

Jean Failing

March 17, 1913 – January 30, 2008

Jean Failing, former Dean of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, died January 30, 2008 in Ithaca. Born March 17, 1913 in Portland, Oregon, she was the oldest child of three to parents Marjorie Holcomb Failing and Edward J. Failing.

She received B.A. and M.S. degrees from the University of Oregon, and the Ph.D. degree in Counseling Psychology from Ohio State University in 1940. Before coming to Cornell, Professor Failing taught at Centralia Junior College, Washington. In 1939, Flora Rose, then Dean of Cornell's College of Home Economics, invited her to join the counseling staff as an Instructor. Martha Van Rensselaer, the founder of the New York State College of Home Economics, had retired her position as co-director with Flora Rose, but was still active in College and University communities. During her tenure at Cornell, Jean served as Chairman of the Counseling Service, as Coordinator of Resident Instruction, Associate Dean of Resident Education and then as Dean of the College from 1974-78. She retired as Emeritus Professor in 1978.

During her years at the College, Professor Failing exercised firm leadership in support of excellent undergraduate education and the recruitment of a highly qualified student body as well as helping to build a program with strong links between theory and practice. She advocated strong departments, and a multidisciplinary commitment to solving real world problems, with particular attention to non-formal education for New York State citizens. She traveled frequently throughout the State, visiting high schools and explaining the College's mission and programs to educators and families. She provided committed leadership to recruiting a diverse student body and built the foundation for the changes the College would undertake in decades to follow.

During her tenure as Dean, she launched the College's first drive for private funds, raising \$250,000.00 for student support, teaching projects and other College needs. She led the College through the planning for the first major addition to the 1933 building: Martha Van Rensselaer Hall. The North Wing was completed in 1965.

She initiated the first traveling institutes throughout the State in cooperation with county cooperative extension associations. College faculty members presented current issues in nutrition and health, the

American family, the delivery of human services, and energy and consumer policy. The objective of the institutes was to “bring the best research and knowledge on vital topics to those who need it the most, the people of New York.” It was during her tenure at the College that the name was changed to Human Ecology (1969). Professor Failing helped champion the change and accepted responsibility for explaining the re-interpretation of the College’s mission to alumni, educators, policy makers and citizens throughout the State and beyond.

In service beyond Cornell, Professor Failing was Chairman of the Council on Interaction, for the National Association of Land Grant Colleges and State Universities and served on several other committees at the national level. She was Chairman, Northeast Region, Home Economics Administrators, and on the Advisory Council of the National Association of Extension Home Economists. At Cornell, she chaired the Cornell Committee on Academic Records and Instruction.

During her many years as a highly effective educator and administrator, Jean Failing always maintained a personal warmth and congeniality in her daily interactions with people. She was open and sensitive to the concerns of others, whether students, faculty, staff or other colleagues. She was particularly adept at dealing calmly and effectively with complicated academic and interpersonal issues. Her many professional, as well as personal contributions to the continuing evolution of the College will long be remembered and valued.

Lucinda Noble, Chairperson; Brenda Bricker, Henry Ricciuti