

# Nobel Prize-winner Kenneth Arrow dies

By Alex Shashkevich (posted online: <http://news.stanford.edu/2017/02/21/nobel-prize-winner-kenneth-arrow-dies/>)

Nobel Prize-winning economist Kenneth Arrow was a leading figure in the field of economic theory. He inspired generations of students through his decades-long teaching at Stanford.



Kenneth Arrow (Image credit: L.A. Cicero)

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Nobel Prize-winning Stanford economist Kenneth Arrow died in his home in Palo Alto on Tuesday morning. He was 95.

Arrow, the Joan Kenney Professor of Economics and Professor of Operations Research, Emeritus, was a world-renowned scholar in the fields of economic theory and research operations. In addition to the Nobel Prize, he was awarded the National Medal of Science in 2004, among numerous other awards.

“Kenneth Arrow was one of the greatest economists,” said John Shoven, a professor of economics at Stanford. “But he was also humble, warm and a great friend to all of us at Stanford.”

Arrow’s pioneering contributions to general equilibrium theory and welfare theory led him to become the youngest person to date to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, which he received in 1972 together with British economist Sir John Hicks.

One of Arrow's most influential works was his 1951 book, "Social Choice and Individual Values," which publicized what would later be known as "Arrow's Impossibility Theorem," which addresses issues of collective decision-making.

But Arrow's knowledge and accomplishments extended beyond the world of economics and statistics, according to his colleagues and family members. He was interested in a myriad of other subjects, from politics and music to mathematics and Chinese Art.

"He was as gentle as he was brilliant," said Arrow's nephew, Lawrence Summers, former Treasury Secretary and former president of Harvard University. "He was always an inspiration to me."

David Arrow recalled a line from "Hamlet" when talking about his father: "He was a great human being. He was perfect in everything. I'll never see the likes of him again."

"I really think my father is that kind of man," David Arrow said. "His intellectual life and influence is perhaps as profound as any in his field."

He was also vocal about social issues. In 1988, Arrow, whose parents were Romanian-Jewish immigrants, wrote an open letter to then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, challenging Shamir's stance on an "undivided land of Israel" and pleading for an end to violence between Israelis and Palestinians. He also supported the Free South Africa Fund, which supported black South Africans' efforts for freedom while challenging Stanford to rethink its ties with South African companies. He was a co-author of the "Economists' Statement on Climate Change," issued in 1997 and signed by more than 2,400 U.S. economists, detailing the hazards of global warming.

Originally from New York City, Arrow earned a bachelor's degree from the City College of New York in 1940, and a master's degree in mathematics from Columbia University in 1941. His academic career was interrupted by World War II, and he served as a weather officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1946.

After the war, he returned to Columbia for his PhD, and spent time as a research associate and assistant professor at the University of Chicago. He joined Stanford's faculty as an assistant professor of economics and statistics in 1949, and remained there until 1968 when he left to teach at Harvard University for about 11 years.

But he considered Stanford home and eventually came back, his son said.

"He was proud to come back," Arrow said. "He loved Stanford and the community here."

Besides his accomplishments in research, Arrow valued teaching and advising students in his emeritus position until his last days, according to his son. In fact, at least five of his students also have become Nobel Prize winners.

Arrow, who became a professor emeritus in 1991, retired with his wife, Selma, at Stanford, where they lived until moving to a retirement community in Palo Alto.

"To me, to our family, he was just a very generous, loving, caring unpretentious man," Arrow said.

Arrow is survived by his sister Anita Summers, of Philadelphia; sons David, of New York City; and Andrew, of New York City; his daughter-in-law Donna Lynn Champlin, of New York City; and his grandson, Charles Benjamin Arrow, of New York City.