

Read the obituary for Sherry Penney, the longest-serving chancellor of UMass Boston

"Dr. Penney's vision and determination were evident early on."



Sherry Penney and James Livingston outside their Florida condo in 2014. —*Barbara D. Livingston*

By [Dialynn Dwyer](#) May 15, 2019

Sherry Penney, the longest-serving chancellor of UMass Boston, is being remembered by her family and former colleagues for her persistence and her "exceptional accomplishments" working in higher education.

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“They were overcome by carbon monoxide from a car with a keyless ignition system,” her loved ones wrote in her [obituary](#).

Penney served as chancellor of UMass Boston from 1988 to 1995, as well as from 1996 to 2000. When she retired, she founded the [Center for Collaborative Leadership](#) at the university, which she served as director for until 2012.

She and her husband, [who was a world authority on magnets](#), moved to Florida in October.



“Dr. Penney’s vision and determination were evident early on,” her loved ones wrote in her obituary. “When she began her doctoral program in American History in 1970, at SUNY Albany, an advisor warned her that — since she was female — a university would never hire her as a faculty member. Dr. Penney noted that her advisor wasn’t ill-intentioned, just realistic. It was that moment, she later said, when she decided ‘to become a university

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“Sherry was a visionary with the tenacity to enact that vision,” Lisa DeAngelis, director of the Center for Collaborative Leadership, [said in a statement](#). “Sherry believed that each of us had an obligation to step into our leadership and pushed us to do just that. She will be sorely missed, but the impact of her legacy will be felt for generations to come.”

A memorial service for Penney and Livingston will be held May 25 in Hingham at the First Parish Old Ship Church. A family burial for the couple will be held on a future date in Hyde Park, New York.

Read the full obituary for Penney, [shared by Keyser Funeral Service](#), below:

Sherry Penney and James Livingston, well-known for their exceptional accomplishments while living in Massachusetts, passed away last week at their Florida home. They were overcome by carbon monoxide from a car with a keyless ignition system.

Dr. Penney, 81, was chancellor of UMass Boston and founder of the highly successful Center for Collaborative Leadership at UMB. She and her loving husband James Livingston, a retired MIT professor, author and world authority on magnets, moved to Florida last October. Though retired from UMass, Dr. Penney continued to teach women’s history courses for the Suncoast Alliance for Lifelong Learning, in Sarasota Florida, and other local organizations. She passed away the night after presenting a well-received lecture titled “Stuck or Unstuck, Women in the 21st Century” for the International Women’s Forum, Florida Suncoast chapter.

Dr. Penney’s vision and determination were evident early on. When she began her doctoral program in American History in 1970, at SUNY Albany, an advisor warned her that — since she was female — a university would never hire her as a faculty member. Dr. Penney noted that her advisor wasn’t ill-intentioned. Just

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2000, she founded the Center for Collaborative Leadership and served as its director until 2012.

Sherry's executive experience includes serving from 1982 to 1988 as the first female vice chancellor in the SUNY system (64 campuses and 400,000 students) as Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, Policy and Planning. She was Associate Provost at Yale University from 1976 to 1982. She taught at Union College, Yale University, SUNY Albany, and the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Her writing covered topics in leadership, women's rights and political history. She is the author of *Patrician in Politics* (1974) dealing with New York politics in the 19th Century and co-author with her husband of a biography of the 19th century feminist and abolitionist Martha Coffin Wright, titled *A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights*, UMass Press (2004). With colleague Patricia Neilson she compiled *Voices of the Future: Emerging Leaders* in 2009. Their next book, *Next Generation Leadership: Insights from Emerging Leaders*, was published in 2010 by Palgrave/MacMillan.

Dr. Penney also published numerous articles in professional journals and opinion editorials in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Patriot Ledger*.

In 2013 UMass Boston conferred professor emerita status upon her. In conveying the award, the Chancellor and Provost characterized her contributions as "transformative," citing her "invaluable contributions to making our campus a compelling force in the sphere of public higher education."

Sherry is survived by her sons, Michael and Jeff, and by her two grandchildren.

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Church in Hingham (Unitarian Universalist), where the Livingstons were members for many years. A memorial service in Sarasota will be announced later, and there will be a family burial at a future date at St. James Church in Hyde Park, NY. To leave an expression of sympathy, please visit www.KeyserFuneralService.com

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