



W. Keith Bryant

September 22, 1934 – September 13, 2022

Economist W. Keith Bryant, Cornell professor emeritus, co-author of an influential text on household economics and key figure in the establishment of a department that would grow to be a cornerstone of the Brooks School, died on September 13, 2022. He was 87 years old.

“Keith was a pioneer in the study of how families make decisions on spending their time and resources and much of our understanding of consumer behavior stems from his research,” said longtime colleague Alan Mathios, professor in the Brooks School and former dean of the College of Human Ecology. “He was a delightful guy with a broad range of interests and a deep devotion to his family, to his students and to the Ithaca community.”

Bryant served as president of the American Council on Consumer Interests, a Distinguished Fellow of the Council, and as a staff member of President Lyndon Johnson’s National Advisory Committee on Rural Poverty. He published in many major journals and, with Cathleen Zick, authored a widely used textbook, “Economic Organization of the Household.”

In a joint community message to faculty, staff, and students, Brooks School Dean Colleen Barry and Rachel Dunifon, the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of College of Human Ecology (CHE), described Bryant as an accomplished scholar and an effective advocate for the creation of the Department of Policy Analysis and Management (PAM) in 1997, a critical step in the evolution toward the creation of the Brooks School in 2021. “We are grateful to Professor Bryant for his selfless service to Cornell, and we join his many friends and former students in extending our sympathies to his family,” they wrote.

Bryant was born on September 22, 1934, in Guelph, Ontario. He received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the Ontario Agricultural College in 1957. During college, he joined the Universities Naval Training Division (of the Royal Canadian Navy) and was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant upon graduation. He was also awarded the Baker Dirk, for an outstanding naval cadet.

He received his master's (1960) and doctorate (1963) degrees from Michigan State University. In 1963, he joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota as an assistant professor in the departments of Agricultural Economics and Statistics. From 1966-67, he served as a staff economist on President Lyndon Johnson's rural poverty commission, where he led the research on rural and regional development.

“As a result of my experience on the commission staff and my continued research, I became increasingly doubtful that solutions to rural poverty could be found in rural and regional industrial development,” Bryant wrote in an article about his life. “I increasingly turned to researching solutions within the family.”

In 1974, Bryant joined the College of Human Ecology's Department of Consumer Economics and Public Policy. He served as chair of the Department of Consumer Economics and Housing from 1989 until 1997, when it merged with the Department of Human Service Studies to form PAM. He also served as the first chair of that department.

Bryant is survived by his wife of 60 years, Marty; two children, Frances Elizabeth Bryant-Scott of Crete, Greece, and Michael Jonathan Bryant of Santa Clarita, California; and four grandchildren.

Written by Colleen Barry and Rosemary Avery