Donald L. Fredericksen, a teacher, adviser, mentor and friend to generations of Cornell students, died in Ithaca May 15, 2015 from brain cancer. He was 69.

Professor Fredericksen began his teaching career at Cornell in 1971 and was a professor of film, a faculty affiliate in the programs in religious studies and visual studies, and a longtime adviser and seminar teacher for the College Scholar Program. Professor Fredericksen also practiced as a Jungian psychotherapist in Ithaca.

His friend and colleague Marilyn Rivchin, retired Senior Lecturer of film production in the Department of Performing and Media Arts, said, “Don and I shared many hundreds of film students at Cornell for over 30 years, he in theory and history, I in practice. Don always understood our work as complementary and proved to be consistently supportive, respectful and pleasantly witty. His integrity in his teaching and advising of students was a model of opening minds to the many worlds of film and ideas.”

Professor Fredericksen’s colleague of 30 years, Bruce Levitt, professor of theater, added: “He was a generous and insightful mentor who always believed in the Buddhist notion that ‘if you light a lamp for somebody, it will also brighten your path.’”

That spirit enveloped his students during his intimate seminars. His eloquence with dreams and memory raised students beyond the cold, worldly business they would focus on otherwise, and many of his former students consider those moments of connection incredibly educational, for reasons no GPA could quantify. Many students came to visit Fredericksen when they heard he was gravely ill.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in English at Colgate University, a master’s degree in communication studies at the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, a doctorate in film studies from the University of Iowa and a master’s in counseling psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. He also studied for four years at the Namgyal Monastery Institute for Buddhist Studies in Ithaca, and later served on its executive board for several years. His honors included the College of Arts and Sciences’ Paul Award for excellence in advising.
“The rigor Don brought to his field proved to his students that film could be studied as seriously and reasonably as anything else, and his teachings will influence them as long they think about art,” College Scholar Zachary Zahos ’15 said.

“Don believed firmly that art could have a healing aspect for the human psyche as well as help resolve many of the conflicts of humankind,” Levitt added. “He was a spiritual man, indebted to Buddhism, as well as his wonderful wife Hyoin, for the strength and serenity in his life.”

Richard Archer, professor of theater and technical director for the department of PMA said, “To paraphrase from Buddhism: Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Wisdom never decreases by being shared. Don’s ‘candle,’ burns brighter than ever in the fire he lit in his students and advisees.”

Professor Fredericksen’s final work of scholarship is a chapter in the forthcoming book “Eavesdropping: The Psychoanalyst in Television and Cinema,” to be published this year by Routledge.

He is survived by his widow, Hyoin Park, and daughter, Lina Sanguin.

Bruce A Levitt, chair; Richard Archer, Marilyn Rivchin, Zachary Zahos