Edward A. Allworth (1920–2016)

Alexander Cooley

To cite this article: Alexander Cooley (2016) Edward A. Allworth (1920–2016), Central Asian Survey, 35:4, 570-571, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2016.1254396

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2016.1254396

Published online: 25 Nov 2016.
Edward Alfred Allworth, Professor Emeritus of Turco-Soviet Studies in the Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures at Columbia University and member of the Harriman Institute faculty for over a half-century, died at St. Luke’s Hospital in Manhattan on 20 October 2016.

Professor Allworth was founding director at Columbia of both the Program on Soviet Nationality Problems (1970) and the Center for the Study of Central Asia (1984). The Central Eurasia Studies Society had planned to honour Edward Allworth at their conference in November 2016 with the CESS Lifetime Service to the Field Award.

A ground-breaking researcher and connector of scholars, Allworth made his first tour of Soviet Central Asia and Russia in 1957 as one of the early unsponsored American visitors. As a faculty member of Columbia University’s Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures, Professor Allworth headed a series of official exchanges between American and Soviet scholars in 1983 and 1985. Later he was invited to the region by the Academy of Sciences in the USSR and the Uzbek and Kazakh Academies to study a variety of subjects in the region, ranging from Central Asian firearms to Uzbek and Kazak theatre and drama. His own papers (now in the New York Public Library) include extensive and rare collections on Soviet Afghanistan, the Crimean Tatars, Tajikistan and the ‘Uzbek Intelligentsia Project’.


Edward Allworth was born on 1 December 1920, the son of Edward and Ethel (Walker) Allworth. He received his bachelor’s degree from Oregon State University, a master’s degree from the University of Chicago, and a PhD from Columbia University (1959). After working at both Reed College and the Ford Foundation, Professor Allworth returned to Columbia. His long-standing contribution to Columbia University spanned decades of teaching a wide variety of courses on Central Asian studies, including language, literature, history and politics, and culminated in 1984 when he established a centre at what was then the Department of Middle East Languages and Cultures to focus on the study of contemporary Central Asia. Beyond his impressive body of research and scholarly accomplishments, Professor Allworth is widely known for his infectious enthusiasm for Central Asian studies and his dedication to students.

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*A version of this obituary was published on the website of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute on 25 October 2016.
He mentored dozens of accomplished researchers and scholars from around the world and introduced the rich culture and history of the region to countless more.

Alexander Cooley
Harriman Institute, Columbia University
ac210@columbia.edu