Senate Resolution for Professor Emma Felder  
March 12, 2009

Born in Magnolia, Arkansas in 1927, Dr. Emma Felder left this life on November 17, 2009. She was 81 years old. Dr. Felder taught at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee College of Nursing for 23 years and was a Professor Emeritus at the time of her retirement in 1996. She was proud of her position at UWM and contributed extensively to both the College of Nursing and the campus community. In 2003, she was honored for her contributions to the university as a UWM Spaights Plaza Awardee - a recognition that pleased her greatly.

Emma was the youngest of nine children born to a sharecropper and was the first in her family to attend college. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Hampton University in Virginia and later earned a master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee and a doctorate from Marquette University. She was inducted into the Hampton University School of Nursing Hall of Fame in 1991.

Dr. Felder was a pioneering leader in nursing and had a number of “firsts” to her credit. She was a founding member of the Milwaukee chapter of the National Black Nurses Association and a Charter Member of the Association of Black Nursing Faculty, Inc. She was an active member of these organizations for years. She also served as co-Editor of The ABNF Journal, official journal of the Association of Black Nursing Faculty, Inc.

In 1986, Dr. Felder founded and served as the first director of the UWM Center for Cultural Diversity and Health. The center which flourishes in the College of Nursing today as the UWM Center Cultural Diversity and Global Health was the first of its kind in the country. It was created "to teach students and health professionals how to develop skills in culturally competent health care and to guide research and influence public policy related to disparities in care between minorities and the general population” The center predates by more than a decade the current national focus on health disparities.

In her private life Dr. Felder was also a pioneer. She and her family were the first black family in the neighborhood when they bought their first home in Milwaukee and her three children integrated the elementary school that they attended. Dr. Felder was an individual with a good heart and the strength of her convictions. She always had the courage to speak her mind on issues that she felt strongly about and was a strong advocate for both students and patients throughout her long career in health care and nursing education.

A long time UWM colleague of Dr. Felder’s – Professor Winston Van Horne - shared the following thoughts with me recently. In West African cosmology it is understood that those who have led lives of decency when they walked among us are granted the title of “Ancestor” when they shed their mortal bodies. They then continue to move freely without impediments throughout the cosmos and affect to good purpose the lives of those they choose. Dr. Emma Felder is most deserving of the designation of Ancestor. She will be missed by her colleagues in the College of Nursing and across campus. Her passion for social justice and her commitment to health for all will continue to have a positive influence on many in Milwaukee and beyond for years to come.