

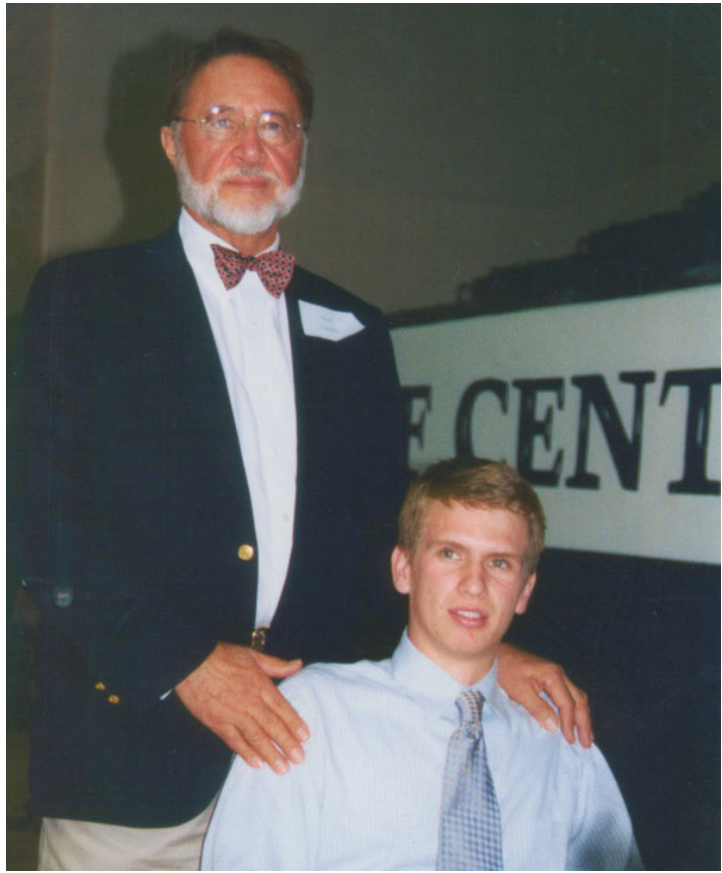
Norbert Schedler

Norbert O. Schedler (March 30, 1933 -) is a Distinguished University Professor of Philosophy and Founding Director of The Honors College at the University of Central Arkansas.

Early life

Childhood

Norbert Schedler is the third of five children born to Missouri Synod Lutheran minister Oscar August Albert Schedler and Margaret Louise Schedler née Barth. Schedler's grandfather, a Lutheran minister, emigrated from eastern Germany (perhaps Saxony) in the 1840s, and his mother's family arrived in the United States from Hamburg. Both sides of the family settled near St. Louis, Missouri. All six brothers on his father's side of the family became clergymen, as well as all but one of the brothers on his mother's side of the family. Margaret Schedler's father was a Lutheran minister,



Norbert Schedler with Rhett Martin, UCA's first Rhodes scholar.

the president of Concordia College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and later president of the seminary in Springfield, Illinois. Schedler's father secured his first parish in Oregon, and later served a congregation in Vancouver, British Columbia. Wanting her son to be an American-born citizen, Margaret Schedler traveled four days by rail to her parent's home in Milwaukee for Norbert's birth. After three months in Milwaukee, Margaret returned with Norbert to Vancouver. Norbert's father said that his first son had "exited the birth canal index finger first and immediately began to babble," and would inevitably become a "Man of the Word."

Norbert's family remained in Vancouver until he reached age nine. In his essays, Schedler notes that he fell deeply in love with the city's diversity, architecture, and weather. The parish his father served was multicultural, as well as impoverished due to the ongoing Depression. The family raised its own chickens and kept a vegetable garden. Schedler wrote of those days, "[E]very spring my father would take me into the garden and say, 'When I came into the world, it was not desolate because those before me planted. When I leave this world, future generations will not find it desolate because we've planted.' Then he took some small seeds and, as if performing a sacrament, put them into the earth. 'Norbie, these seeds will only appear to be sleeping. Actually they will take nutrients out of the earth then creep out into the open to take energy from the sun and then leap forward into flourishing plants that give us shade, fruit, and beauty.' And I would frolic through the garden shouting: "sleep, creep, leap."

