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

ON THE DEATH OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR MARILYN ORNER

“So we, too, gather to give your soul a canopy of memory.”
- Rabbi Larry Pinsker

Marilyn Orner, assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education, died on November 24, 2000, nine days before her 41st birthday.

Mimi Orner had begun her tenure-track position in the Educational Communications Technology Program only months before her death from ovarian cancer. Her teaching focused on innovative approaches to integrating media into curricula and on using media to facilitate teaching about and across social and cultural differences. In her first semester as assistant professor, she had already established strong mentoring relationships with students and productive collaborative relationships with colleagues. Previously, Mimi had served the University of Wisconsin-Madison in academic staff positions for over ten years. Her training, her professional career, and her heart belonged to education on the Madison campus. Born December 3, 1959, she graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1982 with a B.A. in communication arts (radio, television, and film). In 1992, she received a Ph.D. in educational communications and technology from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction on the Madison campus. Her dissertation, written under the direction of Professor Elizabeth Ellsworth and entitled “Teaching Otherwise: Feminism, Pedagogy and the Politics of Difference,” was awarded the National Outstanding Dissertation Award, Division B (Curriculum Studies) from the American Educational Research Association. Already as a graduate student Mimi served as a lecturer in the Women’s Studies Program and the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies. The combination of feminism and pedagogy remained a hallmark of her career.

Continuing to lecture in these three units, Mimi began a position as undergraduate academic advisor for the Women’s Studies Program in 1992. An outstanding teacher, she was awarded the Hilldale Outstanding Academic Staff Teaching Award in 1999. In March, 2000, she was awarded the L&S Academic Advising Award. A member of the Teaching Academy, Mimi published and delivered scholarly lectures in the fields of curriculum and pedagogy. Her research areas included media and information technology, feminist pedagogy, and issues of social and cultural difference in education. As a central figure in the Curriculum Committee of the Women’s Studies Program, her untiring work and creative energies were responsible for dynamic curricular changes. She developed and taught an internship course for Women’s Studies majors and worked on the incipient program for a master’s in Gender and Women’s Studies. A sentence from her personal statement to the Teaching Academy well characterizes her professional life: “I am committed to high quality teaching, to innovative pedagogies and pedagogical research, and to student-centered academic advising.” Mimi lived this sentence, to immeasurable benefit for the university community.

Mimi was an accomplished and recognized video maker. Together with her co-producer Joyce Follet, she won the National Women’s Caucus Emma Award for Best Documentary of 1999 for the video Step By Step: Building a Feminist Movement 1941-1977. With Clark Thompson, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and Rick Voithofer, she co-produced Degrees of Difference: Culture Matters on Campus, later purchased by PBS Adult Learning for the series “Racial Legacies and Learning.” Her work beyond the university included the co-founding and co-facilitating of Madison’s Anti-Anorexia/Bulimia/Dieting Project. These projects embodied Mimi’s courageous commitments to using educational media and innovative pedagogies to teach against culturally biased assumptions and ways of knowing that limit people’s lives, spirits, opportunities, and passions for learning.

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Mimi cared very deeply about people and ideas. She also was deeply committed to her family, a source of greatest joy. Her husband Clark Thompson is an administrative program manager for the Instructional Media Development Center on the UW-Madison campus. Their daughter Sophie Orner-Thompson is a vibrant five-year-old. Mimi is intensely missed by her family and friends, colleagues, and generations of students who benefitted immeasurably from her talented teaching and her wise advising and mentoring.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
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