

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
MAXINE COUSINS HAIRSTON**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Maxine Cousins Hairston, professor emeritus, English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
MAXINE COUSINS HAIRSTON**

Maxine Cousins Hairston, professor emerita of English, died on July 22, 2005, at the age of 83. In a remarkable career, Hairston examined the role of rhetoric and writing programs across the country and challenged assumptions about the roles women might play in the academy. Indeed, she considered the undervalued position of writing teachers in English departments analogous to the status of women in general. She succeeded in bettering the condition of both. Maxine Hairston was born on April 9, 1922, in Ironwood, Michigan, where she attended public schools. She earned a B.A. in English at the University of Michigan in 1944. Shortly thereafter, she met and married James Walter Hairston, moving to the Hairston farm at Rice's Crossing, Texas and raising two children, Coles and Lucy.

The ranch gave Hairston a practical perspective on life and labor that would inform her later academic work. With her children growing, Maxine Hairston returned to school, earning an M.A. in English at The University of Texas at Austin in 1958 and a Ph.D. in 1968. Her dissertation focused on the work of Texas writer George Sessions Perry. What some regarded as a late start for a scholarly career, Hairston saw as a suitable trajectory for many women. Although she retained an interest in literature throughout her life, her employment as an instructor in the Department of English following graduation led her to take a serious interest in rhetoric, a field then in the early stages of intellectual renewal.

Hairston soon established her reputation nationally as an advocate for professionalizing the teaching of writing. Throughout her career, she would remain committed to two constituencies. The first was students of all ages and backgrounds, whose ideas and writing she respected deeply and for whom she developed writing programs and wrote a series of successful and influential textbooks. Her second community was the graduate students, lecturers, and part-time instructors, most of them women, who taught the bulk of writing classes across the country. She labored to give these teachers more power over their careers and subject matter. In a series of highly pragmatic essays, she challenged writing instructors to rethink the nature of their pedagogy and to understand its importance. In Texas, she was elected president of the Conference of College Teachers of English (CCTE) in 1983. Active nationally in both the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference of College Composition and Communication, she chaired the latter organization in 1985, and, in a much-quoted convention address, entitled "Breaking our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections," called for the separation of writing programs from departments of English.

Hairston waded into controversy again in 1991 with "Ideology, Diversity, and the Teaching of Writing," an essay published in *College Composition and Communication* just prior to her retirement. In it, Hairston repudiated a growing disciplinary movement to make first-year writing courses political in their orientation and design. Provoking more response than any article in the history of the journal, Hairston's essay reprised her commitment to students, whose education as writers, she argued, should not be subordinated to the political visions of instructors.

At UT, Hairston rose from instructor to full professor. She served as director of freshman English and later as associate dean of liberal arts. Active in both graduate and undergraduate writing programs, Hairston served as a mentor to young scholars and, in particular, helped many women develop successful academic careers, guiding them both intellectually and personally. A persistent advocate of independent writing programs, she saw that

vision fulfilled at UT with the establishment of a Division of Rhetoric and Composition shortly after her retirement in 1992.

Her retirement, however, did not mark the end of her intellectual or academic endeavors. She traveled extensively with her second husband, David Cooper, a retired professor from Hunter College, whom she had married in 1987. She remained committed to Democratic Party politics, local and national, and served on the board of trustees for both Planned Parenthood of Austin and the First Unitarian Universalist Church. She continued to work on her textbooks, seeing *The Riverside Reader* into its eighth edition, the *Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* into its seventh, and *Successful Writing*, its fourth. She returned to graduate school in 1999 to pursue a master's degree in European history, which she earned in 2003. In 2002, former graduate students honored her by publishing *Against the Grain: A Volume in Honor of Maxine Hairston*, a collection of her major articles, as well as essays recounting her achievements and scholarly life.

Anyone who knew Maxine Hairston understood the vitality of her intellect, her delight in learning, and her eternal goodwill and optimism. Even as she faced surgery in June 2005, Maxine looked forward to a recovery speedy enough for her to attend classes again in the fall. Nothing would have pleased her more.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors John J. Ruskiewicz (chair), Lester L. Faigley, and Anthony C. Hilfer.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on March 7, 2006. 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/>.