DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
RUTH J. RITTENOUR DENNEY

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Ruth J. Rittenour Denney, professor emeritus, theatre and dance, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
RUTH J. RITTENOUR DENNEY

Ruth R. Denney, professor of drama at The University of Texas at Austin from 1976 until 1988 and holder of the Frank C. Erwin Centennial Professorship in Drama from 1984 until 1988, was born in 1914 in Kingston, Ohio. She received a B.A. degree at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1938 and her M.A. degree from the University of Houston in 1955.

After teaching for several years in Ohio, she moved to Houston in 1952, where she taught at Lamar High School. While she was there, her students won six state championships in the University Interscholastic League’s one-act play contest. After more than a dozen years in the classroom, Denney took an administrative job with the Houston Independent School District, and then in 1971, she founded and became the first principal of Houston’s High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA), only the third fine arts magnet school in the nation. She was principal of this school until 1976 when she was appointed professor at The University of Texas at Austin. Her contributions to education in alternative schools of the arts were acknowledged when graduates of HSPVA achieved the highest ratio of National Merit Scholarships in Texas. In recognition of her leadership, the theatre at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts was named the Ruth Denney Theatre. The theatre at Houston’s Lamar High School has also been named in her honor.

At The University of Texas at Austin, Professor Denney taught creative dramatics, theatre for youth, and high school play production as well as supervised student teachers in the Austin schools until she retired in 1988. She directed a number of productions in conjunction with the department’s Summer High School Theatre Workshop. In 1985, the Ruth Denney Endowed Scholarship was established by the Department of Theatre and Dance in her honor.

Denney’s contribution to the arts has been extensively recognized by organizations in Texas, including Houston’s Theatre Under the Stars and the Texas Educational Theatre Association. She was one of the best-known and most widely esteemed persons in her field as is indicated by the following honors she received: the Fredell Lock Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts in Education in 1983; the Founders’ Award from the Texas Educational Theatre Association in 1984; the Sara Spencer Award, one of the highest honors of the Children’s Theatre Association in 1985; and the Outstanding Drama Educator of the Year by the University Interscholastic League during the 75th anniversary commemoration in 1987. That same year, she received the Houston Mayor’s Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts, and in 2000, The University of Texas presented her with the Doty Award. In 2002, she was inducted into The Austin Arts Hall of Fame.

In addition to her teaching and directing, Professor Denney received appointments and served in the following important roles: member, Directors of the Fine Arts Council at Texas A&M; member, Advisory Board for the Society of the Performing Arts in Houston; consultant, California Education Agency; consultant, Los Angeles School District, while the district was in the process of founding a High School for the Performing Arts; and consultant, Dallas Magnet Fine Arts High School. In addition, she shared her expertise in the following: member, UCLA workshop for the use of mixed media with disadvantaged youth; member, Committee for Accreditation of Secondary Schools for Performing Arts, a division of the National Association of Schools of Theatre; and consultant, San Antonio High School for the Arts. In Austin, Professor Denney served on the Board of Directors for the Paramount Theatre and as an advisor to the Zachary Scott Teen Theatre Program.
After her retirement, she played a key role in lobbying Austin school district officials to establish the Fine Arts Academy at McCallum High School.

Professor Denney achieved an enviable reputation both locally and nationally. Among her admirers were some of Houston’s most outstanding citizens, lawyers, doctors, and financiers. Noteworthy as well among her most ardent supporters were a number of nationally-recognized graduates of her high school program, including actors Tommy Tune, Tommy Sands, Carlin Glynn-Masterson, Paula Prentiss, Robert Foxworth, and Jacquelyn Smith.

She is survived by her four nieces, Diane Wolfe, Sidney Wolfe Taylor, Winnie Wolfe Gerhardt, and Jenny Wolfe Rollins. Her indomitable spirit lives on in countless individuals who were inspired and shaped by her unwavering belief in them—as well as her wit, good humor, and passion for life. Most, still lovingly, refer to her as Ms. Denney.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of UT System Executive Director of Creative Services Rod Caspers (chair), and Professors Coleman A. Jennings and Oscar G. Brockett.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Fine Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on April 29, 2009. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.