

Laura Appleton (Provider of a Scholarship for Female Graduate Students)

Laura L. Appleton, professor of Sociology at Central Washington University, died August 11, 2016. Dr. Appleton described herself as a cross between Earth Mother and Genghis Khan. Those that knew her best describe her as challenging, innovative, and funny. She began teaching at CWU in 1970 and was proud to continue teaching until she died. Dr. Appleton completed her undergraduate work at University of California at Riverside in the early 1960's. Considering itself to be the "Harvard of the West," Riverside's expectations were high, competition was still, and most classes were relatively small. Dr. Appleton thrived under what she called the "young and brilliant sociology faculty" who made her experience remarkable. It was here that Dr. Appleton began to formulate her idea of what is was to be an excellent faculty member: know your students by name, talk to students in the hall, invite them into your homes for informal discussions and arguments, involve them in your research and teaching, indulge and encourage those that show promise. She earned her PhD from University of California Santa Barbara.

Dr. Appleton experienced life as "the first" many times. She was the first female faculty member hired in the CWU Department of Sociology which, at the time, consisted of 15 men. The department wanted a female, and according to Dr. Appleton, "...thought my initial grad work at Berkeley made me a radical." She developed and taught many new classes, including SOC 356, Sex Role (now Gender Roles), in the Winter of 1972. Theories of Homosexuality, Death and Dying, and Social Movements were also initially developed by Dr. Appleton. She was also the first women to receive the CWU Distinguished Professor of Teaching in 1989-90. Dr. Appleton, as the most senior faculty member, led the graduation procession by carrying the mace in 2008.

In 1975, Dr. Appleton, with her colleagues Anne Denman, Anthropology, and Jack Dugan, Sociology, conducted research and published "The Status of Men and Women Faculty at Central Washington State College: A Five Year Perspective." The results of the study found "discriminatory practices existed" in regards to salaries, promotions, and departmental ranking of women faculty members. She also co-chaired the Campus Climate Task Force, which presented its results to the CWU Board of Trustees in 1996. One of Dr. Appleton's greatest strengths was her ability to tease out and identify issues and then discover strategies to address them. She traveled to Ghana, Mexico, and twice to China as a Fulbright Scholar, always researching for ways to incorporate new ideas and new experiences to share and improve her classes at CWU.

Ahead of her time, Dr. Appleton joined the Black Muslim movement while at UC Santa Barbara in 1967. She was instrumental in founding the Hospice Program at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Yakima. She was a founding member of the CWU Gender Studies Committee.

According to Dr. Delores "Kandee" Cleary, colleague and former chair of the CWU Sociology Department, Dr. Appleton "...was a warrior. She challenged so many conventions. She, along with Dr. Jack Dugan, prepared me best for graduate school. She was instrumental in CWU's hiring of me as a faculty member in Sociology." Her friend and former student Jay Osborne shared that Dr. Appleton "called me out and challenged me when I was being mediocre and not working hard enough."

In her younger years, Dr. Appleton won many awards as an expert rifleman. She earned dozens of blue ribbons won at the Kittitas County Fair for her canned vegetables and spicy jellies. She was a collector of bright fabrics from around the world. She loved and appreciated the company of a few close friends who called her on her bullshit and brought out her softer side when possible.

Dr. Appleton established the "Laura L. Appleton Endowment for Graduate Study in Sociology" to assist a CWU sociology major in costs associated with application, admission and attendance at a graduate program in sociology. Dr. Appleton was preceded in death by her beloved husband Robert Appleton and her parents Tom and Marjorie Ferguson. She is survived by her sister Sue Ellen Ellis, her friends Joan Sondregger, Jay Osborne, Dean Duby, Staci Sleight-Layman, Kandee Cleary, Kitty Stoffle, her colleagues in the CWU Sociology Department, and the hundreds of students whose lives she influenced.

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