REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR VICTORINE C. ABBOUD

The Special Committee of the General Faculty to prepare a Memorial Resolution for Victorine C. Abboud, Lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies and Curriculum and Instruction, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary.
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM

Victorine C. Abboud

1918-1984

Victorine Abboud was one of those fortunate individuals with a combination of talents that almost seem designed to bring about a marked advancement in a new field. Trained in mathematics, the field of her early career, she turned to linguistics on coming to The University of Texas, combining her capabilities in both fields to make important contributions to the teaching of languages with the help of computers. Among the early scholars who concentrated on designing and developing computer-assisted instruction in foreign languages (1968-70), she was the first to use Tektronix graphics terminals, to demonstrate, processes of Arabic writing; to incorporate teaching of the oral language in computerized instruction; and, further, to develop computer-assisted instruction in Arabic for microcomputer use. These contributions brought her international recognition, accompanied by grants to support her innovative work and by appointments abroad as well as at the University.

Victorine Abboud was born in Cairo, Egypt, where she had her initial education. After Matriculation through the University of London, followed by a Teacher's Diploma in the Montessori Method for Children, and a Teacher's Diploma in Mathematics from the British Council, Jerusalem, she completed her B.A. at the American University, Cairo, with a major in Education, followed by an M.A. in Education at Cairo University. She began her career at The University of Texas at Austin in 1966 as Instructor of English for Scientific Purposes to Kuwait Petroleum Engineering students. Following this she held a teaching assistantship in Arabic until 1969. During this time she took an M.A. degree in Linguistics. On completing her Ph.D. degree in 1970, with a major in Education, she held to January 1972 the position of Research Associate in the development of computer-assisted instruction under grants from the National Science Foundation.
A Ford Foundation grant then took her to the American University in Cairo in 1972, where she directed a project entitled "Grammatical Analysis of English Language Textbooks by Computers." Then, after giving a seminar in instructional design and uses of computers in education at the University of Cairo, she returned to Austin to resume research on computer-assisted instruction as Research Associate V. In May 1973 she was appointed assistant professor in the Computer Science Department, a position she held until 1976. She then took a position as director of the Computer-Assisted Instruction Laboratory at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. She maintained this position when she became assistant professor in the Curriculum and Instruction Department in September 1977, appointments she held until her death.

Her programs, their theoretical bases, and their success with students are well presented in the article "Computers and Arabic," contributed by her to the Summer 1982 issue of DISCOVERY, and in various other publications including ARAMCO MAGAZINE, SAUDI REPORT, and the FORUM FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION. Aiming for "individualized instruction" to meet the problem of "learning the Arabic writing and sound systems," Abboud devised a program of "four cycles, each covering seven to eight" of the twenty-eight Arabic letters, with tests at the end of each cycle. An experimental study comparing the performance of students at U.T., who had used the computer program to learn Arabic writing, with that of students at two other leading universities, who had used more conventional methods, revealed not only that performance of the former was superior, but also that they had mastered the writing system in six to ten hours over against twenty-two to thirty-six hours required by the latter. Nine years after she developed the writing program, she introduced in 1980 a program to teach vocabulary and reading comprehension of elementary Arabic, designed as a two-semester course. Its success was so remarkable that the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded her a three-year grant of $243,957 in 1982 to develop a program for teaching intermediate Arabic and reading comprehension. Her untimely death came before she could finish the project; it was completed in January 1985, under the direction of her husband, Dr. Peter Abboud.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by her daughter, Ruth Abboud Cross, whose career in law gave her mother great satisfaction, and by a grandson, Adam Nicholas Cross.

Her work will be carried on by her students, introduced to computer-assisted instruction in the graduate course she taught from 1977 until her death. Further, many teachers have used her innovations, which they came to know through her tireless presentations at universities, government agencies, and commercial firms in this country and abroad. During 1081-83 approximately two hundred scholars visited her laboratory to learn about the programs she had developed. Her programs are now an integral part of the curriculum at The University of Texas at Austin, at Middlebury College in Vermont, and at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. Her contributions were also introduced to Arabic-speaking nations, which she advised on computer uses in instruction. Moreover, her innovations were applied outside the field through the courses she taught on uses of computers, and through the computer laboratory which she designed and directed.

Dr. Abboud's impact on teaching extends far beyond instruction in Arabic, to the rapidly expanding use of computers in education. She formulated theory, procedures, and expectations of the new teaching technique, stating the "five principal mechanisms ... of the computer to increase learning." In her words, these are active participation, individualized attention, frequent interaction, rapid feedback, and non-critical environment (1982:22). Anyone who has taken a foreign language in an academic setting knows the problems of
mastering a language while competing with twenty or more students for the attention of the instructor. The problem is especially acute when students set out to learn a foreign language quite different in structure from their native language, and employing a totally different writing system.

Dr. Abboud's capable analysis of the possibilities of the computer in the teaching of foreign languages, accompanied by her successful demonstration of its advantages for mastering a difficult writing system as well as a language of totally different structure from that of the students, is a great contribution to an increasingly important aim of education as contacts among nations become closer and the demands on students increase. Students differ in their capabilities to master a foreign language, so that many are open to discouragement even in small classes. Capable use of computers provides individualized instruction with excellent results, as Dr. Abboud recognized in her low-key statement that even "the shy or slow student tends to relax in this private, noncritical environment and the learning process is enhanced" (1982:23).

In the long history of education few have had the possibility of providing a major impact with the help of a new capability and the talents to make use of that capability. Dr. Abboud was brilliantly successful in her application of computers to the teaching of Arabic, achieving in this way permanent recognition for a major contribution to students, teachers, and her field.

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Winfred P. Lehmann (Chairman), George H. Culp, Paul W. English, and Mohammad Ali Jazayery.