Many strangers visited the Schedler home in those years, including homeless vagabonds who marked the front sidewalk with a cross, a Hobo (sign) code for "talk religion, get food." His mother, however, never turned any hungry visitor down because St. Benedict taught Christians always to welcome the stranger, for as he put it, in so doing "some have entertained Christ unawares." Schedler traces the origin of his interest in narrative philosophy,

which influenced his approach to theology, to the stories told by these visitors. In this way, scripture was also presented as a story, rather than as literal truth. "I remember as a boy, on Sunday night [father] would invite over the local preachers. They would all come over and they'd drink beer and smoke cigars and talk about all the big issues that were going on," he said in an interview. "As conservatives, you know, everything was going to hell in a hand basket, and the end of the world was coming soon. So I would pretend to go to bed, and then sneak to the top of the stairs and listen to their conversations, because I've always been fascinated with social and political kinds of issues."

At an early age, Schedler began asking his father questions about his Sunday sermons. On one occasion the Schedler children crawled under the pews from the back of the church all the way to the front during a Sunday sermon, to the horror and consternation of mother, the church organist and choir director, and father. Thereafter, the children were quizzed on the sermons. "When I was just a kid he would read the first drafts of his sermons to me to get my reactions," Schedler relates. "He was constantly asking me the 'why' of things. That's an excellent preparation for philosophy." Increasingly, Norbert preempted his father by asking him questions first. This earned him the nickname - at age nine - "Little Skeptic."

Education

In 1942, Norbert moved with his family to Cincinnati, Ohio, where his father became the assistant pastor serving under his grandfather, then vice-president of the synod. Schedler attended grade school in Cincinnati, and then at age fourteen became enrolled in an all-male immigrant German *hochschule* ("high school") in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he studied German, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and grappled with the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hume, Descartes, and Nietzsche in their original languages. Schedler also joined the ROTC, and rose to the rank of captain-adjutant, the second highest officer in the corps. His teenage hero was Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox. Schedler received a 1951 *Chicago Tribune* award for outstanding ROTC officer in the State of Indiana, and a West Point appointment from Senator Vance Hartke, which he declined. Pressure of family to follow in the footsteps of his father, while not overt, proved too great. His father's dream was that he would teach at the seminary.

During the day Schedler heard ideas in the classroom, only to unlearn them at night while reading books under the covers with a flashlight. He almost never consulted his parents on matters of career or theology, fearing that his views would disturb them. Once, while walking with his father, Schedler described the Whiteheadian "God is a process" view of the universe. His father, befuddled, replied that not only did he not understand the answers his son was giving, he didn't understand the questions. His mother, though very proud of young Norb, remained very pietistic throughout her life. Other students came to Schedler with questions about Albert Camus and other philosophers, hoping that they might keep their Christianity orthodox. Schedler, a very private person, worried about being hypocritical. He recognized that it was easy for him to become a chameleon, going into different intellectual environments and becoming indigenous. "We were perfecting the buggy whip when other people were trying to drive automobiles," he recalled. "That's when I gave up my former worldview."

Schedler received a B.A. in Classics from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, in 1955. Concordia Seminary in those days was in deep theological turmoil, on the defensive against relativism, science, and secularism. Still, Schedler met with several young members of the faculty in their homes, where they talked about these ideas, especially the notion of "higher criticism," treating the Bible like any other text. Concordia's student bookstore became a liberal site on campus as Schedler, an employee, ordered books they were told not to read. The faculty eventually became aware of this, and took the bookstore over from the students. With fellow Concordia student Bob Smith, Schedler ventured into the classes at nearby secular Washington University beginning in 1955. He enrolled in a course called 'Ethics,' the first course not taught by the church. Schedler found the atheist professor a marvelous human being. He read works by Martin Buber and discovered that God was a process, entering into conversations with human beings: "And God changed his mind and repented" (Exodus 32:14). "And of course, that's a violation of everything I had ever learned. I mean, God's all knowing, right? God's omniscient, right? And God changed his mind? That can't be right."

Back at Concordia pursuing master's work, Schedler began asking more difficult questions in class, which one of his professors asked him to refrain from doing. The professor told him that he could ask questions privately in his office because they embarrassed him. In a class on 'The Prophets' Schedler wrote a homily for which he was severely berated by the professor and the rest of the class. He vowed at that moment to refuse to do anything more in the class but attend. He took no tests and wrote no papers. If he flunked, he could not graduate. The faculty met, agreed to give him a D, and passed him on. He completed his Masters of Divinity in Theology at Concordia Seminary in 1958. For his thesis, Schedler wrote a Wittgensteinian defense of religious language under the supervision of Albert William Levi, S. Morris Eames, and Huston Smith.

