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

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS HARRY J. KARAVOLAS

Harry J. Karavolas, professor emeritus of biomolecular chemistry, died on October 18, 1999 at the age of 63. During his distinguished 28-year career at the University of Wisconsin Medical School, his contributions as professor and department chair to the research, teaching and service missions of his department, the Medical School and the University of Wisconsin were highly meritorious and greatly enhanced the institution's reputation as a place of higher learning.

Professor Karavolas was born in Peabody, Massachusetts, February 21, 1936. He earned his B.S. and M.S. degrees from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and received his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1963 from St. Louis University, working with Professors E.A. Doisy, Sr. (a Nobel Laureate for his work on vitamin K and estrogens) and W.H. Elliott. He then did postdoctoral work with Professor L.L. Engel at Harvard Medical School and later was a research associate and instructor in biological chemistry there. Dr. Karavolas joined the faculty of physiological chemistry in 1968 as an assistant professor of physiological chemistry and endocrinology. He became associate professor of physiological chemistry in 1972 and full professor in 1975. In 1975 he succeeded Phillip Cohen as chairman of the Department of Physiological Chemistry, which later became the Department of Biomolecular Chemistry. He served in that capacity until his retirement in 1996, providing the vision, direction and leadership to consistently rank the department at the forefront of all national medical school biochemistry departments. Among Dr. Karavolas' significant accomplishments as chair of the Department of Biomolecular (Physiological) Chemistry was to provide an atmosphere which supported the development of the department's female faculty members. At the time of Dr. Karavolas' retirement, one third of the department faculty was female. As one of the first female faculty members to join the department stated "Harry was always very supportive of the careers of women in science. He promoted equality at a time when that was uncommon."

Professor Karavolas taught in the department's first-year medical student comprehensive human biochemistry course for over 16 years in addition to numerous other teaching commitments both within the department and elsewhere. In recognition of his teaching efforts, the University of Wisconsin honored Professor Karavolas in 1977 with the UW Amoco Distinguished Teaching Award. The award citation described him as “a teacher of quality as well as a stimulating personal friend who creates warm, comfortable, and unselfish access to himself. His fairness, patience, sense of humor, availability to students, and enthusiasm command respect and trust and combine to make him a teacher of quality and a model to be emulated.” Of his many teaching awards, Professor Karavolas most treasured the awards received from students including, inter alia, the Academic Teaching Award given by the Medical School classes of 1985 and 1986. Professor Karavolas trained and mentored many graduate students and postdoctoral fellows during his tenure at this university. He participated in three Ph.D. degree programs on campus, including involvement in the Endocrinology-Reproductive Physiology Program for 28 years, serving as an associate director for 12 years. During the 13 years prior to retirement, he co-directed an NIH training grant titled “Training in Biochemistry of Reproduction.” He leaves behind many students who are better for having known him.

Upon becoming department chairman, Harry's personal dedication to teaching was transmitted to the faculty of his department. Junior faculty were encouraged to spend the time necessary for good teaching. Professor Karavolas regularly visited classes taught by junior faculty, providing encouragement and helpful and insightful suggestions. In departmental planning meetings he always stressed the importance of the unique teaching mission of the Department of Biomolecular Chemistry. His philosophy of the importance of teaching became a departmental philosophy.

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Professor Karavolas' work as a steroid biochemist and neuroendocrinologist brought him international recognition for his pioneering work on neurosteroids and neuroactive metabolites of progesterone. In 1972, he received a Research Career Development Award from the National Institutes of Health. From 1972-1982, Professor Karavolas also held the position of neuroendocrinology section head at the Waisman Center on Mental Retardation and Human Development. He produced an impressive and diverse body of publications, gave lectures and talks at a plethora of national and international conferences, chaired and co-chaired numerous scientific conferences, and sat on editorial boards and study sections. He also served as a visiting professor at both London University (Ludwig Cancer Institute) and at Harvard Medical School.

Another of Dr. Karavolas' significant accomplishments was the leadership and momentum he provided to the Medical School Basic Science Chairs’ Caucus from its inception in 1988. Under his leadership, this group was able to open the lines of communication between the basic science and clinical departments. They held many helpful and insightful discussions with members of the Medical School and University of Wisconsin administration, on topics ranging from funding and space to graduate admission procedures. Professor Karavolas was instrumental in helping the caucus garner endowment funds for Medical School basic science graduate student fellowships. His fellow caucus members honored him with a letter of appreciation in 1992, thanking him for his “outstanding leadership of the caucus since its inception” and noting their sincere appreciation of his “collegiality, impartiality and hard work.” Professor Karavolas’ connection to the other basic science chairs and departments, encyclopedic knowledge of the Medical School and uncommon good sense made him the trusted advisor of a succession of Medical School deans.

Dr. Karavolas was an avid reader and enjoyed traveling, going out to dinner, and golfing with his wife, Barbara and son, Christian. He enjoyed encouraging young people, at one time organizing a Boy Scout Troop and serving as its first scoutmaster. He was a long-time member of the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in Madison. He introduced many office staff members to his wife Barbara's wonderful baklava. He was known for his memory, often amazing people by recalling word for word a conversation from many years previous. Harry was truly devoted to his family and is survived by Barbara and Christian, Christian's wife, Lisa, and his brother, James.

Harry Karavolas had a philosophy regarding life that lives on in the Department of Biomolecular Chemistry. He believed that one generation, be it parents, teachers or faculty mentors, owes it to the next generation to provide it the tools and dreams needed to succeed and contribute to the world in a meaningful way. This philosophy was the foundation of his dedication to teaching of undergraduate, graduate and medical students, as well as the mentoring of junior faculty. His actions have created a lasting tradition of transfer of wisdom and responsibility from old to young; his legacy lives on in the Department of Biomolecular Chemistry, the UW Medical School and the University of Wisconsin.

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