

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
JANICE C. MAY**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Janice C. May, Professor Emerita, Department of Government, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

**IN MEMORIAM
JANICE C. MAY**

Janice C. May was the foremost expert on the Texas Constitution. Scholars and public officials alike sought her authoritative interpretations of the 93,000 word Texas Constitution, its hundreds of amendments, and the many relevant court decisions. Professor May stood out among her contemporaries in her dedication to and mastery of the details of what is a notoriously vague, often ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory document. For decades, legislators, lobbyists, and other scholars of Texas politics went to Professor May for explanations of how the jurisprudence of particular passages in the Texas Constitution had developed over time.

Janice Evelyn Christiansen May passed away on July 10, 2016, at the age of ninety-three. Her husband, Francis Barnes May, predeceased her on January 12, 2007. They had no children; she had three nephews and one niece.

Janice was born on May 29, 1923, in Walnut Grove, Minnesota. Her parents, Arnold Christensen and Bernice Schauer Christensen, instilled in her a love of music, education, and scholarship. Professor May majored in music at the University of Minnesota, graduating summa cum laude in 1944 and was inducted to Phi Beta Kappa. She subsequently earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. in 1952 in political science, both also from the University of Minnesota. Professor May joined The University of Texas faculty in 1965 as an instructor, after previously serving as an instructor at the University of Minnesota, The University of Texas at Austin (1948-53), and University of Oklahoma.

Dr. May became an Assistant Professor in the Department of Government in 1972. She was promoted to Associate Professor in 1974, and became full Professor in 1997. She retired from the University in June 2002 as Professor Emerita. Upon retirement, Janice took on the full-time task of caring for her ailing husband. Following his death, she moved to Arizona to care for her elderly mother.

Professor May was the pre-law student advisor in the Department of Government, a charter member of the Southwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors, and the department's Internship Coordinator. It was in her roles as Internship Coordinator and as the teacher of simulation classes on the Texas Legislature and a Texas constitutional convention that she was best known and loved by hundreds of students. She located internships in which to place her students, repeatedly called the agencies or organizations during the semester to get progress reports on their UT Austin interns, met frequently with the student-interns, and read and graded their three assigned papers.

Dr. May continues to be warmly remembered by a generation of professionals still working in and around the Texas Capitol. Legislators, lobbyists, and others recall her simulation classes and the internship program as their high points as Government majors. Many of her former students report that these classes inspired them to work in Texas State politics.

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She also taught a graduate class on “State Constitutionalism,” and she supervised nine Ph.D. dissertations and dozens of Honors and M.A. theses. In 1983, her classroom performance was recognized with the President’s Associates Award for Excellence in Teaching. Dr. May was trained in an era when political science consisted of research that was highly factual and descriptive in nature, consistent with the discipline’s origins as an offshoot of history and its purpose, rooted in the Progressive-Era, to better educate voters and public officials to improve the United States as a self-governing society. She was the author of the 512-page *The Texas State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (1996), the co-author of two editions of a *Texas Government* textbook, the author or co-author of five other books, as well as fifty journal articles, book chapters, and reference articles on Texas state politics, state constitutions, and related topics. She spoke frequently at events and conferences in Austin, around Texas, and in other states, and she was often called in to advise state legislatures on the process of amending their constitutions.

Professor May’s scholarship addressed the full range of Texas’ political institutions and those of other American states: their legislatures, judiciaries, systems of voter representation, constitutional initiatives, civil rights practices, redistricting efforts, tax systems, and related topics. In particular, Janice played a vital role in the commission of the early 1970s appointed to propose revisions to the Texas Constitution. Although the attempt to revise the state constitution failed amid the turbulent legislative politics of the period, she was a central and active member of the commission, and she wrote extensively about it afterwards.

Dr. May was active with the League of Women Voters: she served as President and Board member of the local chapter and was on the Board of the national organization. She was a registered lobbyist to Texas officials explaining League-supported agenda items. She was also a lifelong active member of the American Association of University Women, for which she served as The University of Texas at Austin’s representative. And she was an election observer for ABC News.

Janice married Francis Barnes May, a Professor of Statistics at The University of Texas, in 1956. The two of them loved classical music and the opera, traveled together to France, the Soviet Union, and China, and spent holidays in their cabin in the northern Arizona woods. They also enjoyed hosting pot-luck dinners for friends and colleagues. They provided a loving home to one dog and a succession of cats. They were married for fifty years.

Janice May was a true pioneer. For a woman to receive a Ph.D. in political science was a rare accomplishment in 1952. As an expert in Texas politics and state politics, particularly state constitutions, Janice worked in areas not considered to be cutting-edge fields; non-theoretical scholarship did not receive much recognition in the discipline. But her research was of some importance in the mid-late twentieth century. In particular, Janice worked in areas that members of the Texas state legislature considered useful and appropriate for the state’s flagship institution to be studying. The promotion letters written by scholars of state politics on behalf of Janice revealed how much they relied upon and respected her painstaking research and scholarly expertise; she made their work and that of many others possible.

Only belatedly and because of outside pressure from the University and federal government did the Department of Government appoint her as an Assistant Professor and then grant her tenure. It was only with Janice’s long-overdue promotion to full Professor, under the leadership of the then-Chair James Fishkin, that the department made a concerted effort to advance her to the rank she merited.

Dr. May, like many other pioneers, paid a price for being first. Yet despite being ignored by many of her colleagues and seeing others with less distinguished records being promoted ahead of her, she displayed a remarkable graciousness and was never heard to complain or express bitterness—both of which would have been more than understandable.

Many of us share the fondest memories of her.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Bartholomew H. Sparrow (chair), Gary P. Freeman, and James Henson.