The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Kathryn G. Wambach, associate professor, social work, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
KATHRYN G. WAMBACH

Kathryn G. Wambach, born June 19, 1951, to Bettye and Gus Wambach of Evansville, Indiana, left this world November 21, 2001, but remains with us through the many people whose lives she enriched.

Among those touched were the students, staff, and faculty of the School of Social Work, where she dedicated her service as associate professor and director of the undergraduate program. Kate began her academic career when she received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Purdue University, attending on both scholastic and athletic scholarships. Later she earned her master's and doctoral degrees in social work from Florida State University, where she also began her formal teaching and research career. After joining the UT Austin faculty in 1992, Kate received many accolades for her dedication in preparing students as social work professionals, and she was regarded by her peers as "a teacher extraordinaire." Among the many awards she received, Kate was honored with the William David Blunk Memorial Professorship for 2001-2002, a University-wide award for teaching excellence.

Kate will be remembered for her influential roles in leadership, advocacy, and empirical research, and as a catalyst in the area of mental health services. Among her many legacies, she served on the board of AIDS Services of Austin and championed women's rights. She is survived by her life partner and soul mate, Janet Boes; her brother Kris and wife Valerie of Destin, Florida; brothers Kurt and Jon, and mother Bettye of Evansville, Indiana; and beloved dog Jasper and Siamese cats Jordan and Eli Boesbach. In her final hours, her Tallahassee family and friends held her close both in their arms and in their hearts. Through all her ventures, Kate touched lives in many ways. She taught us life lessons to make the world a better place if we can learn to utilize them.

Among Dr. Wambach’s greatest teachings were the lessons she taught us in her last few months of life. She was diagnosed with brain cancer in August of 2001. As she herself said, "tell it like it is." Even at that time Kate was pragmatic, direct, and candid. She was concrete in her thinking and took things in great stride. Janet Boes was wonderful watching after Kate's every need. Kate wanted to be the one to put the word out to faculty and staff and above all her beloved social work students. She forwarded her letter for distribution at the School of Social Work late on the evening of September 10, 2001. Due to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, distribution of the letter was delayed until September 12, 2001. Even in the midst of horrendous national loss, Kate’s message was striking for the subsequent outpouring of community support it invoked. What greater tribute could be given than in words excerpted from Dr. Wambach herself:

Imagine my surprise! In the past two to three weeks, I have found that I have terminal cancer. Who would have guessed? Quite seriously, I had no warning. I didn't see it coming. I only learned today that the kind of medical screening that could have identified this process doesn't exist yet.

Somewhere in the last ten years, I "began" lung cancer… I have smoked cigarettes most of my life. Certainly nothing that I am proud of, nor resent. I want to say clearly to everyone who reads this to quit smoking now. Just do it… You can quit smoking. I quit smoking four years ago (clearly too late for me). Smoking cigarettes is self-destructive and as a society we just need to let it go. We need to face the scientific COSTS associated with pretending a legal substance isn't "really" harmful.
I clearly realize just how shocking this information is. I know it has totally changed my life in less than a month. It has totally changed Janet's life in less than a month (for those of you who know also my partner, Janet Boes). You are on a path to become social workers. One of the most important things you will learn on this path is how to take care of yourselves. Here is a list of resources available to you at no cost because you are students at The University of Texas at Austin. Use them if you need to!

Dr. Wambach sent a second letter, a “status report” on September 27, 2001. After a detailed description of her medical condition, she concluded:

NOW TO THE REAL ME... This business is clearly a lot harder on everyone else than me... honestly. Now don't think I'm not pissed off; I certainly did NOT expect to "DIE YOUNG." But let's go from there. I established a firm moral/intellectual/philosophical code early in my life and have lived by it. I am proud of who I am, what I have done. I honestly believe (however arrogant this may sound) that I am leaving the world a better place because I existed in it. SIMPLY, I HAVE DONE WHAT I BELIEVED IN, AM LEAVING A LEGACY ASSOCIATED WITH THAT, AND AM FLAT-OUT PROUD OF MY LIFE. (what a gift, huh?)

NEXT: I am in no way, shape or form AFRAID of dying. I would describe my feeling as mildly curious. I've never put energy into "figuring out" things that you obviously can't and I have no intention to start now. I simply have a little bit better gauge on WHEN I get to find out than most of you (although we all know how much we kid ourselves here which brings me to the next point).

I'm starting to view having a defined period (I'm calling it my NEW PHASE OF EXISTENCE) when you know the step across the line is happening is a marvelous gift in and of itself... The thing that UPSETS me about my own death is the people who will miss me. I have some undefined period of time to help them. Already for many, just hearing what I've told you seems to let them feel very differently... this is supposed to be so horrible and so far, honestly, to me, other than how it has impacted the love of my life, this has been perhaps the most profound experience in my life. WHAT A DEAL!

