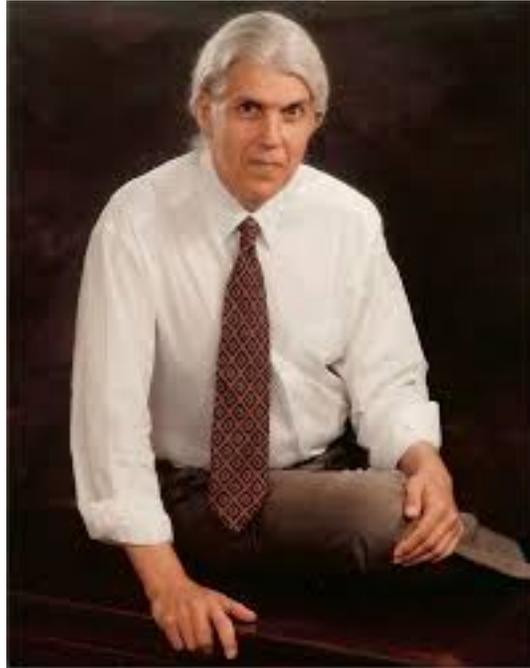


In Memoriam

Daniel Schaeffer Kemp
October 20, 1936 - May 2, 2020

By Michael P. Filosa



Daniel Kemp, long-time professor at MIT, died peacefully from respiratory complications due to COVID-19 on May 2, 2020.

An exceptional obituary for Dan was written by Danielle Doughty and published by MIT News.

<https://news.mit.edu/2020/daniel-kemp-professor-emeritus-chemistry-dies-0508>

Daniel Schaeffer Kemp was born October 20, 1936 in Portland, Oregon. He received his undergraduate degree from Reed College in 1958 and his Ph.D. under the direction of R. B. Woodward in 1964.

At Harvard he had the distinction of being a member of the Society of Fellows. Junior Fellows “*must be persons of exceptional ability, originality and resourcefulness, and should be of the highest calibre of intellectual achievement, comparable to successful*

junior faculty positions at leading universities.” Professor Kemp was very proud of his receiving this three-year fellowship which allowed him pursue studies in any department of the University free from formal requirements. Such an honor was highly appropriate for a man renowned for his expansive intellect and intellectual interests.

I remember Dan telling me that the Junior Fellowship appointment was very important as he was not happy with the state of his research three years into his Ph.D. studies, but the 3 year Junior Fellowship allowed him the time to fully develop his ideas and abilities in preparation for his academic career.

In 1964 Dan began his career at MIT and spent the next 45 years as a Professor becoming Professor Emeritus in 2009. Dan was an exceptional lecturer and teacher and was a strong influence on many generations of MIT students.

In the early 1970s the introductory organic chemistry courses 5.41 and 5.42 followed “Kemp’s Notes” which deviated significantly in their methodology from other texts of the day. These efforts ultimately led to the publishing in 1980 of a textbook with his former student Frank Vellacio. Although Kemp never won the James Flack Norris Award for the Outstanding Teaching of Chemistry awarded by NESACS, this was, as with many awards, an unfortunate oversight.

Kemp’s major research interest was in protein synthesis and properties. His most cited paper is “*Mechanism of Stabilization of Helical Conformations of Polypeptides in Water containing trifluoroethanol.*” The Kemp triacid paper is his second most cited work. He received both a Cope Scholar Award and the 2000 Ralph F. Hirschmann Award in Peptide Chemistry from the American Chemical Society in recognition of his scholarship.

Of further note is a reference I found to a *Tetrahedron* article published in 1999 which was a transcript of a panel discussion held at the 1981 ACS Meeting in remembrance of R. B. Woodward. [*Tetrahedron*, 55, 10253 (1999)].

The panelists were former Woodward students and prominent academic chemists: H. H. Wasserman, J. A. Berson, J. B. Hendrickson, E. Wenkert and D. S. Kemp. Roald Hoffman also talked at that ACS Meeting about working with Woodward and developing the Woodward-Hoffman rules.

One of the best courses I ever took was a course for first year graduate students in Organic Synthesis in the fall of 1973 taught by Professor Kemp. The specifics of the course have blended together into the continuum of synthetic chemistry in my mind although I do remember a particular story he told:

“A student was distilling from a very small flask into a very large flask. The instructor attempted to tell him of the folly of his set up but the student truculently responded:

“Yeah, you think so? Well how do you explain this?”

“The student opened a drawer and showed the instructor three equally large flasks filled with distillate!”

“There was a leak in the condenser!” The class roared.

Donations in Dan’s memory can be made to Foster Parrots, Beth-Israel Deaconess Medical Center, or The Center for Teaching and Learning at Reed College.