Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Cecelia Harrison Foxley, '64

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Dr. Cecelia Harrison Foxley graduated from USU in 1964 with a degree in English. She credits professors in the English department who encouraged her to develop the leadership and organizational skills. And develop them she did!

Dr. Foxley has dedicated her life to education, both in Utah and the nation. She served for more than ten years as Commissioner of the Utah System of Higher Education. In fact, she holds the record for the longest-serving senior executive in the state’s higher education system, and is still the only woman to have held that position. She has received a number of special awards for her life-long dedication to serving the state of Utah, including a Lifetime Achievement award from the Center for Women and Gender in 2014. She was also included in the five-story “Utah Women 2020” mural installed in Salt Lake City to celebrate the diverse contributions of women spanning the history and geography of the Beehive State (https://womensmural.com/).

One of Dr. Foxley’s most significant achievements was as an early advocate for civil rights. As Assistant to the Provost for Affirmative Action at the University of Iowa in 1972, she fought discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin. She was tireless in reviewing policies and practices to ensure fair and equitable treatment. This was at a time when women might have been queried about their marital status on employment forms or asked if they “planned a family.” She taught one of the first courses on “Sex Role Stereotyping and Socialization in Education.”

When she returned to USU as Assistant Vice President for Student Services, Dr. Foxley was one of only five women to hold the rank of Professor, and the only woman administrator in central administration. Dr. Foxley’s concern with equal rights extended to her leadership in the state system of higher education. In 2000, she commissioned a report on Women Full Professors across the system.

Dr. Foxley has played an active role in many organizations; she is widely respected for her excellent judgment on issues faced by the American higher education community. She has been a consultant to a variety of education, business, civic, religious and government groups on many topics, including behavioral science, management, organizational development, program evaluation and equal opportunity. She has
authored or co-authored six books and numerous journal articles on topics such as educational management, non-sexist counseling, human relations education and equal opportunity. She has received a number of special awards for her life-long dedication to serving people in the state of Utah.

Gracious and generous in all she does, Dr. Foxley spoke to our students during a Distinguished Alumni Series about “Making the Most of Your Education.” She commended students for seeking a university degree, particularly at a residential, traditional campus. She also encouraged students to take advantage of out-of-classroom opportunities and to expand their areas of study to prepare for future employment. We concur with her assessment that “A broad education prepares one for personal, professional and community life.” In this presentation, Cece pointed out the obvious income advantages to obtaining a college degree, but she also said that it’s “the healthy route, intellectually and physically. “Those who participate in higher education become enlightened and informed citizens,” she stressed. Completing a higher education, in her opinion, also has an impact on family and encourages community involvement. Cece Foxley is a terrific role model. She is deeply involved in the community, investing time and energy in a number of philanthropic initiatives.

Dr. Foxley has been a loyal and generous supporter of the Department of English, establishing a scholarship in her name to support students who intend to become teachers. She credits her “superb undergraduate education for making her a person who would reach lofty heights in higher education.” As she put it when creating the endowment, “When the time came that I could afford to give back to USU, I chose to establish a scholarship endowment in the Department of English for outstanding students who plan to become high school English teachers. I did this not only because that is how I started my career in education, but also because of my strong belief that high school students need to be better prepared--particularly in English and math--in order to go on to college.” We are honored to have Dr. Foxley as an alum, and grateful to her for her continued support!