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Former Distinguished Visiting Professor Whitehead Dies

August 1, 2008

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Clay T. “Tom” Whitehead, 69, former Distinguished Visiting Professor of Communications Policy at Mason and the nation’s first telecommunications policy advisor, died on July 23 from prostate cancer.

Whitehead taught a Communications and the Law seminar at Mason’s law school in 2005. For the seminar, he arranged an outstanding cadre of guest speakers that included Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia; Richard Wiley, former FCC chairman; Donald Baker, former assistant attorney general for antitrust at the Department of Justice; and Brian Lamb, founder and president of C-SPAN.

As special assistant to President Richard Nixon, Whitehead oversaw policy development for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Atomic Energy Commission, the National Science Foundation and the Federal Communications Commission.



Clay T. Whitehead listens as Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia speaks to students in the Communications and Law Seminar during a 2005 visit.

Photo by Steven Tuttle

In 1970, Whitehead was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the first director of the U.S. Office of Telecommunications Policy at the White House. In this position, he championed competition and deregulation in telecommunications, cable, broadcasting and satellite at a time when the monopoly model was preeminent.

Whitehead is credited with encouraging the FCC to adopt an “open skies” policy, which allowed multiple nongovernmental entities to construct and operate communications satellite facilities. This policy revolutionized the television industry by enabling cable operators to provide nationwide programming on a competitive basis.

Whitehead, a veteran and father of two, received BS, MS and PhD degrees from M.I.T. He is survived by his wife and children.

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