

2/6/02 General Faculty Meeting
Anne D. Gounaris Memorial Minute

Anne D. Gounaris, Professor of Chemistry, at Vassar College from 1966-1989, was born on October 24, 1924, and died after a long illness on November 21, 2001, at Massachusetts General Hospital, which is where she had gotten her first degree, an R.N., in 1946. She resided in Stenham and Wellfleet, MA, after her early retirement from Vassar in 1989.

She graduated summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, from Boston University, and received a Ph.D. in chemistry from Harvard University in 1960. She worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the Carlsberg Laboratory in Copenhagen, the Brookhaven National Laboratory and the Rockefeller University in NY in the most eminent positions in the emerging field of biochemistry. She also held a postdoctoral position at the University of CA, Berkeley, laboratory of Daniel Koshland, who was the editor of *Science* magazine for many years. At the time, such positions were granted to few, if any, women.

Anne joined the Vassar faculty in 1966, saw the need for a Biochemistry Program and initiated work on it immediately upon her arrival at Vassar College. She had a vision that was very forward thinking for the times. It was one of the first such programs at Vassar and the first such program at an undergraduate college in the U.S. Nowadays, the American Chemical Society recommends that all chemistry programs include some biochemistry content starting with the first introductory course in Chemistry.

Her research was cutting edge, she pursued it actively and aggressively, and it included many Vassar students. A testament to her research capability was that she was awarded a major research grant from the NIH, and then a renewal in the mid-70's when grant money was very difficult to obtain. Anne served her Vassar sabbaticals as a visiting fellow in medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, visiting research fellow at Newham College at Cambridge University, and at the Strangeways Laboratory, as well as visiting professor at Rockefeller University. Her research focused on how the conformation of a protein affected its function.

Anne had an incredibly high level of energy and enthusiasm. She was forthright and straightforward- she said exactly what she thought. She was an independent thinker, didn't take "sides"; she had a quickness of reaction that characterized her. This included a quick temper, which she used to excuse by saying, "she was Greek", but she was just as easy to forget what

or who had sparked her temper. She appreciated honesty and was willing to forgive any real or perceived errors in her students and her colleagues. She was not one to sit around and complain about things but rather took action. She was intellectually curious and in her retirement, pursued her interests in traveling and bioinformatics.

She had a terrific sense of humor and playfulness. She used to drive fast and would love to tell the department about her latest encounters with law enforcement officers that would stop her for speeding. On one of her trips to or from Boston, she was clocked at 85 mph going uphill on the Taconic Parkway (speed limit of 55!). She took it upon herself to give one of the Chemistry faculty members who had never been to New York City a tour of the city before he was to leave Poughkeepsie. She was engaged in the life of the college, attending lectures and concerts.

Anne chaired the planning committee for the building of the Seeley Mudd Chemistry Building. It was a difficult task that took several years to complete; there were many revisions of the original project. According to Joan Deiters, Professor Emeritus of Vassar Chemistry, she performed heroic duty in this capacity. In addition, Anne made sure that the Biochemistry lab had proper facilities for conducting biochemical research. As a result of her foresight, the biochemistry space still remains the best research space in the building, almost 18 years after moving in!

She was highly thought of for her many accomplishments by her colleagues in the chemistry department!

Last but not least, Anne Gounaris was an excellent teacher, and always had a loyal following of former students, including Eve Slater, '67, who is at the Merck Pharmaceutical Company. She was not an easy teacher, she required a lot from students, particularly independent thinking, and emphasized both strong laboratory skills and current literature in her courses. Anne was a role model for many of her students and a pioneer for women in science.

I would like to end this tribute by quoting from a letter sent to The Vassar Quarterly this past fall by Eve Slater: "The accomplishments of her career are astounding and her legacy to Vassar is profound."

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam Rossi, Professor of Chemistry, Edith Stout, Lecturer and Curator of Instrumentation and Joan Deiters, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry