IN MEMORIAM

EASTIN NELSON

Eastin Nelson was born September 20, 1902, in Aspermont, Texas. He received his primary and secondary education in the public school system and after graduating from high school entered Stephen F. Austin State College where he received a B.A. in English Literature in 1928. Nelson then attended the University of Texas where he received the M.A. degree in 1929. His graduate major was sociology. After spending nine years as a teacher and principal in the Texas public school system, Nelson returned to the University of Texas in 1938 to begin his doctoral work in the Department of Economics. In that year he was appointed as a teaching assistant to Professor Clarence Ayres and in the following year he was appointed as an instructor in the department. Nelson left the University in 1940 in order to accept a position on the faculty of the Universidad Nacional de Panamá. During his three year residence in Pamana, Nelson served not only as a professor of economics but also as the Ad-Interim Dean of the university's School of Business Administration (1941-1942) and as a technical consultant to the Department of Agriculture of the Republic of Panama.

Eastin Nelson returned to the University of Texas in 1943 with an appointment as an assistant professor in the Department of Economics. At the same time he continued work towards his Ph.D. degree which he received in 1945. His dissertation, written under the supervision of George Stocking, Professor

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of Business Administration and Economics, was entitled "Development of Economic Policy in the Republic of Panama." Nelson left the University again in 1946 to teach at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, but returned the following year as an associate professor. In 1951, Nelson was appointed Professor of Economics at the University of Texas, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1966.

Professor Nelson was often on leave from his position at the University of Texas to teach at Latin American universities. From 1944 to 1946 he was appointed profesor extraordinario at the National University of Mexico. He held visiting professorships at the University of Santo Domingo (summer 1946); the University of San Carlos in Guatemala (summers 1954 and 1955); and the University of Guayaquil (summer 1963). Nelson also served as a visiting professor in Mexico during the summer of 1962. In 1954-55 he had served on a technical assistance mission in South America, and in 1964-1965 he was an AID technical consultant in Brazil.

Given his varied experience in Latin America, it was not surprising that Eastin Nelson devoted his teaching to Latin American economics. Prior to Professor Nelson's return to Texas in 1947, only two Latin American content courses were offered by the Economics Department, both taught by Wendell Gordon, at that time an instructor. After his return to the University of Texas, Nelson introduced three new courses: Economic Institutions of Latin America, the Economics of the Spanish Speaking Countries of America, and Economic History of the Two Americas. In the early 1950s, he taught the first graduate seminar in Latin American economics offered at the University of Texas.
It was in the teaching area, in fact, that Nelson made his major contribution at the University of Texas. Noted as an especially provocative and intellectually stimulating lecturer, Professor Nelson's catholicity of interest and outlook and his frequent visits to Latin America had given him an unusually intimate understanding of and appreciation for the structure and dynamics of that region's culture. In a truly gifted manner, he was able to communicate this understanding and appreciation to those who were privileged to study under his guidance, sharing with them his innovative interpretations of economic history and his keen insights into economic institutions and policy processes. Conventional wisdom in these matters had always to confront Nelson's challenge and his somewhat iconoclastic questioning. But there was ever a basic kindliness and tolerance in this questioning that made Professor Nelson's classes a learning experience to be both eagerly anticipated and long cherished.

Eastin Nelson's research interests also revolved around Latin America. His particular area of interest was the development of economic thought in Mexico and Panama, and the relationship between economic policy and economic development in Latin America with particular reference to the role of the public sector. The results of Professor Nelson's research were published in The Tulane Law Review, The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, and The Inter-American Economic Review. Nelson also did extensive research in the area of production indices, national income accounting, and banking institutions in Latin America for use in his courses.
In 1958, Professor Nelson was named Acting Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies by President Logan Wilson after the resignation of Lewis Hanke. At the same time, President Wilson appointed him chairman of a university committee charged with finding a permanent director. Unbeknownst to Nelson, this temporary appointment would last until May 1962.

Eastin Nelson had taken direction of the Institute at a low point in its history. Graduate and undergraduate enrollment had declined sharply during the 1950s. Lack of University and outside funding had curtailed many Institute-sponsored activities and all but halted research. The associated faculty still lacked a professor of sociology and retirement was taking a toll of faculty members in other departments involved in the program. The University administration was clearly unhappy with the situation and was considering reorganizing the Institute by stripping it of all classroom and degree granting functions.

Professor Nelson accepted the challenge presented by these problems and applied himself with zeal to the task of reviving the Institute. It was under Nelson's directorship that the Institute made such singularly important advances as setting up a special research fund and developing a proposal for securing federal financing under the NDEA program. The latter step was to prove especially critical in that it opened the way for federal financing for program development support and graduate student fellowships, both being of major value in view of the previously spotty record of state financial support through the University. The idea of involving the Institute of Latin American Studies more centrally in the support and conduct of research was to add a significant new dimension to the long-standing teaching functions of
the Institute and contributed much to the Institute's becoming a nationally recognized center of academic excellence and intellectual vitality. Although a champion of research, Nelson also successfully defended and retained the degree granting activities of the Institute, an achievement of great importance for the future of the Institute. Closer academic ties with Mexican universities were achieved by the establishment of a joint research center with the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey.

Also during Nelson's tenure as director, the administrative structure of the Institute was reorganized and streamlined. The new positions of assistant director and director for research projects were created. The latter position was designated to head the multi-discipline research projects being planned by the Institute. The Executive Committee, which at that time was the governing board of the Institute, was reduced from an unwieldy ten members to seven. In addition, younger members of the associated faculty and, for the first time, professors not associated with Latin American studies were appointed to that body.

While other initiatives of Nelson -- such as a more active involvement of the Institute in the development processes of Latin America and a plan to have Mexican scholars serve as co-directors of the Institute -- did not, unfortunately, meet with as much receptivity in the local milieu, it remains true that Professor Nelson's talents played a critical role in reviving the earlier momentum of the Institute.

Lorene L. Rogers, President of The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary of The General Faculty
BIBLIOGRAPHY


