

Resolution on the Death of  
Salvatore A. Soraci, Jr.  
Adopted by the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering  
Tufts University  
October 22, 2003

On August 26<sup>th</sup> of this year Associate Professor of Psychology Sal Soraci lost his four year long battle with lymphoma and leukemia. On that day Tufts University lost one of its finest scientists and teachers.

Sal was born in Yonkers, New York on April 30, 1952. He went to high school in New York at Fordham Prep. He then went to the University of Florida for his undergraduate education. At Florida he majored in Psychology but explored many other disciplines as well. Throughout his life he maintained the strong interest in the Arts and Humanities that developed while he was a college student. In addition, he particularly enjoyed his coursework in anthropology. The evolutionary perspective and understanding of how physiology constrains performance that he learned from this study shaped his future contributions to psychology. After graduating from the University of Florida in 1974, *summa cum laude* and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Sal began graduate school at Vanderbilt University. There he studied Cognitive Psychology primarily under the guidance of John Bransford and Jeffery Franks. While a graduate student at Vanderbilt, he was awarded a number of scholarships and fellowships. Sal's dissertation focused on understanding the mechanisms behind the generation effect, finding that memory is better for information that is self-produced than for that provided by a teacher or experimenter. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1982, Sal expanded his work on the conditions that can optimize learning and memory and began to study learning processes in individuals with mental retardation. His work on relational learning not only advanced knowledge regarding the nature of mental retardation, but also aided the development of interventions to maximize the learning potential of individuals with mild mental retardation. Sal's research was soon supported by a series of grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development beginning with a New Investigator Research Award in 1985. He gained an appointment as a Research Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University and from 1991-1992 was an Associate Professor at the University of Alabama.

In 1993 Sal was a Senior Research Scientist at Vanderbilt and had a prestigious Research Career Development Award from NIH. He had also recently applied for a position as an Assistant Professor in Psychology at Tufts University. A number of the members of our Department had reservations about hiring Sal for the position. They were impressed by his excellent reputation as a researcher and scholar in human cognition, but this opening was to help fill the gap in our Department left by the retirement of Prof. Philip Sampson. Phil, along with Prof. John Kreifeldt from the College of Engineering, had developed a joint undergraduate major in Engineering Psychology and we were looking for someone with a background in Human Factors to replace him. Human Factors takes into account a Psychologist's knowledge of human behavior and abilities when designing equipment and procedures in the work environment, and was not really Sal's field of expertise. In addition, Sal's transferable Career Development Award provided his full salary and stipulated a complete release from teaching responsibilities. Nonetheless, Sal's enthusiasm for coming to Tufts University and willingness to help with the

Engineering Psychology program won us over. Once here he put a great deal of effort into continuing the development of the Engineering Psychology major. He helped expand the course offerings and he found contacts in industry where students could do internships and find jobs. His students appreciated the attention he gave to their education, his ability to communicate his love of Psychology, and his willingness to involve them in his research program. At the same time that he was shepherding the Engineering Psychology major, his research in cognition continued and broadened at Tufts and at the Eunice K. Shriver Center for Mental Retardation in Waltham where he had an appointment as a Research Scientist. Sal was promoted to Associate Professor in 1999 and by the time of his death had published more than 50 research articles, book chapters, and, along with his wife, edited a book on visual information processing. At that time he was also the Principle Investigator or Co-PI on four concurrent grants from NIH.

Sal was also a dedicated teacher and mentor to many graduate students at Vanderbilt and at Tufts. He was extremely generous with his time and he encouraged all of his students to ask speculative questions about human behavior, and to design innovative experiments. He did this in the classroom, in his office and lab, and by exemplifying intellectual curiosity in all Departmental colloquia and at conferences. Sal's enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge was unrelenting, and remarkably infectious.

Despite his outstanding achievements in science, Sal's greatest contributions were to his family and to each of us in our interactions with him. His dedication to his family and pride in their achievements was evident in his actions and conversation on a daily basis. His devotion to and love for his wife, Kimi, and his son, Kanade, was central in his life. To friends, colleagues, and students, his humor and energy were infectious and brightened even the worst of days. His remarkable ability to accentuate the positive and find "links" between ideas and people endeared him to all who had the opportunity and privilege to know him. His wide interests in music, philosophy, politics, science, entertainment, and education reflected the diversity of his thoughts and his simple enjoyment of learning, discussing, and debating issues. His easy-going nature is perhaps best exemplified in the daily "coffee runs" that he had with students, colleagues, and friends during which he would discuss his varied interests in an informal, open, and humorous context. It was nearly impossible to conclude a conversation with Sal without a smile on your face. Sal will be greatly missed, but his positive effect on our lives will be lasting.

We request that this resolution be placed into the minutes of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering, and that copies be sent to his mother, brother, wife, and son.

Respectfully submitted,

Prof. Joseph F. DeBold, Chair  
Lecturer Michael Carlin  
Prof. Richard A. Chechile