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## Miss Franks stood tall for rigor and high standards

Charles Maurice Cherry '65  
*Furman University*

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## Miss Franks stood tall for rigor and high standards

*Furman's 1937 Bonhomie* highlighted the “perfect neatness” and charm of Sadie Franks, then a college senior. “[Though she] never . . . pores over her books,” her biography read, “she has achieved commendable success,” including having always been on the dean’s list.

Following graduation, she taught English in France and fell in love with the country whose language and culture were to define her career. After a stint as an FBI translator during World War II, she taught briefly, then accepted employment with Furman’s Alumni Association in the early 1950s.

She eventually went on to complete her master’s degree at Columbia University and launch a teaching career that took her to Mars Hill, Lander and Limestone colleges before she returned to Furman, where she remained on the faculty from 1962 until her retirement in 1983. She used the summers to pursue additional studies in Pau, France, and at Middlebury College’s graduate French School, and she served as a study abroad director for Furman’s Fall Term in Versailles.

When she died December 2 in Laurens, S.C., just three days before her 93rd birthday, Furman indeed lost a woman of perfect neatness, intelligence, charm and humor. As her obituary in *The Greenville News* stated, “She was the classic example of the ‘Southern Lady.’”

My relationship with Sadie Franks had three distinct phases. I was her student at Furman in the 1960s, and later her colleague on the faculty. Then, in recent years, until her memory began to wane, I stayed in touch with her and her activities at the Martha Franks Baptist Retirement Center.

Yet even when we had adjacent offices in the Department of Classical and Modern Languages (now Modern Languages and Literatures), I was



never able to call her “Sadie.” She remained “Miss Franks” to me.

Most of her career predated the modern era of grade inflation, and even when institutional grades rose, hers did not. Students inevitably knew where they stood in her courses, and with her inimitable smile she minced no words in reminding them, in her soft-spoken yet firm way, that rigor was the minimal requisite for success. I still recall one section of a challenging Intermediate French test, when she read declarative statements aloud and instructed us to rewrite them as negative interrogatives, while simultaneously changing direct objects to direct-object pronouns.

Students who never had a class with Miss

Franks could readily identify her as “the little professor who always wears blue.” She occasionally accented her blue wardrobe with a red scarf or wore a blue-and-white-striped blouse, but blue was undisputedly her signature color, and whatever she wore made her blue eyes appear all the more intense. Even at the memorial service following President Kennedy’s assassination, students observed that Sadie wore a dark blue suit — more subdued in color than normal, yet blue nonetheless.

Sadie Franks saw herself as a champion for women’s rights, particularly with respect to addressing what she considered institutional discrepancies in benefits for male and female professors. In 1974 she unhesitatingly asserted those views in a special issue of the *Furman Magazine*, where she somewhat surprisingly laid much of the blame on women themselves for their lack of assertiveness in addressing perceived inequities.

Since her death I have spoken with a number of her former colleagues and students, all of whom remember vividly their time with her as a colleague, friend or mentor. In addition to her intelligence, wit and high yet attainable standards, they especially recall her strong Southern accent, her devotion to her family, and her love for her hometown of Laurens.

And those sprightly blue eyes.

— CHARLES MAURICE CHERRY '65  
Professor of Modern Languages/Literatures

*Memorials: Capital Campaign, First Baptist Church, 300 W. Main St., Laurens, S.C. 29360; Alzheimer’s Association, 4124 Clemson Blvd., Anderson, S.C. 29621; or Martha Franks Baptist Retirement Center, 1 Martha Franks Drive, Laurens, S.C. 29360.*