One of Kate's social work faculty colleagues, Dr. King Davis, elegantly summarized the impact of her letters on each of us:

Kate's intimate messages come at a time when each of us remains a bit numbed from the events that have befallen us nationally, locally, and personally. A numbness fueled in part because we continue to hear and feel on a daily basis the numerous risks that life involves. The price of life is ultimately death but not a priori from war or transgressions old and new. In her own eloquent way Kate helps to put so many of life's issues, items, and assumed priorities into a stark, near Zen, perspective. She raises the questions of all questions put forth by philosophers: What is life? What is it for? How should it end? Or does it? Unlike most who know not the exact chronology of their fate, the persons on board the airliners did. One cannot discount what inner strength it takes to be able to think of others as these folks and Kate does at a time that death is at hand. Imminent. Waiting. Kate moves me to tears when at such a time she chronicles and encourages us to find real balance in life: take time to reach out to friends, family, and loved ones. Go home when it counts. Treat your body like a temple. Honor those non-material things that you believe in during your life. Leave a legacy that makes you proud. Be not bitter about what hand life deals you. And be yourself above all else.

Among Dr. Wambach’s greatest legacy of professional life was her gift of teaching. Dr. Wambach had high, but fair, expectations of her students. Students knew just what to expect in her class. She was concrete in her explanations. She related her teaching of theoretical concepts to the real world of practice. Dr. Wambach incorporated her many years of professional mental health practice experiences into her teaching. Dr. Wambach was not a “student-pleaser.” She was able to hold students to a higher standard and still be held herself in high regard by her students. Students took her courses not for an easy grade, but to learn and to better prepare themselves to be social work professionals.

Dr. Wambach, even prior to her 1999 appointment as undergraduate program director for the School of Social Work, had a special interest and commitment to undergraduate students. She served on the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee in the School of Social Work after coming to The University of Texas in 1992, and, in
addition, assumed chair responsibilities in undergraduate curriculum development. Dr. Wambach also served as a School of Social Work representative to the Student Deans of The University of Texas at Austin and was on the Provost’s Task Force on Academic Advising. Dr. Wambach was a fierce advocate for equitable resource distribution for undergraduate students within a school that has a strong focus on graduate education.

Students described Dr. Wambach as an excellent instructor who taught them to look at ideas with a new approach. The experiences and examples shared during class lectures gave a clear picture about the subject she was teaching. The students appreciated her humor, flexibility, and dedication. Many students commented on her caring for her students. When describing Dr. Wambach, the terms “excellent, awesome, best professor, great lectures, stimulating class, knowledgeable, and approachable” were repeated over and over. Her interesting and thought provoking classes made students think for themselves on a level they never had before. Her strong presence held students’ attention and stimulated thoughts. She made students think about their attitudes and actions and how they affected others. "Dr. Wambach always asked the right questions to make us go further," one student commented. Other student comments on course instructor surveys include:

- Hands down, Dr. Wambach is one of the best professors I've ever had in eight years of college!
- Strengths: extremely interesting, made me want to learn more on my own.
- Extremely knowledgeable: what I expected from graduate level coursework. Dr. Wambach is incredibly intelligent, but also down to earth and able to provide information in an exciting manner.
- Wonderful! I loved this class! Very stimulating and fun. I actually wanted to read and learn.
- Strengths: relates well to students; wonderful way of breaking down the material into a simple, understandable format.
- Dr. Wambach is one of the best (if not the best) professor I have ever taken a class from, here or at other universities. She presents material in a clear and orderly fashion that is filled with helpful and informative ways to diagnose and differentiate various mental disorders. She presents all data with interesting stories that aid in understanding the material. Even with sensitive topics (sexual disorders) she approaches the topic in a clear and nonsensical way allowing us to learn and question information without personal emotional baggage getting in the way.

Dr. Wambach’s influence on students extended beyond the classroom and over the years. At Kate’s passing, the School of Social Work provided an opportunity to pay “Tribute to Dr. Wambach” on its Web site. Among tributes paid by students of her lasting influence are the following acknowledgements.

Tonya Hiland:

Kate has been and will continue to be a pivotal person in my life. I first met her in 1996 when she taught me that no matter how open minded I think I am, I still have prejudices that I need to be constantly aware of. That was my very first class as an undergraduate student and I continued to seek out Kate about social work issues from then on. I feel extremely grateful that I was fortunate enough to have her as a professor in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. She is a very special person and I will continue to carry her words of wisdom and lessons of life with me throughout the rest of my life. Kate, I will greatly miss your incredible smile and your wonderful jokes.

Becca Hutcheson:

To the woman who introduced me to Rita Mae Brown and made Stone Butch Blues real, who forged her way, alone, along paths few of my generation will ever fully comprehend
To the woman who believed in and stood up for me when others could or would not and had the courage to tell me about it I honor you.
Your very breath gave testament that human evil ultimately will not prevail.
Your integrity was the greatest honor you could have given those they denied you the chance to know.
They know, Kate. They understand. They are proud.
To the woman who loved the orcas
who was patient and faithful to the Lady Longhorns,
loyal and loving to her partner,
and enduring as a friend -
I wish you peace.

