



Over more than 40 years, thousands of students benefited from the work of **Carolyn Callahan**, a leader in gifted education. A pioneer in understanding and challenging those learners called “gifted and talented,” Callahan directed UVA's National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. She founded the Summer Enrichment Program and its companion

Saturday Enrichment Program, which bring gifted and talented students to the University to take specialized classes from UVA faculty and other distinguished teachers. She is a past president of the National Association for Gifted Children and The Association for the Gifted.

She considers another one of her most significant roles to be that of Faculty Representative to the National Collegiate Athletic Association and to the Atlantic Coast Conference, which she took on in 1997. In nominating Callahan for the Zintl award, Craig Littlepage, who was then UVA's

director of athletics, cited her thoughtful approach and compassion for student athletes.

Callahan was recruited to UVA in 1973 after earning her PhD in educational psychology at the University of Connecticut. Her early days on Grounds coincided with the University's adjustment to full co-education. One of only six women out of 120 faculty members in the School of Education when she was hired, she has received recognition as Outstanding Faculty Member in the Commonwealth of Virginia and numerous other accolades. She retired in 2020.

WHY DID YOU COME TO UVA?

There were very few – and still are very, very few – institutions with programs that focus on training teachers or researchers in the area of gifted education. So, when I was looking for a position, I saw the University of Virginia had a program in gifted education. They weren't looking for a position in that program, but because they had one in educational psychology, I decided I would come and see what I could do to get affiliated with the gifted ed program as it might grow, or I might help it grow.

My doctoral advisor really made an incredible impression on me relative to the tradition and the whole Jeffersonian way of thinking about education as a partnership between students and faculty, which I really, really liked. And then coming here and meeting the faculty whom I was going to work with made a major impression on me. They were people who I felt would be good colleagues and would support me, and whom I could work with.

WHAT WAS UVA LIKE WHEN YOU ARRIVED? HOW HAS IT CHANGED AND/OR STAYED THE SAME?

I had been at the University of Connecticut, which is a large public university that was 50 percent female with lots of female faculty. I was in college during the Vietnam War, and I had participated in lots of demonstrations. So, it was very liberal, you might say a little bit radical, in terms of some of the student groups.

I was shocked when I found out that the first women's class was graduating from the College the year that I came here, and that there were so few women faculty. I hadn't even thought about that in my job search. It wasn't even on my radar as an issue. And then I went to class and the men had on jackets and white shirts and khakis and the women were all dressed up – I mean, they wore dresses! I came from an institution where everybody wore blue jeans and T-shirts. I was shocked that there were so few women faculty, and that the culture was so different from what I had experienced in a very different kind of institution.

Also my first year, I had the experience of being told that I wasn't getting a raise as large as everyone else because I didn't have a family to support, which I immediately protested and thought, “I can't believe somebody is telling me this. I'm going to have to go to the higher-ups and find out what's going on.” Well, that got remedied, but I had never experienced that kind of thinking. But I also saw that change over time, at least relative to me. I can't speak for all women.

I was assigned to teach a night class in Cabell Hall because the education school in Ruffner Hall didn't have any more rooms. I came out of the building at nine o'clock and realized there were no lights between Cabell and Ruffner, and of course there weren't things like call boxes or anything like that, and I had to walk in the dark by myself back to Ruffner Hall. I went down to the Dean's office the next morning and said, “I'm not going to teach until nine or 10 o'clock at night and walk back to Ruffner Hall by myself with no lighting.” I told him there are women here on Grounds now, you have faculty who are teaching in buildings across Grounds from where we have our offices and we have no lights. And the Dean said, “Well, I guess we never thought of that.”

continued

In Her Words | Carolyn M. Callahan

HOW DO YOU THINK DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF YOUR IDENTITY, INCLUDING BEING A WOMAN, IMPACTED HOW PEOPLE RESPONDED TO YOU IN YOUR POSITION?

