American Sociological Association
Footnotes
May 1994

Alden Speare, Jr.
(1940-1994)

On Saturday morning, January 8, 1994, Alden Speare, Jr. died of a heart attack on his way to the People’s University in Beijing, China to teach a seminar on the uses of demography in marketing under the auspices of the United Nations Brown University. Al spent his entire professional career in the Department of Sociology at Brown University and was a distinguished scholar, teacher, and researcher. He played key roles in the Population Studies and Training Center, in the Social Science Data Center, and the Social Science Research Laboratory. He was chair of the sociology department from 1979 to 1988 and again during the spring semester 1992. He was 54 years of age.

Al Speare did not start out as a sociologist. He received his Bachelor degree from Cornell University in Engineering Physics in 1963 and went on to the University of Michigan for his Masters of Science degree in Nuclear Science in 1964. But his commitments to liberal values and his concerns about the uses of nuclear science for military purposed led him to switch fields. He turned to sociology at Michigan, receiving his MA degree in 1967 and his PhD in 1969. He came to Brown as an Assistant Professor an 1974 and Full Professor in 1981. When he was away from Brown he carries out demographic research as a visiting faculty member in the sociology department in Tunghai University in Taichung Taiwan, as Field Associate stationed at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research in Jakarta, Indonesia; and as a Visiting Researcher in Center of Demographic Studies and in Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division of the U.S., Bureau of the Census in Washington, D.C.

Alden Speare research focused on issues on migration and urbanization in the United State and in third world countries. His work on the U.S. census of 1980 documented in detail the regional and metropolitan growth patterns in the United States and became the basis of his most recent book published as part of the Russell Sage Foundation series of Census monographs. His earlier work on the rural-urban transition in Taiwan detailed study of residential mobility in Rhode Island combined for the first time a real and individual level measures to develop a systematic theory of mobility choices. It has become a classic in the field. In addition, he published over 50 articles in the leading journals of demography and sociology. At the time of his death, he was completing a series of studies on changes in metropolitan area in the United States between 1980 and 1990 that is scheduled to be published by the Center for Urban Policy at Rutgers, was continuing research on migration using longitudinal data from survey of Income and Program Participation, and studies of living arrangements and mobility of the elderly.

In much of his research he involved graduate students and undergraduates. His books and articles list as coauthors the names of a large number of colleagues and students with whom he shared the research enterprise. This year he served on the largest number PhD committees in the Department of Sociology.
as well as teaching required graduate seminars in statistics and new courses on world urbanization and on metropolitan community.

In addition to serving in the past as Chair of the Department of Sociology, Al Speare served as a key member of committees with the department an within the university. He was a frequent editorial consultant for the major journals in his field and at the time of his death was associate editor of *Demography*, the official journal of the Population Association of America. He was instrumental in placing Brown University among the leading centers for the study of migration and population change.

Whether he was measuring migration in Taiwan or Indonesia; regional and metropolitan growth in the United States; whether he was studying who helps whom among the elderly or comparing their economic wellbeing or their living arrangements; Al was passionately committed to examining how people’s lives were organized or disrupted and how we could dispassionately and systematically measures these lives. He often said little, but did much. He was quite but never self-absorbed. He was always thoughtful, always respectful. In his own way, he was forceful and articulate as he carried out his various responsibilities meticulously and professionally. He taught a large number of graduate and undergraduate students and mentored junior faculty with fairness and modesty. The outpouring of grief expressed by his former students and his colleagues from around the world has continued; their contributions to a special fund setup by his family in his memory to support graduate students in sociology has been extraordinary and is a testament to the value they attach to their teacher and mentor.

For a quarter of a century, he was intimately and continuously connected to every corner of the sociology department at Brown. In his quiet way he was the personification of the strengths of the department and the university. He treated the department as his community, as an extension of his family. In his private and unassuming ways he was committed to the fullness and totality of family and research and teaching. And he integrated these activities into the whole web of his life.

Al Speare spent most of his life as we knew him thinking about how to take the accurate measurement of people and their lives. He always sought ways to get at the basics and find new ways to teach them to others. He influenced all those who knew him as he continually taught us. With him we were better persons and better scholars. Without him we shall not be the same. As our teacher and our mentor, as our friend and our colleague, he will be deeply missed.