

Ethel Landau Vatter

October 22, 1909 — June 1, 1996

Professor Emerita Ethel Landau Vatter was a dedicated social scientist in the broadest sense of the term. Her professional interests spanned economics, research design and statistics. She combined technical competence with a strong commitment to helping the disadvantaged.

Born and brought up in Ohio, Professor Vatter left for Washington, DC in search of a job. Growing up in the depression gave her an enduring concern for economic and social issues. While in Washington, she began to attend part-time courses at George Washington University.

Professor Vatter did not obtain her first academic degree until she was in her thirties. Her academic career began in 1947 when she became an Instructor in economics at Oregon State University. She subsequently returned to the University of California at Berkeley where she had earned her bachelor's degree and completed her Master's program in 1952. She returned to Oregon State, serving not only as an Instructor, but also as a Researcher and Editor in the Department of Agricultural Economics. She resigned her faculty position there in the late 1950s to pursue a Ph.D. program at the University of Iowa. She obtained her doctorate in economics from that institution in 1962.

Professor Vatter joined the Department of Household Economics and Management at Cornell in 1962. At Cornell, she initially had a three-way appointment in teaching, research and extension. She became an Associate Professor in 1966 and a full Professor in 1970. From 1966-69, she was Coordinator of Research for the College and Assistant Director of the Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station. In 1969, she was named Associate Dean for Graduate Education and Research for the College and served in that role until 1971. She was named Professor Emerita in 1974.

Within the College, Ethel Vatter was noted for bringing the insights of the various social science disciplines to bear on humanitarian issues. Her strong personal commitment to achieving justice and concern for the disadvantaged led to her research interests on poverty and to service on numerous college committees dealing with social issues. She was a member of the Executive Committee on Operation Hitchhike, a pilot effort of the three Statutory Colleges at Cornell and the U.S. Department of Labor on rural manpower development. She was active in the development of women's studies on campus.

One of Ethel Vatter's major contributions to the College was her work with both graduate and undergraduate students. Professor Vatter was an excellent teacher presenting material clearly and challenging her students to take on individual projects. She gained the confidence of graduate students and was strongly supportive in their professional activities. Her concern for their personal welfare led her to interact with her students both socially and professionally.

Professor Vatter made significant contributions to the study of family income, including work on private pension plans, the allocation of family resources and the economic status of women in the world of work. Her publications included *Women in the World of Work*, *The Affiliated Family: A Device for Integrating Old and Young*, *Income Maintenance in the 1970s*, and *Experiment and Evaluation in Reaching Those in Poverty*. While on sabbatical leave in 1970, Professor Vatter was a Visiting Professor at Temple University. Her work there led to the publication of joint research with Sylvia Claven and Joseph Kennedy.

In 1972, Professor Vatter was diagnosed with a massive brain tumor which was surgically removed. The physicians were amazed at her stamina and recovery. The following year she returned to teaching having made a remarkable recovery. Her courage during this period was inspiring to her colleagues.

Professor Vatter was active in several professional societies. She was a member of the American Economics Association, American Home Economics Association, American Council on Consumer Interest, American Association of University Women, American Association of University Professors and the Grove Conference on Marriage and the Family.

Professor Vatter will be remembered for her concern for the less fortunate. It influenced her research and her teaching. Her generous gift to the college in 1987 supports mature students who experience financial stress. She had encountered difficulties while pursuing her own education and hoped to smooth the way for students similarly situated. She also demonstrated her concern for others through participation in activities in the community. She was a person of strong convictions, determination and courage; she also had an unusual tolerance for all points of view and was particularly effective in chairing committees and mediating conflicting views.

Professor Vatter married Harold G. Vatter in 1944; they were later divorced. They had two daughters: Theresa Vatter, now a high school mathematics teacher in Ithaca; and Rita Vatter Jett, an attorney in Portland, Oregon. Professor Vatter died on June 1, 1996 at the age of 86. In addition to her two daughters, she is survived by three grandchildren.