

DENICE DENTON | 1959-2006

A FALLEN CHAMPION FOR WOMEN

At a service for the late UCSC chancellor, hundreds of mourners gathered to hear speakers including Professor Gretchen Kalonji, right, who addressed the crowd next to a portrait of her longtime partner. Story, **Page 6A**.



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Death leaves gap in female science leadership

ucsc-Faculty

by Lisa M. Krieger
Mercury News

✓ The death of University of California-Santa Cruz Chancellor Denice Denton leaves a gaping hole in the small and tightly knit community of America's elite female scientists and engineers, say students and colleagues who revered Denton for her

DENTON HELPED MANY WOMEN FOLLOW HER PATH TO SUCCESS IN MALE-DOMINATED FIELDS

leadership.

Triumphing at a young age in a time and place inhospitable to many women, Denton reached back to pull less experienced women up the ladder of academic success, recruiting them to a field

she loved.

"There is still a long way to go," she said in an interview two weeks before her death. "But it is getting better. All gains are positive."

There is irony in the fact that Denton apparently took

her life when the nation's top research universities say they are seeking more women of her caliber.

A soon-to-be published report by the National Academy of Science finds that while science and engineering schools are full of bright and

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WOMEN ON TENURED STANFORD FACULTY, 2005

Engineering 9% | Natural science 13% | Earth science 16% | All disciplines 24%

Source: Stanford University Provost's Office

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ambitious female undergraduates, the number of women declines with each successive step in academia.

The study — which will be dedicated to Denton — reports that women account for 10 percent of tenured or tenure-track faculty in engineering, Denton's field.

At age 32, Denton earned academia's triumvirate — excellence in research, teaching and service — that is required to win tenure, education's ultimate prize. At 36, she was named the first female engineering dean of a major research university. At 45, she was the youngest chancellor in the University of California's history.

But Denton was the exception.

Women have lower rates of tenure, according to the Academy of Science study. They wait longer for a promotion. And they have lower job satisfaction.

Women work harder

Women faculty, on average, spend more hours per week than men in the classroom, more time preparing for classes and advising students, and more time engaged in university service activities.

But this doesn't translate into tenure. Most women end up seeking careers elsewhere — in community colleges, four-year liberal arts schools or businesses.

They bristle at the suggestion by former Harvard President Lawrence Summers at a 2005 economics conference that the problem might stem from, among other causes, innate differences between the



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sexes.

But they say that female students face different issues from their male classmates — and need more role models to show the way.

"Some women don't see it as a welcoming environment for them," said Geraldine L. Richmond, professor of physical chemistry at the University of Oregon. "Until we get our numbers up, the problem won't go away."

At Stanford, some students still feel bruised by the tenure rejection of the popular paleoceanographer Adina Paytan.

After seven years teaching and researching geological and environmental sciences, this spring Paytan received the thumbs down. She says she was told that although her teaching and public service work were stellar, there was not enough support from consulted scientists in other fields.

Paytan's female students wonder if, like many women scientists, she failed to market herself to the right people. They question whom was consulted, and whether Paytan failed to play by academia's rigid rules.

"Students are saying, 'What chance do I have, if Adina can't do it?'" said Carrie Whitehill, a doctoral student in earth sciences.

Stanford's Patricia Jones, vice provost and a tenured professor of biological sciences, says that numbers of

women are creeping up — but that it takes time. As many as 14 years are needed to rise, and there isn't much turnover at the top, she said.

To recruit women, Jones said, Stanford is striving to make an academic career more family-friendly. The university increasingly offers jobs to spouses and provides affordable on-campus child care, as well as grants to pay for child care when women travel for work. It "stops the clock" on the tenure timeline for maternity leave.

But she agrees that a research institution like Stanford attracts fewer women.

Different routes

Women faculty contribute in many ways, students said. There are differences in the way they approach problems, lead classes and present research, they say.

And while research is critical, particularly at places like Stanford and UC, they wish that equal value were placed on a professor's ability to be a role model, a teacher, an adviser and a tireless volunteer — and someone who combines academics and family life.

Computer scientist Maria Klawe, who moves this summer as dean of Princeton University's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences to president of Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, said "it feels extremely important that the faculty reflect the demographics of the student body. Ultimately, it is a better educational experience."

Seeking tenure feels a lot like a theater audition with no script or stage direction, female students say. And while

male students socialize at night with male professors, or swap advice with one another, women say they don't feel included. Instead, they tend to wing it, picking up clues where they can about how to become an essential asset to their department.

"Many people don't understand the game right away," said Klawe, who advises students.

That's one reason Denton was valued.

Denton challenged Harvard's Summers on his comments about women, and through e-mail to her colleagues, triggered a national protest.

Her recruitment methods have become a model for other universities and for industrial laboratories, said Jennifer Tour Chayes, research area manager for mathematics and theoretical computer science at Microsoft.

"Denice tackled the problem of enhancing diversity as she would approach any other scientific problem — testing hypotheses, gathering data, changing practices when necessary, and demanding accountability," Chayes said.

By example, she taught others — and still had much left to teach.

"Denice was incredibly compassionate, advising me on how to approach my situation — understanding that we couldn't always be as strong as we tried to be," Chayes said. "I only wish that I had realized earlier that she was not always as strong as she appeared to be."

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