

Frank Johnston, SAS and Netter Center

SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

VOL 67 ISSUE 8 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-67-NUMBER-8](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-67-number-8))

DEATHS

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Francis E. (Frank) Johnston, emeritus professor of anthropology in the School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, died August 20 in Springfield, Pennsylvania, due to complications from Alzheimer's. He was 89.

Dr. Johnston was born in Paris, Kentucky, and attended Paris High School before enrolling at the University of Kentucky. He left college and enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1953. He became a naval aviator and flight instructor. He earned a National Defense Service Medal and was honorably discharged in 1958 with the rank of first lieutenant.

Frank Johnston

While he was at the University of Kentucky, Dr. Johnston took a class from Charles Snow, a biological anthropologist who inspired him to pursue anthropology. After leaving the Marine Corps, Dr. Johnston returned to the university and earned a BA and then MSc degree, studying the Archaic period Native American burials from the site of Indian Knoll, KY.

Building on this, Dr. Johnston's interests turned to the use of skeletal analysis to study growth and development in living people, and he entered the anthropology department at the University of Pennsylvania to work with Wilton Krogman, professor of physical anthropology (1947-1971) and founder of the Philadelphia Center for Research in Child Growth, which became the W.M. Krogman Center for Research in Child Growth and Development. Dr. Johnston received his PhD at Penn in 1962 after completing a study of the ways in which skeletal analysis could be used to measure and assess the growth, and therefore the health, of children in Philadelphia.

He then joined Penn as an assistant professor of anthropology that year. He was also a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Child Health, University of London from 1966 to 1967 and the Institute of Cancer Research in Philadelphia from 1967 to 1968. He left Penn in 1968 to become an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, and in 1971 he moved to Temple University, where he was a professor of anthropology until 1973.

Dr. Johnston returned to Penn's anthropology department in 1973, where he remained for the rest of professional life. He served as department chair from 1982 to 1994. Dr. Johnston's research focused on the growth and development of children, particularly how culture affected their nutritional status and so their health. He did research in many places throughout Latin America, especially Guatemala, but also in Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, and Cuba. He was also involved in the study of the health effects of modernization in Papua New Guinea.

His teaching incorporated service learning, particularly with Penn's Netter Center, where he served as a co-chair of its Faculty Advisory Board for 20 years. In 1991, Dr. Johnston founded the Netter Center's Urban Nutrition Initiative (now the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative, AUNI) with student leaders based on a course he taught and went on to be its faculty director. Under his leadership, AUNI became the largest and most comprehensive Netter Center program, involving 12 to 15 academically based community service (ABCS) courses annually, and operating nutrition and health programs, including fruit stands and school gardens, currently in 16 Philadelphia schools, serving more than 6,000 students. His ABCS courses and related research projects and writing made significant contributions to the fields of engaged scholarship, participatory action research, and public interest anthropology, as well as university-community projects across the United States and around the world.

Dr. Johnston was also part of a faculty delegation that went to Complutense Universidad de Madrid to develop collaborative opportunities (*Almanac* January 12, 1993 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v39pdf/n17/011293-insert.pdf>)). He was a member of Penn's Medical School Council on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and the Council's Special Task Force on improving the health status of the West Philadelphia community.

He was given a Research Foundation Award in 1996 for "Physical Growth and Mental Development of Guatemala City School Children" and another in 1999 for "Nutrition, Physical Growth, and Health of Children from Abruzzo, Italy—Feasibility Study." He became an emeritus professor in 2000 and retired in 2016.

Outside of Penn, Dr. Johnston was an overseas fellow of Churchill College, University of Cambridge; visiting fellow at University College, London; and visiting professor at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

He served as a president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists and was editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, *Human Biology*, and the *American Journal of Human Biology*. He served as consultant to the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization, and the Pan American Health Organization.

His many honors included: the award of the American Society of Scientific Publishers for editing the best issue of a scientific journal published that year in the US; author of the best article appearing that year in the *Journal of Adolescent Medicine*; Honorable Mention for the Ernest A. Lynton Award for Faculty Professional Service, given by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education; and the Charles Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (*Almanac* May 13, 2003 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v49/n33/honors.html>)). In 2002, Barbara and G. Frederick Roll established a permanent academic chair of anthropology in Dr. Johnston's honor, the Francis E. Johnston Term Professor of Anthropology.

Dr. Johnston wrote 15 books and over 160 articles. His last book, *Knowledge for Social Change* (written with a number of co-authors) was published in 2017. Using history, social theory, and case studies, the book argues that we should fundamentally rethink research universities, using the knowledge they produce to enact social change and help create and sustain democratically engaged colleges and universities for the public good.

Dr. Johnston is survived by his wife, Patricia and three children and three grandchildren. Due to the COVID pandemic, a private funeral service for his immediate family is being held.