Resolution on the Death of James George Ennis, Associate Professor of Sociology
Read at the Arts, Sciences, & Engineering Faculty Meeting, 2nd September, 2015

The Department of Sociology invites the Arts, Sciences and Engineering Faculty to join us in remembering our friend and colleague, James Ennis, whose death on July 7th, 2015 deeply saddened us all.

The Ennises were originally from Brooklyn. Jim’s mother was Italian, his father worked as a union metallurgist/metalworker. They eventually landed in New Jersey, near Princeton, where they lived among extended family. Jim was an honors graduate of Middlebury College in sociology and psychology, elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He did his graduate work in Harvard’s Psychology and Social Relations Department, where his dissertation director was the eminent social psychologist R. Freed Bales. He joined the Tufts faculty in 1983, after his first position as an assistant professor of sociology at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh, received tenure in 1987, and held the position of Associate Professor until his death.

Jim was an intellectual and a sociologist through and through, probably the best in the department’s long history. He saw everything through a sociologist’s eyes and, consequently, was always asking “why?” and encouraging everyone around him to do the same. He was very widely read and an expert in several fields, the sociologies of science and technology, art and taste, among others. He could pursue research and scholarship in many different areas because his inquiries were inspired by a coherent set of questions derived from an exceptionally refined understanding of social theory. His innovative 1980 PhD dissertation brought together social psychological approaches to small groups with what were at the time rapidly developing advances in social network analysis. While publishing in this area, Jim also pursued a separate line of work, combining his personal commitment to social justice movements with academic research on social networks. He analyzed and published on diverse topics such as the biotech industry and its links with academe and the mobilization of social movements.

He was however best known for his research that applied techniques of network analysis to promote better understanding of the dynamic structuring of scientific fields and research specialties. His interest in the analysis of social fields led Jim to develop close ties with theorists and methodologists in France, and he played a crucial and vital role in bridging insights and analytical approaches on both sides of the Atlantic, a contribution that was recognized with an invitation to be a Visiting Professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. He loved being in Paris, not least because he was able to see more of his brother Mark who had moved there.

Jim was brilliant at things that are difficult to measure, which he would find ironic because he spent much of his time figuring out how to measure things. **Collaboration** is an example, as is **Contributing to the discipline**. He often collaborated in his research; at Tufts he collaborated with other faculty on a user’s manual for a software conceptualizing statistics, and supervised a Social Psychology major for a number of years with a colleague in the Psychology department; and he was called to serve on committees of national organizations and professional associations such as the Social Science Research Council and the American Sociological Association. His work also had **Impact**; he lent his data analysis skills to organizations and projects ranging from polling firms, to a prevention program for children at risk of emotional disturbance, and a study of the informal aid networks of the elderly in rural areas.

**Mentoring** is mentioned frequently in the tributes from current and former students and colleagues. They use the same words: “gentle, kind, thoughtful, generous, warm, supportive, intelligent, so/super smart”; they allude to Jim’s signal influence on their lives: he “ignited my love for the work of social science”, “shaped my academic path here at Tufts”, “had a hand is shaping who I've become”, and leave us wondering: how do you teach someone to “think harder and wiser”?

Jim had the soul and the temperament of a **Teacher**, a skill or perhaps a quality that is also hard to measure,
though we try. He liked to foster inquisitive minds and help students to learn how to structure their ideas in an analytical manner. He taught them the logic of inquiry, how to ask researchable questions and to gather and analyze the kind of data that made it possible to answer them. His courses were on big topics—American Society, Self and Society, the Computer Revolution, as well as in his specialty fields. He also became the anchor of our department; for many years he, and only he, taught two of the core courses in the major, Quantitative Methods and Social Theory. The latter was a masterful analysis, connecting classical and contemporary theories and prompting students to explore questions such as: Does theory improve over time, and if so, how? How can theory enrich empirical investigations? Which parts of the classical tradition remain relevant, and which have been eclipsed? Jim followed his former students, was in contact with many of them, and not or not only because of the requests for letters of recommendation that follow academics for years. It is not surprising that his sons have inherited his love of social science and his intellectual adventurousness: Noah is a PhD candidate in NYU's Sociology department and Sam, having graduated from Tufts in Sociology, is now a software engineer and self-described “professional programmer, social science and statistics enthusiast”.

Finally Jim was a Colleague, in many different ways. He chaired our department, which was then a combined Sociology/Anthropology department, for 6½ sometimes stormy years. His talent for organization (executed with an array of notebooks, pens, and the latest technology and software which we envied), made him the natural choice for university committees (notably the Educational Policy Committee which he chaired for two years), and search committees where he kept the peace during hiring discussions. He was seriously committed to the techniques, institutions and governance of higher education and promoted important reforms at Tufts.

Jim was also a colleague in a more immediate personal sense. He was the person who would show up unexpectedly when you were giving a paper, see something on your bookshelf and engage you in discussion, or comment incisively on your work - often pointing out, gently, the crucial flaw in your argument. He led a full and rich life within and beyond academia and shared his passions with us. In addition to writing about art and artists and mapping structures of critical taste and musical preferences, he was involved in the arts himself, as was his wife Gloria, a writer. He loved jazz and played the saxophone. He was an avid photographer and, as always, put that expertise at the service of his department: graduations, students and university events were recorded and remembered. Even during the last two and a half years of illness and debilitating treatments, which he endured with characteristic stoicism and humor, we were treated to a regular stream of photographs – of protests, political events, Boston skylines – as well as news on Sociology, academia, and anything else he thought would interest us. One of his last emails forwarded a celebration of the life of saxophonist and composer, Ornette Coleman.

Jim was a devoted and proud husband, father and brother and a linchpin of the Tufts community. We miss him terribly. For the department and the university his loss is immeasurable.

We ask that this resolution be included in the minutes of the faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering, and that copies be sent to Jim’s wife, Gloria Garfunkel, his sons, Noah and Sam, and his brother Mark.