Emeritus Professor Dr. Varanasi Rama Murthy died October 12, 2012 in California at the age of 79 after a long illness. He was a faculty member at the university from 1965 until his retirement in 2006, serving in various administrative roles, including Head of the School of Earth Sciences, Associate Dean and Acting Dean in the Institute of Technology (now College of Science and Engineering) and Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Born July 2, 1933 in Andhra Pradesh, India, Rama received degrees from Andhra University and the Indian School of Mines, and his Ph.D. in Geology from Yale University in 1957. He was an Institute Fellow in Geochemistry at Caltech and Assistant Professor at UC San Diego before moving to Minnesota.

Rama’s career as a geochemist and geophysicist spanned a half-century, during which he conducted innovative research on the composition of planets, the lunar samples brought back by the Apollo missions, and the earth’s mantle. Early in his career, using lead isotopes as a scientific “clock,” he contributed to the revolutionary view, now well-accepted, that meteorites, lunar rocks and the earth are roughly the same age, supporting the idea that the earth is ancient: about 4.5 billion years old. More recently, he showed experimentally that potassium can be a substantial radioactive heat source in the core of the Earth, with important implications for the understanding of the thermal evolution of the Earth and similar planetary bodies. He also introduced the term geochron, to refer to a standard that allows comparison of materials from different parts of the solar system, and his studies of meteorites and ocean sediments provided more accurate dating of the solar system. His widely-cited work has advanced the ability of scientists to study the earth’s age and composition, and he mentored many students who are now influential in the earth sciences internationally.

During his career, Rama received numerous honors and awards, published extensively in scientific journals, including articles in *Nature* and *Science*, and served on scores of scientific committees including some at the National Research Council. He was elected a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union, a Life Fellow of the Indian Geophysical Union, and awarded the Outstanding Service Award from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

In 2006 Rama retired to Corrales, New Mexico with his wife Janice Noruk. He continued his work in the position of Research Professor with the Institute of Meteoritics at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and maintained his life-long passions for music, literature, the sciences, and friends. He loved teaching and mentoring students, and he and Janice established the V. Rama Murthy/Janice Noruk Fellowships, one awarded annually to promising young geologists and the other specifically for exceptional women graduate students in our department.

A Memorial will be held on campus on December 20. Memorial contributions are preferred to the Murthy-Noruk Fellowship for Women, c/o University of Minnesota Foundation, CM3854, P.O. Box 70870, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55170.