# Evidence

## A farewell to Dr. Sonia Gonsalves

## **May 2017**

#### With contributions from

- Dr. Harvey Kesselman
- Dr. Amy Hadley
- Dr. Diane Holtzman
- Dr. Manish Madan
- Dr. Michelle McDonald
- Dr. Chris Tartaro
- Dr. Carra Leah Hood



Please permit me to express my sincere congratulations on your well-deserved retirement. After twenty-five years of dedication and faithful service to Stockton University, you surely have earned every moment of your leisure. But even as I write this, it feels strange to associate your name with the word "retirement," as you have become a foundational pillar of the Stockton family.

Your extensive tenure boasts of many awards and accolades, in addition to your considerable service to the University in various capacities. You have set the bar high as a thought leader and a role model for your colleagues. We are all deeply indebted to you for your valuable contributions throughout your professional career with Stockton.

I can think of no one who is more well-regarded and highly-respected among their peers and the entire Stockton community than you. Your character captures the essence of gravitas and grace; your speech so eloquently commands the room. Admired by many as "strength under control," your confident spirit and level of influence always leaves a lasting impression of those in your presence.

Sonia, I consider you as a trusted adviser and confidant, of whom I can always count on to deliver a well-thought, insightful opinion, regardless of the subject matter. You are one of Stockton's finest, a superlative in every sense of the word. Your absence creates a great hole in the tapestry of our community.

And although positions can be filled, no one can ever replace the person we have all grown to know and love.

I've heard it said that retirement is simply a graduation from one phase to another more beautiful phase in a person's life. Well, I wish you all the success and happiness as you turn the page in this new chapter. For two and a half decades, it has been my great joy to serve with you as a colleague; but even more, it has been my great privilege to call you my friend.

May you experience the very best in your future and remember you always have a family at Stockton!

-- Dr. Harvey Kesselman

You have set the bar high as a thought leader and a role model for your colleagues.

I was fortunate to have Sonia Gonsalves serving as the Director of the Institute for Faculty Development the year that I came to Stockton as a new faculty member. She has been an inspiration and a mentor in so many of my accomplishments since beginning that fall as an Assistant Professor. I knew that I needed to begin my research agenda at Stockton and that I was interested in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. I described to Sonia one of the constructs that I wanted to study. Her reply was something to the effect of, "Information Literacy! You need to get together with Mary Ann Trail." That discussion lead to another great faculty friendship and collaboration that resulted in several presentations and a co-authored publication with Mary Ann during my pretenure years.

Sonia was also influential in my first submission for a Research and Professional Development grant at Stockton. I received the grant which helped to bring a research project to completion for publication. When I finally received a response from the editor of the journal, I was informed that my article would be accepted providing I corrected a multitude of flaws by an unforgiving deadline. I went to Sonia explaining that my results section was described as "confusing and poorly written". She replied, "They're right, it is confusing and poorly written" followed by the advice that allowed me to submit my revisions by the editor's deadline.

I have also spent time over the summers in three separate Assessment Institutes under Sonia's direction. The first institute was at the end of my first year at Stockton. That summer I paired with Dr. Diane Holtzman on an assessment project. That opportunity resulted in another long friendship as well as an additional opportunity for professional collaboration. Diane and I have presented together on assessment (particularly e-portfolios and accreditation) and have received internal funding for Stockton projects.

Each time I enrolled in the Assessment Institute I was offered the opportunity to design new assessment tools for my program. This assessment process was instrumental in the development and eventual accreditation of the Communication Disorders program. Another benefit of enrolling in the Assessment Institute was being invited to serve on Stockton's Assessment Committee. Serving on the committee has allowed me to expand my knowledge of intuitional as well as program assessment.

The committee has also facilitated multiple opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.

So, now it is time to close the loop and wish Sonia well on her new journeys.

I am most fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with her as a mentor, colleague and friend.

I wish you the happiest of days ahead.

-- Dr. Amy Hadley

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Having a campus environment that has a "culture of assessment" is significant and, at Stockton University, Sonia's work over the years has helped to make assessment of student learning part of the University's culture.

Sonia is known as the "go to" person for assessment—often in the assessment meetings and summer institutes Sonia would introduce faculty members to the CLA, to the ELOs, and to the interpretation of the results of NSSE. Often we would hear Sonia ask "do you have a rubric developed?" or "have you closed the loop?"—two familiar questions from Sonia. In a review of the Evidence newsletters over the years we can note the growth and progress made at Stockton University in the area of assessment of student learning—including the importance of rubrics and closing the loop.

Thank you, Sonia.

-- Dr. Díane Holtzman

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It is often difficult to write about someone who has been at an institution for much longer than your own existence. Nevertheless, conceding that I will not be able to justify her contributions to the institution for my knowledge is limited, I still want to take this opportunity to write about Dr. Sonia Gonsalves' contribution to my professional growth as an early career faculty.

