Whether teaching undergraduates about inequities in the U.S. justice system, leading Bible study with prison inmates, or researching the fear of crime among women, Esther Madriz was passionate about her work in criminology until the last day of her life.

The University of San Francisco professor died in the early morning of Nov. 30 after a long fight with ovarian cancer. Throughout her illness, Madriz remained devoted to her work, focusing on teaching, researching, and publishing while she battled a deadly disease. The work, she said, sustained her.

"What I do, I do because it is also a personal need," she said in a recent interview. "It's like my work at San Quentin, which not only helps the inmates, but also fulfills my whole spirit."

Friends and colleagues described Madriz as warm, generous, open, a sincere friend, and a woman dedicated to serving others.

"To me Esther had the face of love, she had the face of joy, and that didn't change no matter what was happening to her physically," said Michael Stanfield, associate professor of history. "She always brought a commitment to positive change to whatever she did."

"Esther's passion for justice came from her deep ability to befriend the world," said Lois Lorentzen, associate professor of theology.

Madriz joined USF as an assistant professor in 1996. In her relatively short career at the university, she co-founded USF's Latin American studies program and was the key founder of the Center for Latino Studies in the Americas (CELASA). Her teaching and activism focused on many facets of criminology, including domestic violence, hate crimes, and human rights abuses against Latinos. She served on the boards of two community outreach and policy organizations as well as on the board of the USF-based Peace Review.

In an interview in September, Madriz talked about her dedication to studying criminology as a way of reforming the justice system.

"In jail, most people are black, Latino, and poor," she said. "You never see a wealthy person imprisoned, because the system is designed to be more forgiving with them."

Madriz learned firsthand of the plight of inmates while working for the Ministry of Justice in her native Venezuela in the 1970s. Her experience showed her that "the judicial system is the place in society where injustices are magnified," she said.

In the early 1980s, Madriz moved to the United States to study criminology. She earned a PhD in sociology from Vanderbilt University in Nashville before moving to New York City to teach at Hunter College. At USF, teaching and writing were not enough to keep Madriz satisfied. For the
last five years of her life, she paid regular visits to inmates at San Quentin Penitentiary, a state prison in Marin County.

Initially, her visits were a way for her students to learn about the realities of U.S. prisons. Soon, the visits took on a greater, more personal meaning as she began to lead Bible studies with the prisoners. "It's amazing to see how happy they look when we get there," she said. "Many take the opportunity to tell us about their problems and sadness and they feel much better afterward."

Madriz was equally passionate about helping victims of domestic violence and women paralyzed by fear of violent crime. Based on hundreds of interviews and relationships with Latino, African American, and white women, Madriz wrote *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls* in 1997. The book was first published in English and, by the time of her death, it had been translated into Spanish and released in Mexico.

At a memorial service for Madriz on Dec. 7, students, colleagues, friends, and family gathered in St. Ignatius Church to celebrate her life. Michael Webber, chair of the sociology department, spoke about his relationship with Madriz during a eulogy.

"I was struck by her obvious enthusiasm and passion for (criminology), as well as her mastery of the subject," he said, recalling her initial job interview at USF. "She became one of my closest and dearest friends. I grew to cherish the rap on my office door, when I would turn and see Esther's smiling face. I didn't know how much I needed someone like Esther in my life until she arrived. The same can be said for USF.... She was a spectacular woman and a spectacular friend. But more than any of this, she had a spectacular heart. Good night, my friend."