Columbia Mourns the Death of Social Work Professor Howard Polsky

**By Kristin Sterling**

Howard W. Polsky, professor of social work, died on Sunday, Oct. 19, in New York.

A distinguished educator, researcher and prolific author, Polsky had been teaching at Columbia’s School of Social Work since 1961. His research interests focused on juvenile delinquency and treatment; organizational development; staff training; corrections institutions; family life education; children’s services and more. In 1998 he created a popular new research course, “Social Work and Ethnicity.”

In the 1950s and 1960s he was one of the pioneers who used social science knowledge, particularly sociology, to improve social service programs. Throughout his career, Polsky played an important role in defining social advocacy for segments of the population who are confronted with inequalities in everyday life.

Polsky’s seminal work “The Delinquent Boy: A Sociological Study of Juvenile Delinquency” was a best-seller. Its popularity prompted Polsky to conduct seminars about the book in libraries throughout New York City and in Jewish centers and homes for the elderly.

For Polsky, the capstone of his career came with Mainstreaming Institutions: From Custodialism to Community in Residential Care, written with his wife Roni Berger. The thesis of the book, according to Polsky, is that it is as important for social services to change their normative and social structures as it is to “heal” or “empower” clients.

Among his other contributions, Polsky was the principle investigator of the Child Welfare League of America’s Project at Edwin Gould Academy in Westchester from 1994 to 1998. The project was a national study of children and teenagers living away from home in residential treatment centers, group homes and foster care.

From 1987-1989 Polsky was a member of the New York City Fire Department Project planning and management team. The team’s goal was to establish a workplace climate conducive to gender integration. He analyzed and diagnosed FDNY culture and designed, trained and implemented the action programs. The project allowed him to fulfill a childhood dream of riding on a fire engine.

Polsky received a B.A. from University of Chicago, 1949, and an M.S.W. in Group Work (1954) and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Wisconsin (1957).

He is survived by his wife Roni Berger. The cause of death was complications from emergency heart surgery.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

University’s Horst Stormer Briefs Congressional Staff

**By Ellen S. Smith**

On Oct. 20, 2003, Congressional and key Federal Agency staff received an introductory overview of the key concepts in nanoscience and nanotechnology by leading scientists, among them Professor of Physics and Applied Physics Horst Stormer and Evelyn Hu, BC ’69, GSAS ’75, scientific director, Nanosystems Institute, UC Santa Barbara.

The briefing was attended by close to 100 staff and was coordinated by the Science Coalition (TSC), as part of its Science 101 series to assist lawmakers in making informed policy decisions in this area.

The professors led the attendees through the groundbreaking scientific concepts behind nanotechnology, or the art of manipulating materials on an atomic or molecular scale and building microscopic devices. The researchers explained that many core scientific disciplines such as chemistry and physics interact to form the basis of nanoscience. They also described the potential applications of the new scientific frontiers, noting that like all scientific discoveries—even such common ones as the knife—this new technology can yield both positive and negative uses.

The Science Coalition was formed in the mid-1990’s to expand and strengthen the federal government’s investment in university-based scientific, medical, engineering and agricultural research, its mission statement noted. Sustained support for research across the entire range of scientific disciplines is the most important step the nation can take to maintain America’s position at the forefront of the scientific discovery, technological innovation, and economic growth in the 21st century. Columbia University was a founding member of the group which includes 400 organizations, with member universities (over 80) serving as the steering committee.