agency, for whom Stephenson had done some work in New York, introduced him to the School of Journalism and helped materially to make an attractive appointment for him as a Distinguished Research Professor—one of the first such professorships in the University.

"At the University," he says, "it's most delightful and free. One can work without any undue interruptions. We have enough to satisfy us between our trav-

eling occasionally to New York and Chicago and the various cultural events at the University. And we've made more friends here in a few months than we made in Greenwich in all those years. We like it here very much." The traveling he refers to usually involves consultation work.

Liking the U. S. enough to stay here caused Stephenson to take out American citizenship in 1956. "I felt I should show the way to my children," he says. "I have a very warm attachment to Britain, but I like the idea of the great social equality we have in this country; you don't see that in Britain as much. I want to educate my children here. Here, especially my girls can have an equal opportunity for good educations."

Stephenson's four children have had the opportunity for the education he wanted: His daughter Averil went to Chicago University; another daughter, Mariel, will be graduated from Bennington College this June. A son, Charles, attended the University of Wisconsin under a Ford scholarship and was graduated from the Yale Law School. And his youngest son, Ricky, is at the University Laboratory School in Columbia (Mo.).

Contributor to several psychological journals and co-editor of others in the past, Stephenson will publish his third and fourth books later this year. One will concern a new theory of mass communication; the other is *Intimations of Self-Psychology*.

After work, he enjoys golf, long walks, criticizing his wife's paintings and nurturing a quiet war against cigarette-smoking, which he thinks is annoying to non-smokers.

His students at Missouri, he says, "are just as good as any graduate students I've seen anywhere. I'm greatly impressed with the quality of the M.A. theses I've seen here at the School of Journalism. The idea that American students don't work is quite mistaken, at least on the graduate level."

At the graduate level—particularly the pre-doctoral candidates—Stephenson hopes to attract the sorely-needed research personnel for mass communications theory. "Such research," he says, "requires a liberal education beforehand; but it can be useful in sociology, psychology and political science as well as journalism. We need more people in the field who can do research. That's why the right techniques are so important."

Importance of technique is emphasized by Stephenson every day. He is trying to show that "the mass media are a positive function in respect to leisure—not an evil 'hidden persuader' of any sort." His study of the acceptance and influence of mass media—news-papers, magazines, radio and television—on the American public will be the basis for the radical change in the media which should come in the next few years.