DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
SHAMA GAMKhar

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Shama Gamkhar, associate professor, public affairs, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Dean P. Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
SHAMA GAMKhar

Associate Professor Shama Gamkhar and her husband, Dr. Sid Shah, died in the crash of their small aircraft in Georgia on August 4, 2013. This tragedy deprived their families, friends, colleagues, students and society of many years of companionship, support, and contributions. For the LBJ School and The University of Texas at Austin, the loss of Shama Gamkhar is especially acute. She was a productive and still-developing scholar who taught admired courses on many subjects, an exemplary University citizen, a warm and supportive colleague, and a mentor to many students over many years.

Shama Gamkhar was born on August 26, 1958, the eldest of three, in Hissar, near New Delhi. Her father, Mohindra Kumar Gamkhar, an engineer and a senior executive in the Indian Railways, and her mother, Shakti, were of Kashmiri descent. They forever remained Shama’s strength and solace, and she was even more so for them.

Shama was educated at Loreto Convent in Lucknow, first as a day student and then as a boarder, after her father was transferred to Kolkata. She was a serious student. Her sister Ruchita recounts that although there was a strict lights-out curfew, after the bed check, Shama and her friends would sneak out to a lighted area, and so managed to find the extra study hours they needed. She played basketball, performed in drama and debate, and was a leader of “Lourdes House,” where she formed lifelong friendships. While in school, Shama also formed an enduring attachment to traditional Indian music and to painting, although she rarely had time to paint in later life.

Shama graduated from Miranda House at Delhi University in economics in 1978. While there, she discovered a love for nature, and trekking, gardening, and biking became lifelong hobbies. After graduation, she worked in advertising in Mumbai for several years, while completing a Diploma in Business Management and a Master’s in Economics at what was then the University of Bombay. Shama then returned to Delhi University, where she received an M.Phil in Economics in 1984 under the guidance of Professor KL Krishna. She later taught at Delhi University, where she also co-edited a book, The Indian Economy and its Performance since Independence, with two colleagues.

Shama then received a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Maryland. There she specialized in public finance, environmental economics, and industrial organization, working closely with Professor Wallace Oates, who became another lifelong friend. Shama joined the faculty of the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in 1996 as an assistant professor, and was promoted to associate professor with tenure in 2003. She was preparing for further promotion at the time of her death.

Shama's research focused at first on issues of public finance and fiscal federalism, especially federal grants and the financing of education. During her first eight years at the LBJ School, she published seven peer-reviewed articles, a piece on Intergovernmental Grants in the Handbook of Public Sector Economics, several op-eds and invited pieces, and a book, Federal Intergovernmental Grants and the States—Managing Devolution. Later she expanded her research portfolio in several ways, and became co-editor of the Journal Publius, a leading journal in the area of federalism. One of the responsibilities of that job was to co-author that journal's frequently-cited annual “State of American Federalism” essay, which she did from 2009 to 2012.
Shama's research interests gradually evolved toward environmental and development issues. With her doctoral student (and later colleague) Ian Partridge, she co-authored three significant articles: “The Health Impacts of Air Pollution in China,” “The Role of Offsets in a Post Kyoto Climate Agreement in the Power Sector in China,” and “A methodology for Estimating Health Benefits of Using Renewable Technologies.” They had planned several further projects on India and planned to turn their attention to Central America in the 2013-14 academic year. Shama also had recently co-authored other articles, including “Water Sharing between India and Pakistan: A Critical Evaluation of the Indus Water Treaty,” and “Urban Challenges in India: A Review of Recent Policy Measures.” At the time of her death she had approximately ten articles in draft form or in the editorial process, including one co-authored with Hamid Ali, another LBJ School Ph.D. presently serving as chair of the Department of Economics at the American University of Cairo.

Shama taught classes in public financial management and public finance, and expanded her portfolio in later years to include environmental economics and to co-direct several policy research projects. Her environmental classes evolved from an early focus on the U.S. to cover environmental questions in developing countries, especially India and China. One of Shama’s most significant contributions as a teacher was in mentoring the many foreign students who came to the LBJ School, and for whom she was always a pillar of moral support and practical advice. Shama was active in a number of professional organizations, as well as in the Department of Asian Studies. Her service record included an appointment to the National Academies Committee for the Study of the Long-term Viability of the Fuel Taxes for Transportation Finance, at the Transportation Research Board in Washington, DC.

In Austin she had many friends and was part of a group that walked around Lady Bird Lake on Saturday mornings with great regularity. She held dinners for students, friends and colleagues at her home. She remained close to her family and returned to visit New Delhi almost every year. There were a hundred twenty five heartfelt messages posted to her memorial page on the LBJ School website—most in the first week after her death. The dominant themes were her seriousness as a scholar, her supportiveness as a friend, teacher and mentor, her rigor as a teacher, and her warmth and modesty:

Her kindness, expertise, and passion for her job will be dearly missed.

What a peaceful, sincere, genuine, endearing lady you were. Thank you for caring thoroughly about your students and for cheering us on from the front row.

Professor Gamkhar was always accessible, wise, encouraging and intelligent. I took two classes with her, but she made me feel as though she had been mentoring me my entire academic career and was proud of my achievements. Who knew public accounting (financial management) could be so engrossing? Her tragic passing is a great loss to the LBJ family, but her life was a tremendous gift to us all.

She made no distinction between faculty and staff, and I liked her immensely. She was warm, friendly, intelligent and caring. Many students told me of her uncommon teaching ability, I remember when she bought her first home, when her father died and when her mother came to stay [for at least several months each year].

Over the past several years I had the good fortune of working with Professor Gamkhar as her teaching assistant in the Public Financial Management course. During that time I witnessed how committed she was to the course, and I observed her constant aspiration of making it better and more useful for every successive cohort of LBJ School students. In fact, I am certain she was one of the professors, not only in the LBJ School, but across the University, most appreciative and receptive of student feedback, always ready to make changes that would make it easier for students to learn sometimes difficult economic and financial concepts even if it required a considerable commitment of her time that she could have otherwise spent focusing on her research. Professor Gamkhar was always ready to go that extra mile for her students and that says a lot about her character, well beyond the professional domain. She was a kind, caring and generous person.
On a lighter note, colleagues remember Shama as, on occasion, the absent-minded professor, especially with respect to the ring, often missing but never actually lost, that held her office keys. In matters relating to faculty governance, she was also the ultimate straight arrow. At her memorial, one of us remarked that he had been sometimes in need of her vote – usually only when the underlying case was not as strong, on the merits, as it should have been. On such occasions, her vote was not to be had.

Shama Gamkhar is survived by her mother, by her brother, Deepak Gamkhar and her sister, Ruchita Pandit, her sister’s husband, Vishal Pandit, her niece, Ayesha Pandit and her nephew, Arjun Pandit. E. M. Forster concludes *Howard’s End* with Margaret saying that the quality of life and society depends on the fact that we “only connect.” Shama connected to each and to all at the LBJ School, gracing our lives in ways that she may not have imagined.

In her honor, her family, mentor, students, colleagues and friends have established the Shama Gamkhar Endowed Graduate Fellowship in Public Affairs. Thanks to the strong hold of Shama Gamkhar’s memory on all who knew her, this endowment had commitments that met the University's funding requirements in a single day. It was accepted by UT System on March 19, 2014, and will provide fellowship support in her memory at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, beginning in the fall of 2014. In April of 2014, the graduating class of the LBJ School voted to make their class gift a contribution to the Shama Gamkar Graduate Fellowship in Public Affairs.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors David Warner (chair), Jamie Galbraith, and Victoria Rodriguez.