

Sister Helen Christensen, Maryland-District of Columbia-Virginia Section

Sister Helen Christensen (1927-2012) was an exemplary member of the faculty of Loyola College in Maryland and of the Maryland-District of Columbia-Virginia Section of the MAA.

Her special calling was to make mathematics accessible to students of all academic abilities and interests. To that end, she wrote *Mathematical Modeling for the Marketplace: Graphs and Digraphs in Everyday Life* (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1997) and developed a course for non-majors based on her book. She was an enthusiastic proponent of using class projects and journals to appeal to less mathematically-inclined students and to allow them to express their ingenuity and creativity.

In the MD-DC-VA Section, Sr. Helen served as Vice Chair for Programs 1988-1990 and as Chair 1991-93. During that time she orchestrated a long-overdue major revision of the Section by-laws. Her most lasting contribution was writing and maintaining a Section Officers Handbook outlining the duties of various officers and local meetings organizers -- a handbook members have found enormously helpful, and which is still used. She used her connections to the coordinators of the Putnam Competition to discover which students in our Section had done well on the exam each year and led us to develop ways to recognize them appropriately. At the Association level, Sr. Helen served on the Carriage House Advisory Board and the Liaisons Committee. The Section has acknowledged its appreciation for and debt to Sister Helen by naming its Service Award for her.

Response From Dipa Sarkar-Day, on behalf of Sister Helen Christensen

The Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Loyola University Maryland is honored to receive the Meritorious Service Award on behalf of the late Sister Helen Christensen. We are thankful to the Mathematical Association of America for recognizing her service. Sister Helen dedicated her life to teaching mathematics to many students who, at the beginning of her classes, were not enthusiastic towards

mathematics. However, through her own determination, she was able to change the mindset of a lot of students and also enable them to master far more mathematics than they had expected of themselves. Meanwhile, she loved her students and was a constant cheerleader in sports and co-participant in cultural activities and fund raising. On a personal note, Sister Helen was instrumental for my own involvement with the MAA.

Award will be accepted by Professor Dipa Sarkar-Dey, Chair, Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, Loyola University Maryland.

Biographical Note

Sister Helen Christensen was born in Pensacola, Florida. She earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Mount Saint Agnes College in Baltimore and master's degree in mathematics from Notre Dame. She entered the Sister of Mercy in 1946. Sister Christensen joined the Loyola University Maryland (formerly Loyola College in Maryland) faculty in 1971 after five years in the Mathematics Department at Mount Saint Agnes. She taught at Loyola for thirty five years and retired in 2006 as Professor Emerita.

In 1988, she authored a textbook, *Mathematical Modeling for the Marketplace: Applying Graph Theory in Liberal Arts and the Social and Management Sciences*, and revised the book as *Mathematical Modeling for the Marketplace: Graphs and Digraphs in Everyday Life* (Kendall Hunt, 1997). This book served as the basis for a long-running College math course geared towards non-science majors.

In addition to her service in the Mathematical Sciences Department at Loyola, she was instrumental in supporting Loyola students in their pursuit of national fellowships. Former President of Loyola, Father Joseph A. Sellinger, S. J. asked her to develop a National Fellowship Committee for the College. Under her leadership the Committee became a full-fledged program and she served as the director of the program for twenty years. Since the office's establishment in 1983, several Loyola students have received Fulbright and Goldwater scholarships and a Truman, a Marshall and a Rhodes scholarships.

Sister Helen Christensen died on August 2, 2012, at the age of 85.