

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine



Committee on Women in Academic Science and Engineering

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE ENGINEERING AND PUBLIC POLICY

28 June 2006

Dear Mrs. Carolyn Mabee,

Denice Denton was an extraordinarily talented scholar, educational leader, and relentless voice for progress.

She was bigger than life. She opened doors, and stood in them to let others through. She mentored young scholars and students. Her enthusiasm for science was clear and infectious.

She was a force—a magnificent force. She pushed the institutions she inhabited to be better than they wanted to be.

The National Academies *Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* will honor her memory by dedicating our upcoming report to her. This decision has been enthusiastically endorsed by the presidents of the National Academies: President Ralph Cicerone of the National Academy of Sciences, President Bill Wulf of the National Academy of Engineering, and President Harvey Fineberg of the Institute of Medicine.

Denice was a "first" in most categories of the report. Being at the forefront made her a target. Her tragic death highlights that we have much further to go.

She was an active committee member, and also delivered the closing address at the committee's *Convocation on Biological, Social, and Organizational Components of Success* last December. In that address, she said

I'm going to offer you a set of recommendations that will cost you nothing but courage. They can also be used more broadly well beyond the hallowed halls, and thus impact the "cross-institutional interlock," or as I would say as an electrical engineer, "the system."

First of all, we should have zero tolerance for bullying behavior. It should not be acceptable in the workplace or anywhere else. If you are an academic leader, you should confront faculty and others who are abusive to students, staff and other faculty, particularly senior faculty.

Tenure is not a license to kill. There are limits to acceptable behavior in the academy. How many of you have seen on an academic campus, senior people with tenure over and over abuse people who are lower than them in the power structure, and nobody ever does anything? Why does that happen? Why do we let that happen? It's unacceptable.

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If you have issues with dealing with conflict and you are an academic leader, take a class. Get help. Seek support. People don't want to confront each other. But we have to. It's our job. It's in the position description. We can learn from conflict. We do learn from conflict.

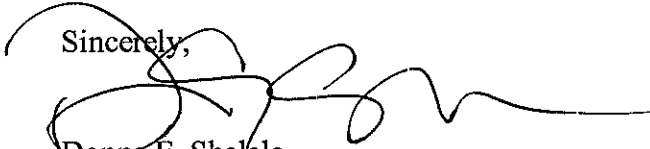
Confront people's biases. When biases come out if you're an academic leader or anything else, confront people's bias.

And here is another one, and this is not a popular one, but I'm just throwing it in there. Support your local senior feminist colleagues, male and female. It's lonely at the top.

I cannot imagine a world without Denice. We have all lost a friend, a colleague, and a champion.

We will miss her.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donna E. Shalala', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donna E. Shalala

President, University of Miami

*Chair, Committee on Maximizing the Potential
of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*