

Donald Fitts, Chemistry

APRIL 7, 2020 | VOL 66 ISSUE 29 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-66-NUMBER-29](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-66-number-29)) | DEATHS | PRINT



Donald Fitts

Donald (Don) Fitts, emeritus professor of chemistry who also served as associate dean for graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania for many years, died March 25. He was 87.

Born in Concord, New Hampshire, his family moved to Keene, New Hampshire, where Dr. Fitts graduated from Keene High School in 1950 and received a scholarship to attend Harvard University. In 1954, he graduated from Harvard, magna cum laude with highest honors in chemistry, and he earned a PhD in chemistry in 1957 from Yale University for his theoretical work with John G. Kirkwood.

After a one-year appointment as a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Theoretical Physics, University of Amsterdam, he joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in 1959 as an assistant professor in chemistry, rising to the rank of full professor. For his first several years he also served as an assistant professor in LRSM (the Laboratory of Research in the Structure of Matter). He was a theoretician and a mainstay in Penn's physical chemistry division.

From 1978 to 1994, Dr. Fitts also served as the associate dean for graduate studies for Penn's School of Arts and Sciences (*Almanac* September 27, 1994 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v41/pdf/n05/092794.pdf>)). His 16 years in the position was the longest term of any graduate dean at Penn since 1928. During his term, he increased multi-year funding for doctoral students, created fellowships for minority students and strengthened the school's international programs. He also served as acting dean of SAS from 1982 to 1983, and on the Faculty Senate, University Council and the PASEF Board (after his retirement) as an at-large member of the executive committee.

Dr. Fitts' sabbatical leaves were spent in Britain as a NATO Senior Science Fellow at Imperial College, University of London; as an Academic Visitor in Physical Chemistry, University of Oxford; and as a Visiting Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University. He authored three books, *Nonequilibrium Thermodynamics* (McGraw-Hill, 1962), *Vector Analysis in Chemistry* (McGraw-Hill, 1974), and *Principles of Quantum Mechanics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), as well as over 50 academic journal articles in the field of physical chemistry. He retired from Penn in 2011 (*Almanac* May 24, 2011 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v57/n34/retired.html>)) and earned emeritus status.

Dr. Fitts is survived by his wife, Beverly Hoffman Fitts; sons, Robert and William; and grandchildren, Benjamin and Samantha.

Memorial donations may be made in his memory to the Arts and Sciences Graduate Fellowship Fund at the University of Pennsylvania (checks should be made out to "Trustees of Univ. of PA" with memo line "Arts and Sciences Graduate Fellowship Fund"). Please send to Univ. of PA, 2929 Walnut St., Ste 300, Philadelphia, PA 19104. To make an online gift, visit: <https://giving.apps.upenn.edu/fund?program=SAS&fund=342114> (<https://giving.apps.upenn.edu/fund?program=SAS&fund=342114>)