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## Obituary: Sherry Lynn Koshman

School of Information Sciences (SIS) faculty member Sherry Lynn Koshman died May 1, 2011. She was 46.

Koshman grew up in Saskatchewan, Canada, and earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Saskatchewan and a master's degree at McGill University.

She earned a PhD at SIS in 1997 then worked as an information retrieval and software testing consultant for quality assurance and product implementation projects in the telecommunications and health insurance industries. She was a visiting lecturer at SIS before joining the full-time faculty in 2005.

Her work focused on visualization tools for helping users interact with large data sets and information found on the web. Koshman's faculty web page cited research interests in information structures including web-based visualizations, clusters, socially generated representations and mobile visualizations for information retrieval.

Koshman chaired the school's library and information science (LIS) doctoral program. Her teaching interests covered web information retrieval, information visualization, information architecture, digital library services, information technology foundations and user-focused system design.

She also was active in the American Society for Information Science and Technology, and served as a member of its conference program committee and as faculty adviser to the group's student chapter at Pitt.

Koshman was remembered as pleasant, competent and professional, with a strong devotion to her students.

SIS faculty member Stephen Hirtle said, "Sherry always had a smile on her face and interest in helping students. She was fascinated by the visualization tools — how to represent vast quantities of information in simple visual displays. She will be missed for her dedication to iSchool and for the personal touch that she put on all her projects."

Although she taught in LIS and he teaches in the information science and technology program, Hirtle said Koshman's interest in information visualization aligned with his work. The two wrote grant proposals together and Koshman guest-lectured in his classes. "She was always looking for interesting questions," he recalled. "She was very open, very inquisitive."

Hirtle said she demonstrated that by crossing program boundaries and reaching out to work with people who had common scientific interests. "She was someone who wasn't defined by topic as much as by the approach to looking at it," he said. "She wanted to give people access to information, making people feel more empowered."

Faculty member Mary Kay Biagini, chair of the LIS program, said Koshman was very dedicated to her doctoral students. She had been working with five doctoral students over the past year in spite of health issues that had kept her from the classroom. "She was a good adviser and a role model."

Former SIS staffer Donna Murr said, "Her door was always open if students needed something for a class or had questions about an assignment."

Koshman had been in the tenure stream, Biagini said, recalling the high quality of the presentation Koshman made at her third-year review. "It was so well done," said Biagini. "It was a model of clarity and conciseness. Her research agenda was set up so carefully and imaginatively. That was something she really aspired to do, to do well," she said.

"She was just a very responsible, professional person. She was so pleasant, not standoffish, very warm," Biagini said.

Still, Koshman was "very, very private," Biagini noted, adding that many colleagues were surprised to learn that she had been an accomplished pianist, organist and singer. A recording of Koshman singing "Amazing Grace" was included at her memorial service.

Koshman displayed inner strength as she fought the ongoing health problems that ultimately took her life, sharing few details, Biagini said. Koshman did not teach during last year's spring and summer terms, but started the fall term before her hospitalization in October prevented her from returning.

"We were glad to have her back," Biagini said, adding that colleagues had been lamenting Koshman's absence. "We were grieving as she's been so ill and out of contact," she said.

Koshman is survived by her husband of 17 years, Dennis Moul, whom she met when both were graduate students at SIS; their children, Natalie and Valerie Moul, and her parents, Martin and Elaine Koshman.

Funeral services were held May 5 and a memorial service in Saskatchewan is planned.

Family members requested remembrances and stories about Koshman be sent to sherrystory@HQ99.net. Memorial donations may be made to North Hills Community Outreach ([www.nhco.org](http://www.nhco.org)).

Biagini said Koshman's doctoral students were preparing a memorial web page and that plans were underway to fund a student award in Koshman's memory.

—**Kimberly K. Barlow**

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