

Florence Berger

May 3, 1940 – July 13, 2023

Emeritus Professor Florence Berger was a member of the School of Hotel Administration faculty. She was born on May 3, 1940, and passed on July 13, 2023. Emeritus Professor Berger received a bachelor's degree from Goucher College (Psychology, 1962), a master's degree from Harvard University (Education, 1965), and a Ph.D. from Cornell University (Education, 1979). Her primary areas of expertise included organizational behavior, human relations, creativity, and organizational change. She then applied these topics to the unique contexts and requirements of the hospitality and tourism industries. Emeritus Professor Berger served as assistant dean of students and helped found the Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service (EARS) at Cornell University in 1972, a student led volunteer organization that supports mental health and well-being for the Cornell community. She was the first female to achieve full professor status in the School of Hotel Administration (now the Nolan School of Hotel Administration), and received Cornell's highest teaching award, the Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow for Distinguished Teaching (1999).

Emeritus Professor Berger's first article was published in 1974. In this paper, Emeritus Professor Berger and her colleagues examined some of the most difficult challenges that students face. She then applied her findings to develop prescriptive suggestions for coping with these challenges. In particular, she and her co-authors emphasized the need for faculty to identify and engage in "the little things" that promote a motivating learning environment, from smiles and warm greetings to determining students' needs and providing support before they acknowledged or even recognized the needs themselves.

Emeritus Professor Berger applied this advice daily. She was purposeful in her interactions with others, with the principal intention of creating and spreading positivity. Her teaching style acknowledged that each individual has unique experiences and ideas to contribute. She created an environment where mistakes were seen as opportunities for growth and encouraged students to take risks and explore new ways of thinking. Moreover, she was practically minded and provided students with a wide array of tools and resources to help them make good decisions and solve complex problems. As a result, students developed confidence in their own abilities and learned to reason critically about the world around them.

Emeritus Professor Berger also possessed an extraordinary level of emotional intelligence, as many will attest to her keen ability to look into your eyes and see your soul. Indeed, this quality was central to her role as a mentor to numerous junior faculty, helping them (including a couple of us on the memorial committee) navigate and manage the stress and ambiguity inherent in the position. Emeritus Professor Berger's sensitivity and empathy was also instrumental in resolving the inevitable conflict that is inherent in all workplaces. She was especially deft when views and perspectives varied in significant ways. Her passion for building relationships made a definitive mark on the Hotel School's culture. Additionally, Emeritus Professor Berger was also widely regarded for her match-making abilities. She is credited with arranging more than two dozen

successful marriages, including the daughter of former Cornell University President Frank H.T. Rhodes.

Written by Judi Brownell, Linda Canina, Steve Carvell, Dave Sherwyn, and J. Bruce Tracey