As part of his seminary training, Schedler served as a vicar at Christ Church, Washington Parish (Washington, D.C.), a position vacated by Martin Marty. This was a large, highly educated congregation, and Schedler described his preaching assignments as "stressful." He said later that he "took the job very seriously. I knew the stories of the people in the pews. You don't just write a sermon to titillate. You write it contextually because it is embedded in all of these sites, to care for all of these souls." Schedler loved teaching, and parishioners asked to get together and talk about world religions. One of them asked, "Why is Christianity superior to other religions?" a question Schedler reserved for the last class. A story on the class appeared in *The Washington Post*, which attracted the attention of the local community. Schedler knew nothing of the *Post* report, and on the last evening of the course, seven Buddhist monks in saffron robes walked into the church classroom. Schedler went through a whole assortment of feelings, from defensiveness to embarrassment to attraction to what they were saying, finally regretting that he could not be like them: "Regret is an interesting emotion, combining as it does both wish and denial. Regret is about affirmation: 'I wish in my next life to be like you.' But this is so often impossible because of the way we are enculturated." While managing Christ Church parish youth events he met the women who would eventually become his wife, Carol Skeels. Skeels, the daughter of Norman and Betty Skeels of Miami and a journalist, followed him back to St. Louis and took a job teaching English. They have three children: Karen, Ruth Anne, and David.

In 1959 Schedler enrolled at Princeton University after seeing the school's announcement of a new and selective Religion and Philosophy Ph.D. program in the journal *Religion and Life*. Schedler intended to become a language philosopher, and he was enamored of Alfred North Whitehead, phenomenology, and existentialism. Paul Tillich's method of correlation became the major influence on his thinking. Schedler wrote his dissertation on the method of Austin Farrer and Ian Ramsey under religious scholar George F. Thomas at a time when the history of ideas approach to interpretation of texts characterized most of the faculty. He remembers that Thomas, to his credit, often "put up with my position, but did not agree with it."

While completing his thesis, Schedler accepted a call to ministry in the parish of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Cheltenham, in the Philadelphia suburbs. "Once I was out of Princeton, I went into a parish right outside of Philadelphia. And I wanted to do that because mother church educated me and I felt I owed her. I wanted to teach in a church-related school where I could help young men and young women deal with the questions that I'm sure were coming up when they confronted Darwin and Freud and linguistic philosophy, and existentialism and all that." Schedler led worship services, but also did experimental things like bringing in advisors from all walks of life - lawyers, psychiatrists, doctors, and accountants - to help parishioners better negotiate their lives. He mounted theater performances in the chancel and also religious plays. "My concern was teaching the gospel the good news in the contemporary world," he remembers. "I was not a rabble-rouser, but tried to help people find healthy ways to live."

Professional life

Early Faculty Appointments and Arrival at UCA

After a year beginning in his Pennsylvania parish, and before finishing his Princeton Ph.D., Schedler accepted an offer to teach at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana (Associate Professor, 1963-1967; Chair, Department of Philosophy, 1968-1969). His students read Plato and Nietzsche in their original languages. Sixty went on to complete doctorates, and several became presidents of colleges, theologians, professors, and philosophers. Accusations of heretical thought dogged him here as well. Conservative teachers and administrators at the school were concerned about liberalizing scholarly practices. "I got up to give a talk in the chapel," he recalled, "and said that my text for that day was going to be on Frederick Nietzsche, and the text was 'I can't believe a God who couldn't dance.' And I proceeded to give a sermon on how God is a person and God interacts with us, and if we pray there's the possibility that we could convince God to do otherwise as Abraham had done." Following the talk, members of the Religion Department appealed to the president and board of trustees, asking that he be fired. The incident led Schedler question his continued service to the school: "I could see more and more that I was in the wrong place." He returned to his dissertation research, completing his thesis in 1967. The school later closed in the Seminex controversy as Missouri Synod leadership began questioning professors who used historical-critical methods for biblical interpretation or stressed the importance of the Gospel over other scripture.

In 1967 Schedler became a Visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Purdue University replacing Calvin Schrag. He taught undergraduate and graduate classes, including courses on contemporary ethics, and after one year secured a full-time appointment at Purdue University Fort Wayne branch. He became chair of the Department of Philosophy in 1969, and worked with the Center for Studies of the Person. Schedler rose to full professor rank in 1973. He inaugurated a course in women's studies and another in men's studies, and taught around themes like the future of marriage, the environment, and human sexuality.

