

2018 Thomas Jefferson Award to Professor Connie Eble

*Presented October 12, 2018 at UNC Faculty Council Meeting
Michael McFee, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, UNC Chapel Hill*

Good afternoon. I've known Connie Eble for over forty years, first as her student and later as her colleague, and I can tell you: Nobody at this university deserves the Thomas Jefferson Award more than she does. In her teaching, in her scholarship, and especially in her selfless service, she embodies the best Jeffersonian ideals, and those of UNC itself, whose light and liberty she has pursued as a faculty member for 47 years. How fitting that she should receive this honor on University Day.

Connie is a native of New Orleans, in a state purchased during the presidency of the man for whom this award is named. She took her undergraduate degree at St. Mary's Dominican College there, and her graduate degrees here at Carolina, where—after a teaching sojourn in Kentucky—she returned to start her academic career in 1971. I took an Old English class with Professor Eble soon thereafter, during which I learned two things: I did not belong in graduate school, and this teacher **really** loved language—the origins and histories and sheer raw energy of words. Connie may be best known for one of her undergraduate courses, English 313: Grammar of Current English, in which students collect and study examples of “good campus slang”—she always shared the final raucous list with me and my colleagues in Creative Writing, so we'd be up to date on “bae” and “be like” and “boo-thang” and “bruh” and “bye Felicia,” just to mention a few of the B's.

Connie's focus on slang extended far outside the classroom. She published two books on the subject, including *Slang and Sociability: In-Group Language among College Students*, from UNC Press in 1996, and also gave many interviews and lectures and papers on the topic, locally and nationally and around the world. She is a scholar of the language of Louisiana as well, and—after retirement—will continue to work on a study of the dialects of her hometown, New Orleans.

Like Mr. Jefferson, Ms. Eble is a devoted public servant. The number of her professional activities is astonishing: to mention only three, she has been President of the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, of the South Atlantic Modern Languages Association, and of the American Dialect Society. Here at UNC, but there are few committees, at the departmental or university level, that she has not been a member (or the chair) of. I have seen first-hand her thoughtful, cheerful, insightful participation in whatever she's asked to help with. I'm not sure she's ever said No to serving others, and all of us—students, colleagues, fellow scholars, and citizens of the state and the world—have benefited from her generosity and her profound humanitarian vocation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to present this year's recipient of the Thomas Jefferson Award at UNC-Chapel Hill, Professor Connie Eble.