

## In Memory of Vickie Mikelonis

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The first meeting I had as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota was with my newly appointed advisor, Vickie Mikelonis. I remember her office well (shelves overflowing with books, knickknacks from Eastern European countries, pictures of Tony and Ted), and her uncanny ability to find anything in the numerous stacks within seconds. In class, she would literally bounce in carrying about 5–6 heavy binders, ready to go with at least twice as much energy as any of us had. One day we had to change rooms, and she grabbed those binders and moved so quickly to the new place that she had been sitting for five minutes before we finally came tripping through the door. She just winked at us and then continued class discussion.

Her energy and love for students and work was amazing and having the opportunity to share the classroom with her from 1999–2005 was inspiring. Our team teaching began when I misunderstood her suggestion that I come to her Grant Writing class back in 1999. She later confessed that she only meant I should come to one class session, but at the time I heard, “Come to class, and maybe you will get to come to Ukraine with us.” So I started coming to every class that semester. She also told me later that it surprised her so much that she figured she might as well put me to work. My class observation quickly became team teaching because she simply wouldn’t let me sit there, but kept drawing me into class discussions and activities, and after a while, into the planning as well. If I close my eyes, I can still see the sparkle in her eyes as she watched students engage (and struggle a bit) then transform and share their new understanding with the class. One of the last classes she taught was a small undergraduate academic writing class. I can still hear the glee in her voice when she told me about how the students really got it, and they were able to move from writing as intuitive to writing as conscious understanding of the structures they were using.

This energy not only came out in the classroom but also from her love for Eastern Europe and extensive work on United States Agency for Interna-

tional Development (USAID) projects. She not only taught grant-seeking but also lived it. I remember the day she bounced into the office with a sparkle in her eye, saying \$20 million in 20 years! She had just helped write a grant that helped universities in Ukraine adjust to the switch from a command to a market economy. She had previously worked on environmental projects in Eastern Europe during the 1990s and was fascinated by the cultural changes she



**Vickie Mikelonis**

observed during that time. I think by the time she finished her grant writing career, she had brought in \$30 million for environmental and academic projects in Eastern Europe.

Her affinity for Eastern Europe came from her Polish roots. She once told me about her Polish-speaking grandmother and thought that maybe the language came so easily to her because she had heard it as a child. She was a fabulous cook and often filled her kitchen table with pierogi and other Polish delicacies. She joked that her boys, Tony and Ted, whom she adopted from India, were

Polish on the inside because they preferred Polish cooking to Indian food. These boys were her passion outside school, and she often said, in some ways, her greatest teachers. Each boy had his own challenges; she savored the differences that made each of them special and learned about overcoming challenges from their experiences as well as her own. She was a single mother and loved those boys as much as any two parents could have done together.

Culture was one of her passions, not just looking at the abstraction of it from a theoretical perspective, but living it. She advised many international students, two of which I remember her admiring, Marianna Mendez, first as a master's then a PhD student from Venezuela, and Gertrude Hewpathirana, a master's student from Sri Lanka. She really listened to them and did everything she could to help them bridge the cultural gaps between their academic experiences at home and the academic culture in the department. She appreciated their struggles and understood them with an open mind, identifying and working with them to overcome the cultural biases built into the assessment of academic writing.

Mentoring was another passion that she had, and it led me from not only sharing her classroom but also her writing space—a cozy porch heated by a wood-burning stove in the winter. During the two years that we wrote *Grant Seeking in an Electronic Age*, we, along with Signe Betsinger, would sit and write in the evenings, mixing writing, stoking the fire, and drinking tea together. Her amazing energy showed through here as well. I

remember one night we had been writing and I looked up at the clock and remember saying, "Please don't tell me it is 10 minutes before 1:00 a.m." And with the customary twinkle in her eye, she said no. It was actually five minutes to 1:00 a.m.; the clock was a little slow. The next time we sat down to write, she told me she had worked until 3:00 a.m., and then woke up at 6:30 a.m. to drive the boys to school.

Nothing stopped her from giving all she had, not even cancer. During my last semester, while I was pulling together my dissertation, she slipped and fell on the ice in February. When the doctors realized that she had broken the strongest bone in her body, they also discovered that she had bone cancer. That semester, as she went through chemotherapy, and struggled with side effects like diabetes, she still had me come visit and bring my work for her to review and give formative feedback. I would work on giving feedback to her master's students, as she would work on giving me feedback. At times when she felt better, she would insist we all go out for dinner together afterwards. Her generosity of spirit, even in the toughest of times, was amazing.

To me, Vickie will always be one of the heroes of the discipline. During the last part of her career, she tended to stay at home for her boys, consequently was less active on the conference circuit, and therefore out of the spotlight. Many of her publications were not in English, and not necessarily recognized in our discipline. Yet she continued to work on developing materials and books for people in Eastern Europe, founding the Consortium for Enhancement of Ukrainian Management Education (CEUME), an organization in Ukraine designed to help academics adapt to an education system supporting a market, rather than a command economy. She was one of the most creative people I have ever encountered, creating the bachelor's of Applied Business Program at the University of Minnesota, conceiving interesting projects in Eastern Europe that USAID found worth sponsoring, and listening to the cultural differences the international students encountered to help them create cultural bridges. The source of her creativity was deep listening and a problem-solving attitude. The fruit of her creativity still lives on, influencing the minds and perspectives of students.