Still, he felt something was lacking. He reached impasse while serving as a Visiting Research Associate studying the environmental impact of ethical theories at the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University in the 1975-1976 academic year. Relates Schedler, "I was sitting on the side of a hill, and I could look down and see the San Francisco Bay. My eyes went over two interstates, each of which had 12 lanes and all these people. I was thinking, do I want to go back to Purdue with twenty-something faculty, 30,000 students, and all the hassles of that, or do I want to go to an 'underdeveloped country,' to a small university where I can spend a lot of time with students, raise my kids, and not be under that kind of pressure."

His concerns stemmed, in no small measure, from the research he was doing. Schedler had written part of a PBS radio script on the ethical values implied by controversies surrounding the channelization of the Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois rivers, and in 1975 published a now widely anthologized essay "Our Destruction of Tomorrow: A Philosophical Reflection on the Ecological Crisis." Said Schedler in an interview, "Our problem is the seeming inevitable slide toward making the world into one huge Los Angeles. The forces that move history are beyond our ken and they are moving rapidly, like the test pilot who radioed back to earth, 'I'm lost, but I'm making record time.' So many people feel like this about what is going on around them." He also was drawn to the meaning-centered, face-to-face scale of life portrayed in E. F. Schumacher's essay collection *Small is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered*. Schedler applied to teach at UCA, a small university nestled in the town of Conway, and became the head of the Department of Philosophy (1976-1985). "I think participatory democracy can best be realized in small communities, where people still have control over their destiny," he said in an *Arkansas Gazette* interview.

Origins and Growth of the UCA Honors College

Schedler took to his students and new post immediately. In 1978 he said, "I particularly enjoy the eagerness of Arkansas students to learn and their eagerness to do hard work I find them every bit as capable as any students I have had. They have not yet succumbed to the all-pervading indifference and weariness many students in other sections of the country exhibit to the so-called big questions."

On a hot August day in 1981 then President Jefferson Davis Farris, Jr. came to rest next to Norbert Schedler on a concrete bench

under a large oak tree outside UCA's Administrative Building. Schedler asked Farris if the university could offer remedial courses to students who needed them, could it not also offer a comprehensive program for what he called the "severely gifted"? What if it could start an Honors College offering talented students an intensive approach to learning within the broader university? What if it could democratize a first-rate education in a state not otherwise recognized for educational excellence? "The context for the conversation was our desire to do more for our good students academically and to help recruit and keep good students," wrote Schedler, "especially if UCA was to make its mark as the quality undergraduate program in the state." Farris said little that day, letting his friend talk through the idea, but three days later he got a note: "That is one of the best ideas I've heard of in a long time. I want one of those by next fall. What do you need?"

Norbert Schedler had actually begun thinking about founding an Honors College on the campus almost a year earlier. The idea for such an institution first emerged in a conversation between Schedler and Michael Kelley, another faculty member. Schedler and Kelley argued, first to fellow professor Phillip Anderson and then to administration officials, that the establishment of an Honors College might help UCA recruit and retain talented undergraduates, and improve the stature of the university as a whole. New UCA President Jefferson Farris, Vice President Marvin DeBoer, and Dean Robert M. McChesney all agreed that the idea had merit, and recommended that a full study be undertaken to consider Schedler's proposal.

Schedler accepted the university's invitation to create the UCA Honors College and was named its first Director. Schedler initiated an Honors pilot program in the fall of 1982 with an initial appropriation of six hundred dollars. Other early contributors of time and talent included UCA faculty members James Brodman, Eugene Corcoran, Robert Lowrey, and Helen Phillips. The first recruiting class of 1982 included sixty freshmen, together comprising an average ACT score of 26.8. A special Honors Center for honors class instruction was outfitted in the summer of 1983. The Honors program derived its pedagogical underpinnings from the traditional small liberal arts college. The Honors College jealously guarded its small class sizes, intimate teacher/student relationships, a dedicated faculty with tenure in Honors, and intense studies of a variety of interdisciplinary subjects.

