

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



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The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.

CONTENTS

Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status 2017

Dilip J. Abreu	3
Anne Catherine Case	6
Esther da Costa Meyer	9
Benjamin A. Elman	11
Joan Stern Girgus	13
Jan T. Gross	17
Barry Leonard Jacobs	20
Robert Owen Keohane	22
Yannis George Kevrekidis	26
Daniel N. Osherson	29
Samuel George H. Philander	33
Jean-Herve Prévost	36
Mark David Rose	39
Lawrence Rosen	42
William Bailey Russel	45
George W. Scherer	48
Brent Donald Shaw	50
Arthur John Stewart Smith	54
Edwin S. Williams	57

JOAN STERN GIRGUS



Joan Girgus will become emeritus professor of psychology after forty years of service to Princeton University. She was recruited to Princeton in 1977 in the dual roles as professor of psychology and dean of the college. During those forty years, Joan has left an indelible mark on the college, the department, and the University community.

Joan's appointment to a tenured professorship marked the beginning of many positive changes at Princeton. She was the first woman to serve as dean of the college and her appointment as professor made her one of only a handful of tenured women faculty members at the University. As professor and dean, Joan helped to pioneer a new era of diversity at Princeton. Her commitment to diversity left its mark not only on the Princeton faculty but also on the delivery of undergraduate education at Princeton and other institutions.

Princeton recruited Joan from the City College of the City University of New York, where she had been serving as associate professor of psychology and dean of the Division of Social Sciences. She served successfully in the CCNY administration during a time of immense turmoil and change. It was not long before her ability as an administrator and her commitment to change would be manifest on the Princeton campus. In her ten years as dean of the college, Joan would devote herself to a number of important initiatives, but none more important than the creation of the residential college system for freshmen and sophomores. The implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Undergraduate Residential Life changed the undergraduate experience from one based exclusively on club life on Prospect Avenue to a more inclusive experience on the Princeton campus.

Her decade as dean of the college also included two important innovations, each of which is now a staple of education at Princeton. Under Joan's watch, the University created the highly successful freshman seminar program as well as the Program in Women's Studies, which is now the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies.

As dean of the college, Joan was a member of the president's cabinet. In that role, she served continuously on the Committee on Appointments and Advancements, the Academic Deans Planning Group, the Council of the Princeton University Community, the Committee on Undergraduate Life, and the Committee on Discipline. After her time as dean of the college, she served as chair of the Faculty Committee on Conference and Appeal, chair of the Committee on Women Faculty in Science and Engineering, and chair of the Animal Care and Use Committee. She also served as a member of more than a dozen other committees, including the Advisory Committee for the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies and the President's Task Force on Gender Equity in Natural Sciences and Engineering.

When Joan retired from the dean of the college's office in 1987, she returned to Green Hall, the former home of the psychology department, as professor of psychology. By 1996, she was cajoled back into leadership as chair of the department. Not surprisingly, she undertook a review and modernization of the undergraduate curriculum and overhauled the requirements for undergraduate psychology majors. One of Joan's most influential contributions during her six years as chair was the strong support she provided for the expansion and reinvigoration of neuroscience at Princeton, by recruiting faculty in that area and supporting the formation of the Center for the Study of Brain, Mind, and Behavior, one of the predecessors to the Princeton Neuroscience Institute.

Born in Albany, New York, Joan was educated at Sarah Lawrence College where she earned her B.A. in 1963. The independently minded undergraduate had not taken a course in psychology when she decided to devote her intellectual career to the empirical study of children's perceptual development. She did her graduate work at the New School for Social Research in New York City, earning her M.A. in 1965 and her Ph.D. in 1969 under the supervision of Julian Hochberg. She won fellowship awards from the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health to support her graduate work.

Joan's research in psychology during her years at CCNY focused on children's emerging ability to differentiate and understand visual objects in their environment. Her work was published in outstanding scientific journals including *Science*, the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, and *Psychonomic Science*. At the same time, Joan began

to study the emergence of children's and adults' misperceptions of visual objects, seeking to explain and understand what we refer to as visual illusions. Her work on visual illusions culminated in the book, *Seeing Is Deceiving: The Psychology of Visual Illusions*, that she coauthored with Stanley Coren in 1978. Joan's accepting the dean of the college position at Princeton did not put an end to her scientific contributions. She continued to work and publish with graduate students in the psychology department throughout her tenure as dean.

A chance meeting with a former childhood friend caused a major change in Joan's research emphasis. While at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto, Joan attended a seminar given by an old childhood friend, Martin Seligman. Seligman was perhaps the world's outstanding scholar in the study of depression and learned helplessness. Joan began a collaboration with Seligman and the late Susan Nolen-Hoeksema that produced seminal work in the empirical study of depression and related psychological disorders.

Joan has always been interested in the broader academic community. She served for ten years as the director of the Pew Science Program for Undergraduate Education, a program dedicated to improving science opportunities for students at liberal arts colleges. In this capacity, she coordinated a collaborative approach to improve science education among more than seventy-five undergraduate institutions.

Another of Joan's projects to improve postsecondary education was her work with The Learning Alliance, a program that strives to provide students and faculty access to best practices in teaching and learning. She has also worked on the scientific advisory committee of the NCAA to study the incidence of traumatic injuries among student athletes.

During the past few years, Joan has split her time between her duties as professor of psychology and her assignment as a special assistant to the dean of the faculty. This innovative role has placed her at the center of making Princeton a family-friendly institution. Her office guides all of the University efforts to attract, accommodate, and retain outstanding dual career faculty.

It would seem to have required several people to accomplish the scientific, administrative, and service contributions that Joan somehow managed to perform. Yet, there was more. Looking toward the community, Joan was a longtime member and chair of the board of

trustees at her alma mater, Sarah Lawrence College. She is a trustee of Adelphi University and The Wenner-Gren Foundation. Her love for the performing arts is shown by her service for more than three decades on the board of trustees of McCarter Theatre.

When Joan Girgus becomes emeritus, the University and the community will struggle to find a way to fill the very large void. Joan, on the other hand, will find many ways to fill her newly created free hours. She will work on analyzing a trove of psychological data that she and her students have collected, and she will expand her work with national and local boards, but there is another dimension not yet mentioned. A visit to Joan's office on the fifth floor of Peretsman Scully Hall reveals what is very close to Joan's heart. Adorning her door are more than two dozen pictures of her gorgeous grandsons (and one or two pictures of her daughter Kate of whom she is very proud). Emeritus status will provide Joan and her husband, architect Alan Chimacoff, more time to devote to this precious corner of their lives.