

**A FIGHTER TO THE END: THE REMARKABLE LIFE AND CAREER OF  
LAURA JANE HARPER**

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## Abstract

This study is an investigation of Dr. Laura Jane Harper's tenure, achievements, and contributions to Virginia Tech from 1949 – 1980. Throughout Virginia Tech's history, examples of leadership, scholarship, and service have been recorded about students, faculty and administrators; however, female administrators are overlooked in these collections. Using archival and interview data collection techniques and historical biographical methods, we will examine Harper's influences to the profession, significant contributions in areas of scholarship, administration, and as a mentor for minorities and women.

Harper was born on August 18, 1914 in Jackson Mississippi. She attended and graduated from Belhaven College in 1934 with a BS degree, University of Tennessee in 1948 with a Master's, and Michigan State University in 1956 with a doctorate. From 1960 until 1964, Harper served as dean of the School of Home Economics for both Radford College (now known as Radford University) and VPI (now known as Virginia Tech). After 1964, Harper continued to serve as the Dean of the Home Economics College at VPI with additional responsibilities until her retirement in 1980. During Harper's tenure she touched the lives of many and made several contributions to the institution in which she was employed. Harper worked at Virginia Tech as a professor, researcher, department

head, and dean for over 31 years in the home economics discipline; however, the legacy she left continues.

## Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, Reverend Bennie L. Miles, Sr. and Mrs. Annie M. Miles, who believed in me enough to let me try.

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