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Emeritus faculty member Lynn Steen dies

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St. Olaf College Professor Emeritus of Mathematics Lynn Steen, who spent more than four decades making mathematics accessible to all students and shaping the way teachers approach the discipline, died June 21.

Steen was born in Chicago and grew up on Staten Island, New York. In 1965, four years after graduating from Luther College, Steen completed a Ph.D. in mathematics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and joined the St. Olaf faculty.

Early in his career, Steen focused on teaching and developing research experiences for undergraduates. One result was the widely used reference book *Counterexamples in Topology*, co-edited with J. Arthur Seebach Jr. and partly authored by St. Olaf students.



Another was a gradual change in mathematics at St. Olaf from a narrow discipline for the few to an inviting major of value to any liberal arts graduate. By broadening the major and focusing student work on inquiry and investigation, Steen and his departmental colleagues grew mathematics into one of the top five majors at the college — and one of the nation's largest undergraduate producers of Ph.D.s in the mathematical sciences.

As his teaching led Steen to investigate links between mathematics and other fields, he began writing about new developments in mathematics for audiences of non-mathematicians. Many of his articles appeared in the weekly magazine *Science News* and in annual supplements to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and he penned a groundbreaking report for the National Research Council on the challenges facing mathematics education in the United States.

Steen held numerous leadership posts in national mathematics organizations, serving as president of the Mathematical Association of America and director of the Mathematical Sciences Education Board, a National Academy of Sciences entity that works on improving math education. In 2013 he was elected as a Fellow of the American Mathematical Society.

In addition to his teaching, Steen served as head of institutional research at St. Olaf and as special assistant to the provost before retiring from the college in 2009.

A memorial service for Steen will be held at 11 a.m. on Friday, June 26, at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield. A visitation will be held one hour prior to the service.

Read Steen's [obituary](#).