

## **Funeral Remarks from Dr. Patricia Richards Director, Institute for Women's Studies**

Messiah, Nichole's Parents, Tiffany, Nichole's other family members, many friends and colleagues: I am so sorry for our loss. I speak to you today as the Director of Women's Studies, as Nichole's colleague, and as someone who loved her.

Dr. Nichole Ray was a treasure. Gentle and kind, vibrant and funny, she was a gift to the universe. Something that has struck me in the conversations and correspondence I've had with others since she died is how many of us mention her light. Nichole surely was a bright light in all our lives. She filled any space she entered with that light, with her generosity, with love.

Nichole knew she wanted to teach women's studies from the first undergraduate class she took at UGA in 1995. Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey taught that class and went on to be Nichole's major professor for her Ph.D. in Adult Education, which she earned in 2007. Juanita characterizes Nichole this way: "Nichole was the best and the brightest - a brilliant scholar and one of the best people I've ever known. She possessed a rare intellect and the kindest heart, qualities not often found together."

A lecturer for IWS since 2009, Nichole was promoted to Principal Lecturer this year. This is the highest honor for lecturers. But she was also her harshest critic. When I talked with Nichole about going up for this promotion last year, she was dubious, feeling that she hadn't been able to live up to the sort of performance that merited promotion. I remember sitting in my office going through the requirements for promotion with her one by one and saying, "Nichole, you exceed these expectations!" And of course, her promotion was approved unanimously with an enthusiastic cover letter from the dean of the college.

Nichole was an incredibly hard worker, and she was dedicated to her craft. I remember another conversation with her just this spring, when Nichole, despite the toll the chemo was having on her, exclaimed, "You know Patricia, I am a worker! I have to work! I like to work. I am not myself if I am not working!" And work she did, teaching four classes almost every semester, serving on our curriculum committee continuously since 2009, volunteering as a mentor to undergraduate and graduate students alike, and regularly being invited to speak at special engagements across campus. Her contributions were so vital that it feels impossible to imagine continuing on without her. Not just because of the labor she

put in, but because she did it all with humor, grace, intelligence and dedication. She is and will always be the heart of women's studies at UGA.

The outpouring of love for Nichole from students and colleagues has been immense. I want to read just three of those messages. A former undergraduate wrote, "This woman changed my life so much for the better. I will miss her so dearly and will be living forever in gratitude."

One of our grad student instructors sent a message saying: "As a professor she inspired many people, including myself, and modeled a pedagogy deeply informed by her own values and ethics. I will strive to be as much like her as a teacher as I can be."

And Terri Hatfield, our former programs director and Nichole's good friend, reflected: "I'm so grateful that I existed on this planet at the same time and in the same place as Nichole so we could meet and become friends. Her friendship will be with me always. She inspired me when she was here, and she'll continue to inspire me. I'm going to work like hell to be more like her -- more thoughtful and caring and deliberate, making people feel like they are seen and worthy of being here." It's striking to me how many people saw Nichole as an inspiration, a model to emulate, a person to be more like.

I'll end with the words of Meko McFadden, another grad instructor and a friend of Nichole: "I don't think anyone who knew her can really encapsulate what a mighty soul she was." I agree. Nichole indeed was a mighty soul, a bright light, an inspiration. May her spirit continue to accompany us as we forge our collective path without her.