Sarah Sarrat:

Dr. Wambach—wow, what a person. When I think back on my five years at the School of Social
Work, her face immediately comes to mind. I had her in undergraduate and in graduate school. What
drew me to seek out and take whatever she was teaching was her perspective and knowledge, but most
of all her ENERGY! She made social work "real" for me; she brought it to life! I will miss seeing her
bright shiny face and hearing her voice in the halls when I go back to visit the school, but she has left a
permanent mark on the school that I will never forget.

Jennifer Williamson:

Though losing someone of great importance brings great sadness, I believe that comfort comes from
the remembrance of the great things that person did while a part of our lives. Kate was a very special
person, and though she was taken at such an early time, she did make quite a difference in the time she
was here. She was always there to help others, and I believe that her legacy will continue in the lives of
all she touched.

Faculty colleagues also held Kate in high esteem. Several members of the faculty who were among Kate’s
“fans” (Dr. Elizabeth Pomeroy, Dr. Lori Holleran, Dr. Miguel Ferguson, and Dr. David Springer) wrote and
performed a song in her honor, to the tune of Tom Petty’s “Free Falling.” Kate’s partner, Janet, noted that she
couldn’t stop singing the phrase written for Kate, “Free spirit, I’m a free spirit.” Dr. Elizabeth Pomeroy, faculty
colleague and co-author of The Clinical Assessment Workbook: Balancing Strengths and Differential
Diagnosis, states in her dedication of their book:

The spirit of this book celebrates the life and scholarship of my co-author, Kate Wambach (1951-
2001). Kate’s unique character, bold irreverence and ability to think clearly and critically shaped the
framework of this text. Her excitement and enthusiasm about the subject matter was exemplified by
her active contributions in the field of mental health and teaching. This book is a testament to her
continuous, profound impact on all whose lives she touched.

A “Celebration of Life” event was held following Kate’s passing, on December 7, 2001, to pay tribute to Dr.
Wambach. One of those to speak was a faculty colleague, Dr. Diana DiNitto. Her words also pay tribute to the
teacher, but point more to the person of Kate. Among Dr. DiNitto’s expressions of tribute are the following
words:

I am very glad that so many of you could join us for this celebration of the life of
Dr. Kathryn Wambach. We have called this occasion a celebration, for indeed there is so much to
celebrate about Kate’s life. But in my heart I am mourning the loss of a valued colleague and
friend—one whom we will no longer see in the halls, in the classroom, and in committee meetings, but
one whom we will remember for her intellect, her decisiveness, her sharp wit, and her wicked
sarcasms… I remember when I learned of Kate’s illness, and I rued the fact that such a vibrant person
could suddenly be so ill. But Kate did not recoil at the thought of her illness. She looked it square in
the face. She handled it with her own style. She spoke candidly about her situation in a letter to us and
at the event we had to honor her just before she and Janet left to return to Tallahassee. She left each of
us with a message about all we had to accomplish here at the School of Social Work.

When I think of Kate, I think of a woman who made no pretenses. Kate was first and foremost a
straightforward and forthright individual. She was outspoken. She let you know who she was. There
can be no doubt that all of us in the School of Social Work knew who Kate Wambach was. Kate was a
champion of fairness and of ethical conduct. Kate had a keen mind to complement her sharp wit. She
was an experienced clinician, teacher, and researcher. The Excellence Fund established here at the
School of Social Work in Kate’s name is a fitting tribute to the person Kate was… I know that there
are not supposed to be any injustices in the great beyond, but if there are any, I am sure that Kate is raising hell about them in heaven.

Yes, what a person was Kate Wambach. She touched our lives in a profound way. Toni Johnson, doctoral student, said that thoughts of Kate brought to mind Maya Angelou's poem, “Phenomenal Woman.” She shared the last paragraph in tribute:

    Now you understand
    Just why my head's not bowed.
    I don't shout or jump about
    Or have to talk real loud.
    When you see me passing,
    It ought to make you proud.
    I say,
    It's in the click of my heels,
    The bend of my hair
    The palm of my hand
    'Cause I'm a woman
    Phenomenally.
    Phenomenal woman,
    That's me.

We conclude with the words of Dr. King Davis and Dean Barbara White. Dr. Davis wrote: “Alas, Kate wins. She does it her way. With such strength. Grace. Determination. Caring. We've all lost a guiding spirit.” Dean White, in a Daily Texan news article (December 6, 2001) honoring Dr. Wambach correctly predicted the future when she said, “You don’t replace Kate. She was a unique individual, and we’ll probably be telling stories about her for a long time.”

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Associate Professor Dennis Haynes (chair), Professor Diana DiNitto, and Assistant Professor Lori Holleran.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Social Work, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on October 28, 2002. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).