



## *IN MEMORIAM*

Helen Lena S. Astin  
Professor of Education  
UC Los Angeles  
1932-2015

Helen “Lena” S. Astin, Distinguished Professor Emerita at UCLA and senior scholar at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), died on Oct. 27 in Los Angeles at the age of 83 after a prolonged illness. She is best known for her loving heart, said family members and friends, as well as for her research on higher education issues related to women, equity, civic engagement and spirituality.

For most of her early professional life, Astin’s scholarly work focused on issues of equity for women, motivated in part by her experience as a young woman with a Ph.D. in psychology trying to find work and by her activism during the early years of the women’s movement.

Her 1969 book, “The Woman Doctorate in America,” which became part of Citation Classic, the acclaimed academic series published by the University of Maryland, was released just as the women’s movement was beginning. Astin’s national study debunked several myths about highly educated women, including the belief that they drop out of the workforce to have children and raise families. She also documented the existence of widespread sex discrimination in the higher education workplace.

Astin’s 1991 book, “Women of Influence, Women of Vision,” coauthored with Carole Leland, was an in-depth study of 77 prominent women leaders who had helped bring about societal change on behalf of women. The study found that these women shared power, saw leadership as a collective effort, and demonstrated a passionate commitment to social justice, equality and inclusion.

Helen Astin (née Stavridou) was born on Feb. 6, 1932, in Serres, Greece, and, in her youth, witnessed the occupation of Greece by the Axis powers during World War II. She traveled to the United States in 1951 to pursue higher education and met her husband in

1954 when both were doctoral students in psychology at the University of Maryland. They were married in 1956.

In 1973, the Astins accepted professorships in higher education at UCLA where they remained until their retirement in 2002. As the associate provost of the College of Letters and Science (1983-87), Helen Astin established the Student Research Program, which provides opportunities for undergraduates to work directly with faculty on their research projects. In 1989, she cofounded the UCLA Center for the Study of Women with fellow faculty members Nancy Henley, Anne Peplau, Kathryn Sklar and Karen Rowe, and served for a time as its interim director.

Among her 14 books are “Higher Education and the Disadvantaged Student” (1972), “Some Action of Her Own: The Adult Woman in Higher Education” (1976), “Minorities in American Higher Education” (1982), and “Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students’ Inner Lives” (2011). Astin also described her life experiences in “The Road From Serres: A Feminist Odyssey” (2014).

She was a senior scholar at HERI, a nationally renowned institute at UCLA that houses the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which conducts the nation’s largest and oldest empirical study of higher education. It serves as the most comprehensive source of information on college students in the U.S., with an annual longitudinal study of the American higher education system that includes data on approximately 1,900 institutions, more than 15 million students and over 300,000 faculty.

She was also a trustee of Hampshire College (1972-79) and Mt. St. Mary's College (1985-97 and 2001-11) and chaired the Board of the American Association for Higher Education, among several national organizations she helped lead. She was also active in the American Psychological Association. She received the Distinguished Research Award of Division J of the American Education Research Association as well as the Mentoring Award and Howard R. Bowen Distinguished Career Award from the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

The Astins have been generous benefactors of fellowships to UCLA students. In 2006, for example, they created an endowment to support two fellowships for education graduate students in the Department of Education’s Division of Higher Education and Organizational Change at UCLA.

In 2008, the Office of the Chancellor, in partnership with the vice provost for undergraduate education, created the Astin Civic Engagement Scholars Program, named to honor the couple and their important research that demonstrated the positive effect community service can have on the lives of college students. Last fall, the Astins established an endowment fund to further support these young scholars.

In addition to her husband and two sons, Helen Astin is survived by three granddaughters