

Nancy Dickson-Lewis (1950-2021)



Dear Friends,

It is unimaginable to me that I am writing to you this soon about the loss of another one of our treasured members, Professor Emerita Nancy Dickson-Lewis, from the Department of Dance. If you didn't receive a notice from Glenn Pfeiffer in the Office of the Provost, dated 3/25/21, I am including his message here.

On a personal note, I had the privilege of e-mailing with Nancy in my capacity as Communication Coordinator for our Association. I heard from her in December of 2019 when she related that she had been through multiple treatments, but she was heartened by good doctors, that she was glad to be alive and looked forward to seeing us all when she was doing better. We were blessed to have Nancy in our midst as were her students and the University at large due to her vision for the future of the Dance Department. She will be missed.

All the best,
Claudia Horn

Message from Provost Glenn Pfeiffer

"With a very heavy heart we must announce today that Chapman University Professor Emerita Nancy Dickson-Lewis, former chair of the Department of Dance passed away on Tuesday after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Nancy retired from Chapman in 2016 after a rich career spanning more than three decades of dance, choreography, and teaching, as well as influencing the lives and careers of generations of dancers.

She began teaching at Chapman University in 1986 as an adjunct faculty member bringing with her extensive experience, including teaching at several other colleges and studios in Southern California, and her many professional engagements, such as her post as artistic director of Dance Theatre West, a modern dance company based in Orange County. From 1999 she joined the full-time faculty and in 2012 she became the chair of the department.

I served with Nancy on a few faculty committees, and I can personally attest to her dedication to Chapman students. Teaching and mentoring young artists was always her passion. At Chapman she taught many courses and instituted a new curriculum that contributed greatly to the current excellence of the Dance department. She also choreographed at Chapman and as a freelance choreographer at venues across the United States, and she received extensive recognition for her work. However, her strongest influence on the department was the way she tirelessly championed it, pushed everyone to be excellent, and created a vision for the department in a period of great growth both in number and quality of students. Our outstanding Dance department is where it is today in great part because of her work.

While at Chapman she received two awards for excellence in teaching, but her influence cannot be measured simply by her awards. Dean Giulio Ongaro said, “Time after time, when talking to alumni who studied with Nancy, what comes through is her deep concern for each individual — the way she continued relationships with her students and provided mentorship, advice, and friendship well after their graduation from Chapman. By doing so, she touched many lives very deeply. We will miss her very much.”

The entire Chapman community offers our most heartfelt condolences to her family, her husband David Lewis, and her daughters Allison and Whitney, and the entire family.

Before she passed away, Nancy learned that we had started a campaign earlier in the year to raise funds to name a space for her in the new dance facilities currently under construction. We had hoped to surprise her at the grand opening, but it is heartwarming to know that she understood how much we care during her last days.