

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITA URSULA M. THOMAS**

Ursula M. Thomas, professor emerita of the Department of German and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education, died in Cambridge, Wisconsin, on September 9, 2010, at the age of 94. She was born and raised in Iowa and held BA and MA degrees from the University of Iowa. From 1942 to 1950, she taught German and Spanish at both the high school- and college-levels in Illinois, attending courses during the summers at the University of Mexico, Middlebury College, and Northwestern University. Thereafter, she spent time in Europe, working for the most part in Germany with the World Council of Churches to help displaced persons with the process of applying to emigrate. Upon her return to the United States in 1952, she entered the graduate program in German at the UW-Madison, and she remained at this institution throughout the rest of her career. While still a graduate student, she taught at the School of Education's Wisconsin High School and as a teaching assistant in the German department, and after receiving her PhD in 1957, she was promoted through the ranks to a full professorship in 1976. She held a joint appointment in German and curriculum and instruction beginning in 1966, and in 1981, at the age of 65, she retired.

Professor Thomas was a master teacher who was always making plans and implementing her ideas about how to improve German-language programs. She steadfastly advocated teaching the kind of German students could apply to their own special fields of interest and spearheaded numerous attempts to broaden the traditional programs for German majors, which, as she pointed out, were mainly "courses in the history, appreciation, and criticism of German literature." In 1971, she set up a successful UW course in botany taught by Professor Wolfgang Heyser from Göttingen, which offered students five credits either toward their science requirement or in German; in 1975, she arranged a lecture series entitled "German Lectures in the Biological Sciences;" and in 1977, she organized another German-language lecture series on "Current Developments in Medical Practice." There was interest in additional semester-long courses taught in the German language, particularly in history and chemistry, but — presumably for budgetary reasons — those ideas came to naught.

Professor Thomas was widely known for her teaching materials, including a series of four successful textbooks that she published between 1962 and 1970 together with Helmut Rehder and W. Freeman Twaddell, her former colleagues in the German department. Another series, which appeared in 1977 under the title *Lesestoff nach Wahl*, consisted of six textbooks that invited students at the third-semester level to choose their reading materials from the physical sciences, the social sciences, the life sciences, or literature. She worked with energy and efficiency, successfully managing a great amount of detail and often answering several needs at once. Under her supervision, for example, future high school teachers of German did their practice teaching by instructing evening classes of adults who wanted to learn German; and she connected her love of travel with the job of taking photographs and tape-recording conversations of native speakers for her textbooks. At the time of her retirement, she was honored by the Wisconsin chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German for her major contribution to the teaching of German in Wisconsin.

Devoted to her family, she helped to raise the children of her sister Ruth, who died in 1967, and cared for her mother for many years in her Madison home. Generous with her gifts, she donated her textbook royalties to a memorial fund in the German department. She sponsored a number of children overseas through ChildFund International and, in her retirement, crocheted lap robes for patients and gave time to Meals on Wheels. She continued to travel widely, raised show dogs — none more beloved than her German Shepherd Hex —, and joined knitting groups. Her interest in teaching materials lasted into her retirement, when she undertook a comparative study of Austrian, Swiss, and East and West German textbooks that resulted in a bibliography published in 1983.

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Professor Thomas's colleagues remember her fondly as a hard-working, unselfish, conscientious, and loyal individual, a teacher's teacher and a friend to all. She contributed to the stature and reputation of the University of Wisconsin as an institution where first-rate teachers of German were educated: indeed, for many years she herself was the person primarily responsible for this. She is survived by her sister, Margaret Loewen of North Carolina, many nieces and nephews, great- and great-great nieces and nephews, and a special friend, Alaine Johnson of Stoughton.

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