

# John F. Ollom

Dr. John F. Ollom (1923-2013) was the Robert Fisher Oxnam Professor of Science and Society from 1956-1988.

According to the Drew *Gateway*:

Ollom's career in physics began when, as part of his WWII military service, he was a research assistant on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, New Mexico. He went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University under the tutelage of Nobel Laureate John Van Vleck and served as an electromagnetic theory consultant to Bell Laboratories.

Ollom arrived at Drew in 1956 as its first physics professor. He was the sole member of the department until 1968, at which time he hired his former pupil Robert Fenstermacher '65. The two worked side by side for the next twenty years and developed a life-long friendship. Recalling the first time his mentor – who always addressed students by their title and last name – called him “Bob”, Fenstermacher says, “It seemed to me a very special rite of passage.”

Ollom's friends recall his keen interest in religion and the Civil War. He enjoyed weekly exchanges with colleagues Tom Oden, Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics, Emeritus, and Jim O’Kane Professor of Sociology, Emeritus about current events. This self-described *tertulia* (social gathering of like-minded individuals) went on field trips ranging from Gettysburg to Brooklyn.

A soft-spoken West Virginian gentleman, Ollom was sought out by students, former students and colleagues for his sound advice. According to Tom Oden, “Amidst all the usual conflicts of university life, and especially those during the 60s and 70s, John was the one man who was trusted by everyone.” At Ollom's retirement celebration in 1988, Bob Ackerman, former dean of the College of Liberal Arts, observed that Ollom “represented much of the best of [this] marvelous place: excellence, collegiality, a renaissance curiosity about all of life, warmth of friendship.”

The [John F. Ollom Prize in Physics](#) at Drew was established by friends, family, and colleagues in 1989 to recognize Dr. Ollom's retirement from the physics department