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Legacies of SFSU Social Work Emeritus Faculty, Dr. Kenji Murase

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San Francisco State University (SFSU) emeritus faculty member, **Dr. Kenji Murase**, passed away at his home on 2 June 2009 at the age of 89 years. From 1967-1990, he was an SFSU professor in the School of Social Work, where he was known as a prolific writer and productive social work educator, strong researcher, and community activist. His wide array of accomplishments demonstrated his deep commitments to community services, human and civil rights, social justice, and civic engagement.

As a social work educator for 23 years at SFSU, he was dedicated to excellence. His students excelled and became professional service providers and leaders. Among his students were Heather Fong (San Francisco Chief of Police), Caryl Ito (San Francisco Airport Commissioner), Steve Nakajo (San Francisco Fire Department Commissioner and SFSU educator), and Janlee Wong (Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter).

Dr. Murase was a leader in many professional organizations, including the Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers. He was San Francisco State University's first director of the Institute for Multicultural Research and Social Work Practice (then called the Center for Cross Cultural Research and Social Work Practice).

Many of Dr. Murase's SFSU colleagues reflected on his contributions to SFSU's School of Social Work, community, and society. The School's Director, Dr. Rita Takahashi, said he was a "giant" in the social work profession and in interdisciplinary human services. "Kenji Murase was recognized nationally and internationally because of his multicultural diversity research, publications, and professional work. He was involved in social justice pedagogy, research and practice long before many others began to explore this important area." Another SFSU colleague, Dr. Jerry Shapiro, attributed the School's "successful launch" of the Master of Social Work (MSW) degree program (in 1966) to Dr. Murase, saying that "His vision, intellect and diplomacy embodied what social work at San Francisco State was intended to be all about. He was a wonderful colleague."

Dr. Murase's co-workers cared deeply about him because he always cared about them, and he treated them respectfully. Dr. Susan Sung, who was Dr. Murase's office mate at SFSU for 12 years, said:

He was the most caring colleague one could ever find. What he taught me was that one could stand strong in his/her views and still be respectful of the opposing views. Educators from afar would visit him and seek his company in conferences and meetings. His classes would always be fully enrolled. Students would drop by the office to seek his counsel. Students always commented on how much they learned from him.

After retiring from SFSU, he devoted considerable time to improve community and society by serving on non-profit organization boards and participating in community-based projects. Among the many organizations with which he volunteered hours of service included: Japanese American National Library, Kimochi Inc. (senior services), United Japanese Community

Services, Japanese Community Youth Council, Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, Kokoro Assisted Living Facility, National Japanese American Historical Society, and Nisei Student Relocation Commemorative Fund (NSRCF).

The impact of Dr. Murase's work with NSRCF is continuous, broad, and strong. The Fund, which was established in 1983, has been providing annual scholarships to needy Southeast Asian students who are refugees or descendants of refugees. The Fund's website says that since its inception, "NSRCF has awarded more than \$340,000 to 365 deserving students. Its endowment exceeds \$650,000." This Fund distributes 95% of its donations to needy students, and only 5% is used for operating costs and expenses.

Dr. Murase established the first ground-breaking NSRCF scholarship in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1983, which served as a model for similar scholarships across the United States. As a national board member of NSRCF, Dr. Murase provided strong and steady leadership and helped raise needed funds through the years to keep this project strong and viable. He was still a board member at the time of his death.

Until he was diagnosed with cancer shortly before his death, he was working on an article he was to include in the School of Social Work's publication about the School's roles during the 1968-1969 SFSU strike for ethnic/cultural inclusiveness. At his last public professional presentation on 10 December 2008, he reflected on the context of the SFSU strike and connected human and civil rights.

Born in Parlier, California (near Fresno) to immigrant sharecroppers from Japan, Dr. Murase grew up with few resources and little support for education. Despite many obstacles,

he graduated as valedictorian at Reedley High School, and went on to UCLA and UC Berkeley before World War II and Poston (Arizona) concentration camp disrupted his life and precluded his continuation of studies in California. Ultimately, he graduated from East Coast institutions (initially because he and other Japanese Americans were excluded from the West Coast based solely on ancestral heritage), where he received his BA and MSW degrees from Temple University (Philadelphia) and Ph.D. from Columbia University (New York) in 1961.

Dr. Murase is survived by his three children and their spouses (in parentheses), Emily (Neal), Miriam (Greg), and Geoffrey (Christine) and 5 grandchildren (Junko, Izumi, Kenji, Noah, and Sakura). His wife (Seiko) of 42 years preceded him in death.

A memorial service for Dr. Murase will be held in San Francisco at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC), 1840 Sutter Street, on Sunday, 28 June 2009, from 4:30 – 6:00 P.M.



Dr. Kenji Murase speaking at SFSU luncheon after receiving commendations from the Institute for Multicultural Research and Social Work Practice (IMRSWP) for his work as first IMRSWP Director. 10 December 2008



Dr. Kenji Murase at the IMRSWP 20th anniversary recognition luncheon where he received a certificate of recognition and commendation for leadership as first director of SFSU's IMRSWP. 10 December 2008



Top and bottom right photographs by Rita Takahashi
Bottom left photograph by Lourdes Sarmiento