Professor Emerita Carolyn Heilbrun Dies

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arolyn Heilbrun, Avalon Foundation Professor Emerita in the Humanities, died on Thursday, Oct. 9. Her death was by suicide, an option Heilbrun had advocated as a rational way to approach old age.

Heilbrun joined the Department of English and Comparative Literature in 1960 as an instructor, rising to full professor in 1972, and Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities in 1986. She served as president of Columbia’s Modern Language Association in 1984. She taught her last classes in the spring of 1992.

Known for her courses on feminist theory and modern British literature, Heilbrun was an advocate for the advancement of women’s rights. She was a founder of Columbia’s Institute for Research on Women and Gender and served as its first director from 1967-1989. She also served as editor of Columbia University Press’ “Gender and Culture” series.


Born in 1926, Heilbrun received a B.A. from Wellesley in 1947 and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia in 1951 and 1959, respectively. Heilbrun was a Guggenheim Fellow, AAUW NEH Senior Research Fellow, Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellow, Radcliffe Institute Fellow and Radcliffe Institute Fellow and NEH Senior Research Fellow.

A Glimpse of Columbia History . . .

To celebrate Columbia’s 200th anniversary, College Dean Emeritus Harry Carman headed a cast that included eight students and citizenry of New York in colonial costume. The ceremony was held just south of Trinity Church on the original campus site and featured a dedication of a plaque on the US Steel building facing Rector Street.