UCA inaugurated a full Honors College in the 1984-1985 academic year by awarding a minor degree in Honors Interdisciplinary Studies. Twelve students graduated with Honors in the first Class of 1986. The minor degree is satisfied by the completion of a two-tiered system of courses. The first tier makes up the "Honors Program." These four courses are considered the "Honors Core" (Honors Core I, II, III & IV) and credit from these classes is applied to the students' general education requirements. During the second semester of their sophomore year, students wishing to continue to the Honors College must successfully complete a sophomore lecture on a topic of their



McAlister Hall, current home of the Honors College.

choice. The student must also meet certain GPA requirements to continue into the formal "Honors College," the second tier of course work. The fifteen credits in the second tier of the program satisfy the requirements of the interdisciplinary studies minor. In satisfying the minor requirements, students develop their own curriculum by selecting from a variety of course offerings or by taking advantage of independent study opportunities. Successful completion of the minor requires a senior thesis or a supplemental senior project such as a performance, exhibit, or other creative work.

Schedler's thoughts about the special developmental curriculum offered in the Honors College are outlined in two documents, *The Lively Experiment* ^[1] and *The Challenge* ^[2]. These remain the foundational documents of the UCA Honors College.

Each year the Honors College sponsors co-curricular events, including lectures and performance events for its students, the entire UCA campus, and the Central Arkansas community. These include "High Tables," a series of lectures given by visiting academics; "Soapboxes" ^[3], a series of discussion groups led by Honors students or faculty; and a "Contemporary Foreign Film Series." Nationally prominent figures are invited to speak and spend time interacting with students and faculty members during "Challenge Week" events. George McGovern, Ralph Nader, Ann Coulter, Michael Moore, Manning Marable, Neil Gaiman, Chuck Klosterman, and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have all lectured in past Challenge Weeks.

The Honors College added a residential component to its programs for the first time in 1993-1994 using Wingo Hall. The next academic year Wingo Hall was re-designated as a co-ed Honors dormitory. Before the fall of 1996, Short Hall was converted to private rooms for upper-division Honors men, and Denney Hall was converted to private rooms for upper-division women. By 1998 the third floor of Baridon Hall was added to upper-division Honors scholars. In 1999-2000 all of Baridon Hall became part of Honors College residential space. In 2003 Wingo Hall was taken off-line as a residential hall, in preparation for conversion to administrative space, and apartment living at Chapelridge and the June Beene Garden Apartments was added to the mix for upper-division Honors students. In the fall semester of 2005 Farris Junior Honors Hall - named after the former UCA president - opened, housing students in the Honors College. Schedler retired that same year. The average student ACT score in the year of his retirement topped 30.

Honors Enrollment

Year	Freshmen	Sophomores	College
1982	45	0	0
1983	51	30	0
1984	55	32	15
1985	57	36	36
1986	72	31	36
1987	47	34	38
1988	53	40	41
1989	60	38	42
1990	63	43	44
1991	72	61	43
1992	75	55	57
1993	69	51	58
1994	64	51	58
1995	65	57	73

1996	110	52	71
1997	120	75	66
1998	123	80	125
1999	140	115	150
2000	120	118	175
2001	130	116	180
2002	137	125	188
2003	144	117	220
2004	142	127	235
2005	140	126	233
2006	152	130	242
2007	125	160	201

Teaching Philosophy and Courses Taught

Schedler's lectures often focused on matters of environmental ethics, philosophy of religion, and the philosophy of honors education. Yet he took an interdisciplinary approach to learning and integrative approach to scholarship in core Honors classes like 'The Search for Self' and 'The Search for Community.' "As I poke around into other people's ideas and my own," he said, "I am suddenly confronted with a whole set of ideas - a whole view of the world. That is what has fascinated me all my life. And that is why as long as I find another person to talk with I will continue to try to expose what conceptual scheme lies behind our thinking and doing."

He worried about the effects of mass media on both university learning and the public square. "Power now goes not to the funded wisdom of the race or to those of quick mind, but to the image and the image makers," he wrote in a 1990 essay. "What compels us is not the past or ideas but what gets noticed, that is, the image, because it has become the style. ... Everything is *viewed*, (not heard or reasoned) as if it is a spectacle and the viewer is like an art critic." He worried when students came up after a lecture and commented not on the ideas but on his bright white New Balance tennis shoes or a snappy bow tie: "Usually, they watch me as if I were a TV show and then say that my talk was 'good' or 'neat.'"

