

## Retirement from the Skidmore College Faculty &amp; Spring 1999

**B**E IT RESOLVED: The faculty of Skidmore College expresses its profound appreciation and admiration for the following member of the Skidmore faculty who has this year expressed her determination to retire. The faculty further resolves that the following biographical highlights be included in the minutes of the faculty meeting of April 30, 1999 — as recognition and celebration of distinguished service and achievement.

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MARY ELLEN FISCHER joined the Skidmore faculty in the spring of 1975, having completed her doctorate in political science at Harvard University the year before. A graduate of Wellesley College as well, where she was named a Durant Scholar, Professor Fischer is a widely recognized and honored expert on Romania, the regime of Ceausescu, Eastern Europe and the status of women therein, and the former Soviet Union. A member of Phi Beta Kappa (and at least once president of Skidmore's chapter), Mary Ellen has received a National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship, an NSF graduate fellowship, a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and grants from Fulbright-Hayes, and the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, among others.

Several times a fellow at Harvard's Russian Research Center, Mary Ellen has frequently been an invited speaker at national conferences, member of national boards, and widely quoted expert on Eastern European politics and cataclysms (including, for example, on *The Koppel Report: Death of a Dictator*, and in the *New York Times*). In 1982 she was selected by her Skidmore colleagues to deliver the annual Moseley Research Lecture.

She has made significant contributions as well to pedagogy, particularly to the art of team-teaching. Mary Ellen, Pat Lee, and Susan Kress collaborated on perhaps the earliest 'general education' course, a course on war, which led to work at West Point including Skidmore students successfully completing Academy tests of physical strength and endurance — an untraditional example of Skidmore's *learning by doing*. With a Pew Faculty Fellowship in International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, she developed case studies for her courses. Always focussed on how best to present material to her students, and given events in Eastern Europe over her years of teaching at Skidmore, Mary Ellen has had to revise her courses radically with what must have been alarming frequency.

Her *Nicolae Ceausescu: A Study in Political Leadership* was selected as a Choice Outstanding Academic Book in 1990 and described by the *Times Literary Supplement* as "The fullest and best account anyone has yet given of the dictator's rise to power and the conditions which made this possible." She has published numerous articles and review essays and has presented extensively at conferences all over the world. More recently, she conceived and edited a collection entitled *Establishing Democracies* (1996), to which she and several of her Skidmore colleagues contributed essays — collaboration on an unusually extensive scale.

Widely traveled — from Honolulu to Hungary (not to speak of the many research trips to Romania) — and always returning her research to her classroom and her "fellow travelers" in the department, Mary Ellen is held in highest esteem by colleagues both on campus and all over the world for her scholarly contributions, her pedagogical prowess, and her exemplary acts of citizenship and leadership. Over the years at Skidmore she has been department chair, chair of CAFR, CAPT, CEPP, and the Task Force on Faculty Salaries, and a member of many other committees, notably the recent Presidential Search Committee. As a small token of our recognition of all these achievements, the College honored her just this year with a President's Day Award.

When Mary Ellen was appointed the first Joseph C. Palamountain Jr. Professor of Government, President Palamountain wrote to her in these words: "Having had the privilege of knowing and working with you since your initial appointment at Skidmore, I take special pleasure in this appointment, for I have had, first hand, many opportunities to observe your distinguished contributions as a teacher, scholar, and College community leader. The chair you will occupy is our second endowed chair, and its establishment represents, for me, both a signal personal honor as well as an important institutional milestone in Skidmore's progress."

We applaud Mary Ellen's career at Skidmore and her contributions to her discipline and to the academy; we wish her and Erwin the best and happiest of collaborations and travels yet ahead.