

Alan Heston, Economics and South Asia Studies

NOVEMBER 19, 2024 | VOL 71 ISSUE 15 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-71-NUMBER-15](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-71-number-15)) | DEATHS |

PRINT



Alan Heston

Alan Heston, a professor emeritus of economics and South Asia studies in the School of Arts & Sciences, died on October 25. He was 90.

Dr. Heston was born in 1934 and raised in Portland, Oregon. He earned a BA in economics from the University of Oregon in 1955, followed by an MA from the University of Washington in 1957. In 1962, he completed his PhD in economics at Yale University, where he also served briefly as an assistant professor.

In 1962, Dr. Heston joined Penn's faculty as a professor of economics. Along with collaborators Robert Summers and Irving Kravis, he developed the International Comparison Program (ICP) and the Penn World Table. These resources, now indispensable to economists, policymakers, and researchers worldwide, introduced a methodology for comparing prices and real incomes across countries, transforming the field of international economics. The ICP, currently administered by the World Bank, stands as a major legacy of this work.

Dr. Heston joined the ICP in its inaugural year in 1968 and worked to develop its benchmark comparisons. By 1985, he and Dr. Summers had expanded the database to cover 34 countries, introducing GDP estimates on a purchasing power basis for non-benchmark countries. Their work continued to grow, culminating in the Penn World Table in 1991, which extended these comparisons over time and geography. The Penn World Table continues to provide panel data on relative levels of income, output, input, and productivity covering 183 countries over the period from 1950 to 2019. For this work, Drs. Summers and Heston were named American Economic Association Distinguished Fellows in 1998.

Dr. Heston co-directed (with Dr. Summers) Penn's Center for International Comparisons (CIC), a successor to the ICP. Over his career, Dr. Heston also served as a consultant to the World Bank, United Nations, and numerous international organizations, helping to establish influential standards for international price comparisons. He retired from Penn and was awarded emeritus status in 2004.

"In his memoir, Alan noted that his relationship with the ICP was approaching 50 years and attributed this longevity to him continuing to find the program intellectually interesting and his colleagues congenial," said the World Bank in an online tribute to Dr. Heston. "Many involved in the ICP would attribute this congeniality to Alan himself—a kind and supportive mentor, always willing to help and explain to others complex concepts and provide innovative solutions."

Dr. Heston is survived by his wife, Bettina Aten; his son, Alex; his daughter, Laura; his brother, Leonard Heston; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

The family requests that donations be made to the Equal Justice Initiative (<http://eji.org/>).