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Health Educator and First Latina Provost at UC San Diego, Faustina Solís, Dies at 90



Faustina Solís

Faustina Solís—an educator and pioneer in public health and the second provost of the University of California, San Diego’s Thurgood Marshall College—died on August 4 in San Diego, Ca., at age 90.

A UC San Diego professor emeritus, Solís was also the university’s first Latina provost. She served as provost of the university’s Thurgood Marshall College (then known as Third College) from 1981-1988, and taught at the UC San Diego School of Medicine beginning in 1971. She established public health coursework for undergraduates and medical students, following many years in social work focused on healthcare for underserved populations. Solís’s contributions were honored in 1990 when Thurgood Marshall Lecture Hall on the UC San Diego campus was renamed the Faustina F. Solís Lecture Hall.

“Without bold leaders like Faustina Solís, UC San Diego would not be the world-class university it is today,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “She was a beloved campus leader who helped establish the foundation of excellence on which the university has been built.”

Thurgood Marshall College is one of six colleges at UC San Diego, each led by a provost. The campus’s college system is designed to provide students with many of the advantages of a small liberal arts college plus the resources of a large research university.

During her years as provost of Marshall College, Solís promoted mentoring programs and aimed to engage new students—particularly from minority backgrounds. She was once quoted about her experiences with her students: “They weren’t left to fly by themselves. Freshman and transfer students can feel very lost in a large university. They need support and assistance in every way possible, whether financial, social or counseling.”

Solís helped solidify Thurgood Marshall College’s mission of developing students as scholars and citizens who value social responsibility and academic excellence, alike. She also encouraged her students to participate in community outreach efforts in local neighborhoods.

“Faustina Solís was one of the first emerging female leaders at UC San Diego who gave vision and necessity to public service and excellence in undergraduate education,” said Allan Havis, Thurgood Marshall College’s current provost. “Our college is so honored by her superb contributions and we all benefit by her generous legacy.”

Because of her extensive background in public health, Solís was the first full professor at the UC San Diego School of Medicine without a medical degree or doctorate. She introduced ethnic content into the medical school curriculum, based on her experiences in social work and the development of healthcare services for California’s migrant farm workers. She also served as an assistant chancellor during her time on campus.



Faustina Solís in her office at UC San Diego

Over the course of her career, she served as deputy director of the public health division of the California State Department of Health, and was coordinator and director of the Farm Workers’ Health Service Program with the State Department of Public Health from 1967 to 1971. In 1975, she was elected president of the California Association for Maternal and Child Health, the first lay person to head the organization which had traditionally elected physicians to the post. She was also directly involved in the establishment and operation of community health programs for Latinos in San Ysidro and San Diego County, and held consultation appointments in Guadalajara, Venezuela and Ecuador.

One of 12 children of parents who fled from Mexico to escape the chaos of revolution in 1911, Solís was born in Compton, Ca. on April 28, 1923. Her father attended English classes at night school after a 10-hour workday. Solís earned her undergraduate degree in sociology from UCLA, followed by her master’s degree in social work from the University of Southern California in 1954.

Solís is survived by two brothers, two sisters, and many nieces and nephews. A celebration of life is planned for Saturday, Aug. 24 at 2 p.m. at the Soledad Club at 5050 Soledad Road in San Diego. The family requests that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made in her memory to the UC San Diego Hispanic Scholarship Council Scholarship Fund. Donations can be made online at givetoucscsd.ucsd.edu; please search *Hispanic Scholarship Council*. Checks can also be made payable to the UC San Diego Foundation, with “Hispanic Scholarship Council Scholarship Fund” in the memo, and mailed to 9500 Gilman Drive, #0940, La Jolla, CA 92093-0940.

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