

In Memoriam: Emerita Professor Dr. Fran Mather

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Dee Boling dboling@tulane.edu

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Dr. Frances J. Mather, professor emerita of biostatistics at the Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, passed away on June 17, 2025, in Metairie, La. She was 88.

Over nearly five decades, Mather held many roles at Tulane, including student, professor, principal investigator, and administrator. She also served on advisory committees for the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, contributing her expertise to research, special projects, and grants.

Mather was born in Alberta, Canada. In the 1950s, she earned a bachelor's degree in mining engineering from the University of Alberta in Edmonton—one of the first women in the program. In the 1960s, she received a Master of Science in mathematical statistics from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and marched with Women for Peace. She joined Tulane University in 1969 as an instructor while pursuing her PhD in biostatistics. She became an assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology (as it was then known) in 1972 and earned her doctorate in 1975. She bought a house and made New Orleans home for herself and her daughter, Mona.

Mather was promoted to associate professor in 1981 and held that position until 2007. She also served as an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Surgery at the School of Medicine. During a sabbatical in 1985, she worked as assistant to the chief of the Biometric Research Branch at the NIH.

Her research primarily focused on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), randomized controlled clinical trials, statistical data interpretation, medical informatics, bioinformatics, pregnancy outcomes, and survival analysis. She conducted training and research in countries including The Gambia, Senegal, and Mali, and contributed to statistical evaluations for the City of New Orleans Healthy Start Program.

As computers and the internet became central to higher education, Mather's background in programming and statistical research made her a natural leader for the school's Academic Information Systems office. She managed the school's technology and computing systems until her retirement in 2013—a familiar presence in the Tidewater Building, often heard before seen, with a lanyard full of jangling keys.



Fran Mather laughing with John LeFante at an event honoring her retirement.

Mather lived in New Orleans for more than 50 years, embracing its unique lifestyle, the Gospel Tent at Jazz Fest, and the food, especially chargrilled oysters. Her home was a haven for anyone in need, and her parties were legendary.

In recent years, her health declined, but she remained gracious and giving, strong and formidable.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Dr. Mather's memory may be directed to the Tulane Honors and Remembers Fund via giving.tulane.edu/memory or by mailing a check to Tulane University, PO Box 669394, Dallas, TX 75266-9394. Please indicate that the gift is for the Frances J. Mather, PhD, Technology Enhancement Fund at the Tulane University Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine by fully completing the top section of the online giving form, or by including a note or memo with a mailed check.