



Vijay Nair 1949-2019  
Professor Emeritus  
Western Connecticut State University

Vijay Nair was born in Alwaye, India, on July 7, 1949, to Ponnamma and Sankunny Nair. He came to the United States in 1969 to attend the University of Buffalo, and then began his career at the Adirondack Museum, now the Adirondack Experience. His position as a librarian at the School of Mines, University of Minnesota, was the beginning of his academic career; he then moved to Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, where he was the Reference Librarian until his retirement in 2016 as Professor Emeritus.

Vijay was an active member of the American Association of University Professors for more than 30 years. In July 2010, he was elected President of the Connecticut State University System AAUP, serving some 3,500 full-time and part-time members. A shrewd and principled negotiator for a series of CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreements, he believed that words in a contract meant something and as such had to be honored and protected. In all things he was a staunch defender of the principles of the profession and the rights of the working professional. With unstinting energy, intellectual prowess, and superb negotiating skills he achieved strong, professionally sound agreements even in the most unpromising circumstances.

Vijay was also active in the Connecticut State Conference-AAUP, the umbrella organization for all AAUP members in the state, representing unionized and non-unionized faculty, both full-time and part-time, in two-year and four-year institutional settings. He served in a number of elected and appointed capacities, always with humility, grace, and a delightful wit; he served a two-year term, 1999-2001, as Vice President, and a two-year term as President from 2001 to 2003.

He was generous with himself and his talents. And when it became necessary to join in a demonstration or to “show the flag” beyond typical professional settings, Vijay could be counted upon to serve the cause. Walking through the Bennington College campus in Vermont on a cold spring day to support the faculty there, joining with Yale graduate students during their organizing efforts, or marching down the streets of Hartford: wherever activists gathered he took part.

In 2012 the Connecticut State Conference-AAUP nominated Vijay Nair for the prestigious national AAUP Marilyn Sternberg award for the “AAUP member who best demonstrates concern for human rights, courage, persistence, political foresight, imagination, and collective bargaining skills.” The nominating letter articulated his many outstanding leadership qualities, his steadfast dedication to his colleagues, and his sincere commitment to the common good. Julie Schmid, current AAUP national president, wrote when she learned of his passing: “He was an AAUP stalwart and a voice for faculty unionism. He will be sorely missed.”

A man of many talents, Vijay was a gifted chef and enjoyed teaching his wife Pat how to cook special dishes. He was a wine connoisseur, a gardener, a friend to animals, and a good neighbor.

In his office in the WCSU Ruth Haas Library there grew an exquisite bonsai. Years ago Vijay had gathered the tiny sapling from his land, planted it, pruned it, and cared for it over the years. With his expansive and sometimes heavy responsibilities, that small tree was his contemplative respite.