



*alpha*

# TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Office of the Secretary of the Faculties

**RESOLUTION ON THE RETIREMENT OF  
KATHLEEN BUTCHER WHITEHEAD  
ADOPTED BY THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES OF  
TUFTS UNIVERSITY  
APRIL 29, 1985**

This year Kay Whitehead is retiring from Tufts University after twenty-six years of service as teacher and administrator. We have all been enriched by her intelligence, common sense, and wit, by her friendliness to students and colleagues, and by her spirit of generous cooperation in sharing our professional duties.

Kay was born Kathleen Butcher in Shelburne, Ontario, Canada. She graduated from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario with first-class honours in mathematics in 1942. The following year she received an M.A. from Smith College, and in 1946 she earned her Ph.D. at the University of Michigan, working in topology with the renowned Professor R. L. Wilder. She had just completed her dissertation when she met George Whitehead, another young topologist, and they were married. She taught at Wellesley, Brown, Smith, Boston University and Brandeis, and spent a year at Oxford and a year at Princeton where George was visiting.

Kay came to Tufts in the fall of 1959. For the first part of her career here, she was exclusively involved in teaching, first as Lecturer and then as Assistant Professor: for most of this period she worked at what was officially half-time but actually far more than that. In 1973 she was appointed Senior Lecturer and Administrator of the Elementary

*Whitehead, K.B.*

Mathematics Program; ever since then she has played a unique role in the Mathematics Department in the way that she has combined her teaching and administrative duties.

She has always been one of our most effective teachers, and one whose section the students strive to enroll in. She has maintained a real interest in the subject matter of our elementary courses and the best way to present it. She has done her part in the development of our curriculum. Perhaps more important, she has genuinely cared about her students and the problems that may seem trivial to us but that are so important to them. She is the kind of teacher that parents hope their children will meet when they go away to college.

Kay has an amazing knowledge of the myriad details that administration requires, and the ability to use this knowledge to make on-the-spot decisions. Her commitment to the undergraduate mathematics program at Tufts has had a great deal to do with its success over the years. Any time an undergraduate has asked one of us whether he can take Math 46 without having taken Math 13 first, or whether she can possibly be fit in as the sixty-seventh member of a class that meets in a room with sixty seats, our answer has been, "Why don't you ask Dr. Whitehead? She can tell you!" The long line outside her office attested to the number of students that she helped with such questions, and with the fact that they knew that she would give them an answer that was correct and a judgement that was more than fair. She also solved many difficult combinatorial problems in the scheduling of classes and examinations.

The same openness that Kay has shown to undergraduates characterizes the warm and friendly hospitality that has been an important part of the life of her department. Not only have our faculty and graduate students gotten to know each other better at the gatherings in her home, but there we have often met old and new friends among the mathematical community, both local and international. She was the official representative of Tufts at the International Congress of Mathematics at Nice in 1970. Her diverse interests ranging from opera to detective stories, from history and politics to archaeology--an interest that once took her as far as Iran--have enlivened many a conversation in the Kursaal.

For the next year Kay and George will be able to enjoy their beloved England with a freedom they have not had before. Kay's post at Tufts may be filled, but her place never can be. We thank her for all that she has given us, and we wish her and George many years of happy and active retirement together.


For the Faculty,

Committee

George F. Leger

William F. Reynolds

James W. Schlesinger

  
Elizabeth Canny  
Secretary of the Faculty