Schedler remained a believer, not a doubter, throughout his life but recognized that questions about matters of faith often arise: "I've always been a pastor, not an iconoclast or idol smasher. The goal in my interactions with students is to create live options for living in the world and not feeling schizophrenic. I'm trying to do that for myself too." In his class, 'Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Religion but Were Afraid to Ask,' he said outlandish things not to upset students, but rather to arouse their curiosity and challenge their superstitions.

Other courses taught:

- 'The Axis of Evil'
- 'Mirror of Modern Society: American Musical Theater'
- 'Senior Seminar'
- 'Trampled Under Foot: A Look at Contemporary Oppression'

Scholarship

- "Paul Tillich's Theory of Symbol," M.Div. thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1958.
- Articles on "Tillich" and "Luther" for *Seminarian*, 1956 and 1958.
- "A Philosophical Analysis of the Method of Austin Farrer and Ian Ramsey," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1967.
- *Talk About Talk About God: A Historical Introduction*, Concordia Senior College, 1968.
- *Philosophy of Religion: Contemporary Perspectives*, New York: Macmillan, 1974.
- "Our Destruction of Tomorrow: A Philosophical Reflection on the Ecological Crisis," in *Ethical Issues*, ed. by William R. Durland and William H. Bruening, 247-269 (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1975).
- "Don't Treat Me Like Dirt! (In Defense of a Land Ethic)," *Nebraska Humanist*, Spring 1982.
- "Ethics," in *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1989.
- "Thought's Body: A New Habitat for 'Religious Humanism,'" *Forum for Honors* vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1990), 17-28.

Professional Distinctions

- Lilly Foundation Junior and Senior Fellow (Princeton University)
- John F. Kennedy Outstanding Educator of the Year (1972-1973)
- Distinguished Teacher Award (Purdue University Fort Wayne, 1975)
- Danforth Associate (1979-1985)
- Board of Directors, The Marshall T. Steel Center for the Study of Religion and Philosophy, Hendrix College
- Board of Directors, Arkansas Endowment for the Humanities ^[4] (1980-1985)
- Humanities Consultant, University of Arkansas Medical Center (Little Rock, AR)
- Review Board, *Environmental Ethics*
- Editorial Consultant, *World Book Encyclopedia*
- Testimony, U.S. Senate, on the Humanities and Educational Reform (1985)
- Special Commendation, UCA Board of Trustees, for initiative leading to foundation of The Honors College (1986)
- National Consultant, National Collegiate Honors Council (1987-1992)
- Faculty Development Seminar Leader (Arkansas College, Batesville, 1988)

Professional Society Memberships

Schedler is a past or present member of the American Academy of Religion, the American Philosophical Association, the Arkansas Philosophical Society, the Center for Process Studies ^[5], the National Collegiate Honors Council, and the Society for Religion and Ecology. Schedler is a founding member of the Arkansas Honors Association (also known as "AHA!").

Norbisms

- "Be prepared to be insulted!" (attrib. to John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria)
- "Humans are creators who make images of themselves and then feel compelled to resemble the images they themselves made."
- "I become who I am when I say 'Thou!'" (attrib. to Jewish philosopher Martin Buber)
- "'I' does not arise at the origin of speech but in the speech act itself. There is no 'I' before language or action. The 'I' arises concurrently in the speech or action as a creation of these activities. I create my 'self' out of no-thing." (attrib. to Jean-Paul Sartre)
- "I'm not a dirty old man; I promise, but I do love nudes."
- "Marx, you must've been to the Mall of America on a Friday night!"

- "Schedler's Law: 'You can't think one thought.'"
- "'Stuff' is a vulgar word, a placeholder when we don't know what to say."
- "Urges, surges, and gurgles."
- "We are therefore I am." (attrib. to the South African concept of Ubuntu)
- "What is competition from the point of view of the working man? It is putting my work up to an auction." (attrib. to American Christian Socialist writer William Dwight Porter Bliss)
- "A word is like a fresh seed sewn on the ground of our discussion." (attrib. to Ludwig Wittgenstein)
- "Words are like barbed hooks. Once they are in - spoken - they are hard to pull out. They shape a world."
- After being told having sex with just one's wife is like eating rice every day: 'But there are thousands of ways to eat rice.'"
- "The students keep saying 'More Norb! We want more Norb!'"
- "You don't order grits. They just come."

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External links

- Facebook page for Norbert Schedler ^[6]
- History of Honors College Faculty ^[7]
- UCA Honors College Homepage ^[8]
- Talk to the Virtual Norb chatterbot ^[9]

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