The University of Texas lost one of its most treasured family members, Elspeth Davies Rostow, on Sunday, December 9, 2007. She was 90 years old. It should come as no surprise to those who knew her that Professor Rostow was active until the end—in the 72 hours before her passing she, among many other activities, completed grading for the popular class she co-taught with the dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs, James Steinberg, tweaked the syllabus of her spring semester course on the American Presidency, and held court at the LBJ Presidential Library Christmas party. She was a remarkable woman, a trailblazer and an innovator, whose tremendous accomplishments were marked by her legendary grace, poise, insight, wit, and kindness. As Dean Steinberg observed,

Elspeth Rostow, more than any single person, embodied all of the values and principles of public service, penetrating analysis and love of teaching that we all cherish about the LBJ School. Words cannot capture what she has meant to us all, for generations of colleagues and students.

Her reach went well beyond the LBJ School to encompass the whole of the forty acres. As our colleague, James K. Galbraith, said:

She loved The University of Texas at Austin as an extension of her own soul. Her star turn came as dean of the LBJ School, but there was much more, done quietly, in later years. She knew our campus like an air traffic controller knows the sky. And in all essential matters, she saw exactly where the interest of the University lay.

Elspeth Vaughan Davies was born on October 20, 1917, in Manhattan. She graduated from Barnard College in 1938, received a master’s degree in history from Radcliffe College in 1939, and another master’s degree from Cambridge University in 1949. She met her future husband, Walt Whitman Rostow, at a seminar in Paris in 1937, beginning a remarkable romance that lasted seven decades.

During the Second World War, Elspeth Rostow worked for the Office of Strategic Services in Washington, D.C., analyzing dispatches from the French Resistance. After the war, Elspeth and Walt lived in Geneva for three years. They spent most of the 1950s in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while both taught economics at MIT and raised their two young children, Ann and Peter. According to the Washington Post, Elspeth was “the only woman on the faculty at the time,” and “gently suggested to the MIT administration that the school build a faculty club for her exclusive use, because she was being charged for use of the all-male club but was not allowed inside. MIT changed its policy.”

On January 20, 1961, they moved to Washington, D.C., where Walt took up several high level foreign policy posts, including President Kennedy’s Director of Policy Planning at the State Department and President Johnson’s National Security Advisor. Elspeth continued to raise her family and teach at both American University and Georgetown University.
Elspeth arrived in Austin in January 1969, with her husband, two children, her mother, and two dogs in tow. She quickly became a force on campus as a teacher, administrator, and public servant. While she succeeded brilliantly in her formal roles as dean of both the LBJ School of Public Affairs and UT’s Division of General and Comparative Studies, it was in her role as informal advisor, mentor, and conscience to the University where her influence was magnified. Her reach included the whole Austin community, whether as a regular columnist in the Austin American-Statesman or in her work helping the less privileged through The Austin Project, which she co-founded with Walt to improve the quality of education, health care, and opportunities available to the city’s younger residents.

Since her passing, scores of students, professors, friends, and admirers from around the world have shared their stories and conveyed the influence she had on their lives. In reflecting upon her rich legacy, we are overwhelmed by her possession of qualities too numerous to list. But three themes do emerge, concepts which animated her life, and which we believe explain the passion she had for The University of Texas: the importance of ideas, institutions, and individuals.

**Ideas**

Elspeth Rostow grew up in the Columbia University of Dewey and Beard, witnessed history in the Europe of Monnet and Myrdal, taught economics at the MIT of Samuelson and Solow, parried with Schlesinger and Galbraith in the salons of Cambridge, and debated America’s global policy in the Georgetown of Bundy and Lippmann. In a world where process and power can dominate, Elspeth always recognized the fundamental importance of ideas, the transformative power of thought, and the need to create an environment for innovation and creativity to flourish.

**Institutions**

In her 20s, Elspeth joined others to create an entirely new academic discipline, American Studies, and in her 40s, helped her husband Walt establish the world renowned Center for International Studies at MIT. In her 60s – an age when most people consider retirement – Elspeth took over a fledgling LBJ program and transformed it into one of the top public policy schools in the nation. In the 1980s, she was asked by President Reagan to serve on the board of the newly created U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). Her remarkable skill at bringing together opposing ideas and big egos are credited by many for the success of USIP, and within a few years, she was named the board’s chair. Ambassador Sam Lewis, president of USIP from 1987 to 1993, said of Rostow,

> Brilliant, wise, self-effacing, and delightful to be with. She brought to the Institute's Board much needed qualities during its early years, and to its chairmanship an extraordinary ability to harness big egos to their task of building this new, unique institution on a solid, enduring foundation. A fine scholar, outstanding teacher, and dedicated student of America's political culture, Elspeth made all those around her feel better about themselves and their nation. She leaves a very large hole in the sky.

She recognized that ideas alone, while critical, were not enough. Professor Rostow always understood that institutions – their values, structure, and influence – mattered greatly.

**Individuals**

Elspeth treasured the wondrous diversity and potential of individuals. This should come as no surprise – Elspeth bar-hopped with Leadbelly, was immortalized in the poetry of John Berryman, translated the famed May 1962 White House dinner conversation between Andre Malraux and Arthur Miller, and was played by Eva Marie Saint in The Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming. But it was the extraordinary amount of time and energy she spent with the less famous individuals – the students in her classes, the professors who came to her office regularly seeking advice and counsel, and the less privileged children served by The Austin Project – that may be her greatest legacy. Her dedication to individuals was unparalleled. Elspeth was not, as those who knew her can attest, prone to flattery or hyperbole. This meant that when she offered her highest assessment of a person – “She/he is talent” – it carried weight. She reminded us how much individuals mattered.

Despite her enormous learning, grace, and style, she always made people from every station of life feel welcome and important. As her daughter, Ann, reminded us, “she was sometimes perceived as an intimidating woman, regal, and erudite. Underneath that image was a woman who was somewhat shy, somewhat reserved, poetic, sensitive and wickedly funny.”
It is almost impossible to imagine the LBJ School and The University of Texas without Elspeth. She will be greatly missed. But Elspeth does live on, in the lives of thousands of students, professors, policymakers, and friends whose ability to do more than they hoped, to be more than they dreamed, was made possible in no small measure by her influence on their lives.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Francis J. Gavin (chair), Bobby R. Inman, and Max Sherman.

Distributed to the dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs and the executive vice president and provost on August 13, 2008. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.