I probably became assertive – I won't say aggressive. I found it necessary to not be as polite as I might have been taught to be and to talk louder. I didn't realize it for a long time. And then I started to hear myself. I wasn't shouting, but when I was in a meeting, I would find myself talking louder, thinking, well maybe at least if I say it loudly, people can't deny that I said it.

On the other hand, one male faculty member said something to me that was really interesting, and I've thought about it several times. One day we're sitting in a meeting and he said, "You know, I'm really afraid of you." And I said, "You're afraid of me?"

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He said, "Anybody who gets a position here as a woman must be a lot smarter than the rest of us because in order to get hired over men, women have to be so much smarter." I didn't think he knew what he was saying, but in a way, it was an affirmation of my ability. And I thought, "Well, maybe that gives me a leg up, if people think, 'If she's here, maybe she is smart.'"

The other thing that being a woman did for me, because the timing was right, was I got to serve on a lot of committees because people decided they needed more representation of women on committees. And sometimes it was really tiring because I would be on more committees than I needed to be on. But it gave me the opportunity to meet many incredibly bright, accomplished and interesting people that I wouldn't have met.

WHAT SUPPORT(S) DID YOU HAVE? WHAT KEPT YOU GOING IN MOMENTS OF ADVERSITY?

I was advantaged in marrying somebody who, every day when I left the house, said, "Make me proud." That was sort of a mantra that affirmed my ability to do good work. And he would also always say, "Watch your back," which was an interesting bit of advice. But never once in my career did he ever say, "You're taking time away from me or the family." He was always supportive in everything that I did. My doctoral advisor also was very supportive. He never stopped being my advisor.

I also was lucky enough to have women around me who were supportive. I always found that the women I interacted with, both internally in the school and externally – people like Pat Lampkin – were always looking out

for other women. And if there was a position or an opportunity, they would always let us know if they thought it was a fit for us, and we could choose whether we wanted to pursue it or not. But I think having women in those leadership roles in the University, and people in support roles like Amy Cronin and Nancy Rivers in the president's office, were people who I knew I could talk to and they would help me find a way to deal with an issue or a problem. I was very careful to cultivate relationships with them – not always asking for something but to volunteer and help with things they thought were important.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN IN A SIMILAR POSITION TODAY?

If I were giving advice, I would say relationships are incredibly important and they have to be collegial. And people need to see you as contributing, not just to your own career, but to the overall good of the institution, the other faculty, and the other people in the institution.

I tried really hard to make people aware of things that might be discriminatory. And I tried not to do it in a way that was going to make them defensive, but to give also a solution to the problem. It's important that you don't just present people with problems, but you help present viable solutions to what you see as problems or issues. It's easy to tell people what's wrong. It's much harder to give people face-saving options to rectify it.

The other important thing for many women in academia is protecting yourself, learning when to say yes and when to say no. I've watched women who say yes to everything who then don't do anything well because they're so overwhelmed. And then women who say no to everything because they want to focus only on their work. Find a good balance for yourself. Where can I really make a difference? What's really going to serve me and the institution well?

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED? WHAT LEGACY ARE YOU LEAVING THAT YOU ARE MOST PROUD OF?

I'd like to be remembered as somebody who did research, teaching, and service that makes a difference in the real world. I think most of the research that I have done has had practical implications for schools and for gifted students in the schools. I developed a program for gifted students that started in 1980, hundreds and hundreds of gifted kids who came here to the University who had an opportunity to be with kids like themselves for two weeks in a summer. My teaching research and service have focused on providing services for gifted students who have been historically under-represented in gifted programs, and I hope I contributed to changing that state of affairs.



I was shocked when I found out that the first women's class was graduating the year that I came here, and that there were so few women faculty. I hadn't even thought about that in my job search. Sadly, I am embarrassed to say, it wasn't even on my radar as an issue as I was coming from another state institution that had done far more to address gender equity in student and faculty make-up.