When I joined Stockton in fall 2013, she was my first observer ever and needless to say - a calming effect to my anxiety of being observed by 'THE Director of Assessments.' Her attention to detail, focus on student learning, ideas on employing different pedagogical strategies, added with her humorous and light hearted demeanor made my observation a great learning experience and a confidence booster. I also had the fortune of working with her (and others) on Stockton' first ever Campus Climate (students) survey. She put together a great team of colleagues. It was evident through this experience that she has a unique ability to identify strengths in others, inspire others to take on higher level responsibilities and that she liked to 'get things done' with everyone's inputs. Serving on a committee with her is like going in to a war zone (in a good way) - you cannot be underprepared and you know you will have a good outcome under such a Commander-in-Chief, who is a pleasure to work with and someone who brings worldly wisdom to her craft.

There are several other professional interactions, however, these two stood out for me because, they in my view, captured her commitment to teaching, pedagogy and building a safe community as a leader. She is truly an academic leader to whom nurturing and mentoring of junior faculty came naturally and a role I believe she played effortlessly and very graciously.

Thank you, Sonia - you will be missed!

-- Dr. Manish Madan

Serving on a committee with her is like going in to a war zone -- (in a good way)...

I want to be Sonia when I grow up. I really do. I realize that bar is high, as she has many enviable qualities, but it's good to have goals. She's smart, and, better still, can break down complicated concepts into ideas the rest of us mere mortals can understand. She's poised, possessing the perfect combination of eloquence and conviction to command our attention, leavened with sufficient humility to ensure we don't take her—or ourselves—TOO seriously. She's well liked. I feel very confident asserting that never in the history of higher education has a Director of Academic Assessment been so fully embraced by her campus community.

Sonia also has the most gloriously wicked sense of humor. It works for all occasions! Feeling proud? She can take you down a peg. Feeling disappointed? She'll help you buck up. She accomplishes both through her mastery of the language of sarcasm. This is also my second tongue, but I readily acknowledge her proficiency is well beyond mine. I used to think I'm quick witted, and Lord knows I'm a fast talker, but I have plodded along in conversational concrete shoes in Sonia's wake for years. Sometimes she won the argument without uttering a word—just arching an eyebrow, a gesture that spoke volumes.

And now that Sonia is retiring I feel like a hammer without a nail, a sock without a shoe, a Robin without a Batman, a rhythm without the blues. I know I'm not alone. Her roots here are deep and her fan club vast. I think we need to formalize the network, and propose weekly meetings of "Sonia is Leaving Us." The sentiment fits us to a T.

Now if only we had an acronym...

-- Dr. Michelle McDonald

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As a second year faculty member, I was selected by my dean to fly to Arizona to learn about assessment in 2002. I had no idea what it was about, but the dean selected me, and I had never been to Arizona, so I agreed to go. The plan was for this group to learn about assessment and leave that meeting with a blueprint for Stockton so we would be prepared for our 2010 re-accreditation. We worked non-stop and came up with a pretty good plan that we were to present to the other groups at a conference.

Then we ran into a problem. One of the other colleges brought props for their presentation! We all looked to Sonia, our leader, as we were mortified that we were about to be upstaged. Sonia sprang into action, went to the hotel gift shop, and came back with two stuffed animals. Both were tropical fish. She explained that they symbolized Stockton, given that we were so close to the water.

With the crisis averted, we proudly made our presentation and then flew back to start the challenging work of bringing programs on board with assessment. We took our new assessment mascots back with us for emotional support.

I have no idea what happened to those stuffed animals, but for the past 16 years Sonia has consistently been there to support us. She is an important reason why our 2010 reaccreditation went so smoothly and why we are in a strong position heading into 2020.

I want to thank Sonia for teaching me so much over the years. She would always bring laughter to the assessment meetings and was one of the best people to demonstrate that assessment can be fun.

I will miss you.

-- Dr. Chris Tartaro

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I met Sonia my second year at Stockton when I walked into the Assessment Summer Institute. That Institute, devoted to rubrics, proved a valuable one. However, I did not think it would be at 8AM on the first day of the 3-day Institute.

Sonia has an abrupt, no-nonsense way about her, especially when someone ventures to disagree with her on the role of assessment in the classroom. I know this from first-hand experience. Although I can bristle and pout, and sometimes do in similar circumstances, Sonia's put-down (maybe it's the accent) energized me to figure out what her vision of assessment was all about.

That year, everyone at Stockton, it seemed, talked about assessment. Sonia created that buzz, single-handedly, by sheer willing-it-to-be. My initial thought, and a thought I return to often when in her presence, is "Sonia is just a great teacher."

From one of the many faculty members who benefited from her strict but charming approach to teaching her peers: Sonia's name has become synonymous with quality, student learning, and closing the loop. Other things may change, but that will not. As Sonia insisted so many times, "we must do assessment to find out if students learn what we claim to teach." My student self thinks she did.

I wish you well, Sonia.

-- Dr. Carra Leah Hood

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If you would like to donate to the <u>Sonia Gonsalves Psychology Student Research Fund</u>, please click <u>here</u>.