MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITA JOSEPHINE HELEN STAAB (1911-1999)

Josephine “Jo” Helen Staab, Professor Emeritus, died on July 19, 1999 at Attic Angels Health Care Center, following a lengthy illness. Jo, a dynamic teacher with a professional career that spanned more than four decades, was born in Wall Lake, Iowa near the Missouri River on April 12, 1911, one of seven children of Victor and Mary Staab.

After graduation from Wall Lake High School, Jo Staab attended the University of Iowa, where she studied under Frances Zuill, former Associate Dean of School of Home Economics, graduating in 1932 with a Bachelor of Arts in Home Economics Education. After teaching several years at the White Fish Bay High School in Wisconsin, she went to New York to explore merchandising as a career. But academia prevailed and she went on to Columbia University-Teachers College, earning her Master of Arts degree. Subsequently, she accepted the position of Assistant Supervisor of Home Economics for the state of Vermont. From 1947 to 1954, she taught and conducted research at the University of Tennessee in Family Economics, focusing particularly on farm family expenditures, farm housing, and family food consumption. At the same time, in the early 1950’s, Jo Staab attended the University of Chicago, where she received her doctoral degree in Family Economics in 1953. She resumed her teaching career at the University of Texas, Austin. During her tenure at Texas, she traveled to India where she served as a consultant to women’s Colleges and Universities, and was stationed at Thackersey Women’s University in Bombay. She found these two years to be among the most rewarding of her career. “It’s very hard for underdeveloped countries, like India, to try to go from the ox age to the jet age in a lifetime,” she explained. “This makes the solutions to the family problems even harder to solve.”

In 1961, Dr. Staab joined the University of Wisconsin School of Home Economics as Associate Dean, a position she held until 1965 and Professor in the Department of Home Management and Family Economics. She continued teaching in Consumer Science and Family Economics until her retirement in 1976. Throughout her long career, teaching remained very important to Dr. Staab, who found intellectual stimulation in her students. Summing up her teaching philosophy on retirement, she remarked: “Students provide an insight into the kinds of problems people are facing in the world. They are the potential forces to change life. Educators can learn as much from students as we can give them. Students give direction to where educators ought to focus their work.”

Upon retiring from the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Staab turned to political concerns. She applied her considerable energies to organizations such as the Wisconsin Women’s Network, the Women’s Political Caucus and the League of Women Voters, directing her attention to the fight for marital property reform in the state. In 1998, she published Marriage As An Economic Partnership: How One State Made It Happen, a monograph that delineates the historical and political developments leading to Wisconsin’s innovative marital property reform law. Jo Staab will be sorely missed.

Dr. Staab was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Mortar Board, and Altusa. She is survived by a brother and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, and three sisters. She is interred in Wall Lake, Iowa.

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