Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emerita Susan A. Nitzke

Professor Emerita Susan A. Nitzke died at the age of 71 on August 20, 2018. She was born in 1946 in Byron, Wisconsin. After growing up in a small farming community, she obtained her bachelor’s degree from UW-Madison School of Home Economics in 1968 with a major in Foods. Following a five-year period of working in the food and nutrition industry, she returned to Madison for her graduate studies and obtained her PhD from the Department of Nutritional Sciences in 1986 with a minor in Continuing and Vocational Education. Susan then joined the faculty of the Department of Nutritional Sciences and UW-Extension.

Susan’s career was the embodiment of the Wisconsin Idea. She was dedicated to developing and evaluating techniques to improve the effectiveness of community interventions and nutrition education programs by identifying pertinent audiences and adapting promising theories and methods from related disciplines. This work was done in collaboration with students and colleagues from UW-Madison, UW-Extension, state agencies, professional organizations, and other groups. While focused on the University’s extension mission, she also made important contributions to our research and teaching missions. She was a leader on campus and in our department throughout her career culminating in her service as department chair from 2008-2011.

Susan was consistently in the forefront of statewide extension activities involving nutrition. Her work had an impact on every county of the state. She and her staff worked on numerous programs over the years, some statewide and some focusing on groups with special needs. She was a highly regarded and respected source of nutrition information and shared that expertise on Wisconsin Public Radio, national radio outlets and many publications. To quote UW-Madison Professor and Wisconsin Public Radio host Larry Meiller, “Sue was a great friend to me and to those who listened during her many, many visits on my Wisconsin Public Radio program. She dispelled myths, answered thousands of questions from listeners and did so with a smile and with wit.” In 1995, she received the Pound Extension Award from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in early recognition of this career-long activity.

Susan made many significant contributions to research throughout her career. Much of her research was collaborative with various institutions statewide and nationwide. She led very large multi-state collaborations including a $2 million multi-year USDA grant to prepare personally tailored nutrition education for financially disadvantaged young adults. Other grants focused on helping career placement for dietetics students and healthy eating for young adults. She served as panel manager for USDA/CREES National Research Initiative grants and won several Best Research Abstract awards from the Society for Nutrition Education. She was an author of over 50 journal publications and first author of the book “Rethinking Nutrition: Connecting Science and Practice in Early Childhood Settings” that was published for a national audience. Susan was on the Board of Editors/Reviewers for the Journal of Nutritional Education and Behavior and the American Journal for Health Promotion. Additionally, she prepared numerous press releases, newsletter articles, and nutrition fact sheets for used by the media and general public.

Despite having no official teaching responsibilities, Susan made important contributions to the teaching mission of the department. She was the lead instructor for Nutritional Sciences 540 “Community Nutrition and Nutrition Policy” and co-instructor for NS 600 “Introductory Seminar in Nutrition”, and NS 931 “Seminar in Nutrition”. She was also the major professor for 14 MS and
PhD students. As one student, Mei-Wei Chang, commented, “She was a wonderful mentor to me and was always there when I needed her. She taught me how to work effectively with a community and be a good researcher.”

Finally, Susan was a leader throughout her career. At the time of her retirement, she was chair of a department with 13 faculty and undergraduate programs with over 250 students and numerous graduate students. She also served as a leader in her Extension and outreach activities and consulted with state and federal agencies to improve nutrition education. Professor Susan Nitzke left an enduring mark on the key missions of our department and of the University of Wisconsin. Her career directly benefited the education of UW-Madison students and the health and well-being of the people of Wisconsin and across the nation.

Memorial Committee:
David Eide, chair
Jane Voichick