

Obituary: Nancy Wadsworth Denney¹

Nancy Wadsworth Denney, Professor of Psychology, died of cancer on April 27, 1995. Denney received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Colorado in 1966 and her PhD in developmental psychology from the University of Washington in 1970. Her first faculty position was at the State University of Kansas from 1972 to 1984 during which time she was promoted to associate and full professor. She joined the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1984.

Denney's research focused on cognitive development across the life span. Although much of the literature in this field reports on inevitable declines with age in cognitive functions such as memory and speed, Denney also emphasized the skills and strategies used most expertly by persons in their middle years and beyond, skills that may compensate in part for those that decline. Whereas many studies of performance rely on traditional social academic tasks, Denney was interested in how people solve practical and social problems. Instead of linking problem-solving skills to innate abilities, Denney studied the effects of training and practice on these skills. She published over 75 chapters and articles in scholarly journals and was a consulting editor of six major journals (including the *Journal of Adult Development*)

during her career. She was also the coauthor of a textbook, *Human Sexuality*, first published in 1988 and now in its second edition.

A champion of women's equity issues at both Kansas and Wisconsin, Denney chaired the University of Wisconsin's Committee on Women for the past 3 years. It is a testimony to the importance she gave this work that she chaired a meeting of this group less than 2 weeks before she died. In January, when forced to give up teaching by the recurrence of cancer, she spurned chemotherapy and chose instead to focus her remaining energies on establishing a university-wide program to facilitate the education of single parents.

Never one to shy away from adversity, Nancy always met it with courage and viewed it as a challenge. She led a balanced life, one in which she took tough stands for her principles and values and yet delighted in spontaneous fun and gourmet meals. She faced her illness with a mixture of realism and hope that was truly inspirational to her family and friends. With fondness and a great sense of loss, we remember Nancy's goals and her unique sense of purpose and commitment.

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