MEMORANDUM

To: FIU Community

From: Douglas Wartzok, Provost and Executive Vice President

Date: 15 May 2014

Re: Professor Howard Kaminsky

Dear members of the FIU community:

One of the earliest and most notable of the university’s founding generation, Howard Kaminsky died on May 7, 2014, five months short of his 90th birthday. He was one of the most distinguished medieval historians of his generation. He was elected a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, the highest distinction available to a medievalist in North America, in 2007.

Dr. Kaminsky came to FIU in 1974 from a long and notable career at the University of Washington with the intent, as he often repeated, of lying on the beach and swimming in the ocean. While he never surrendered his passion for the sun and surf, he not only continued his own scholarship, but plunged into the thick of university life and politics here. He served as chair of the History Department and member of the College Promotion and Tenure Committee, and along with Brian Peterson, was the primary mover of the University to a full four-year university in the early 80s. At least as significant, he created an extraordinary model, especially in History, for research, intellectuality, and professional integrity.

His colleagues recall him as a man who represented a rare and now perhaps vanished character--someone who volunteered for service in the US Army in 1942 when only 18 and enlisted full of enthusiasm to defeat fascism abroad and then, as he often repeated, to establish a soviet in the United States. Indeed, he developed his skill in Czech when he moved to that country in 1948 in order to live under communism. The experienced chastened his theories. His political engagement took a different turn in his opposition to the Vietnam War, and, if professing his Marxism to the last, it changed still again as he shifted his political allegiance to President Reagan in the last 30 years.

He was always full of ideas. He had endless stores of energy. He constantly challenged conventional wisdom. He marked his colleagues and the university indelibly.

There will be no formal memorial service. The History Department will host a small gathering to honor his contributions to the department and the university, with date, time, and place to be announced later.

Sincerely,

Douglas Wartzok
Provost and Executive Vice President