

Elmer “Kim” Kingsholm Nelson, Jr.

NAPA Obituary by Ross Clayton

Kim Nelson became a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration in 1974 while serving as the Dean of the University of Southern California’s School of Public Administration (now the Sol Price School of Public Policy).

Kim Nelson, Jr., 1922-2020, had a long and distinguished career in practice of Public Administration and academic leadership. His education included Bachelors, Masters, and Law degrees from the University of Wyoming and a DPA degree from the University of Southern California. His academic roles included service as an Instructor in Psychology at the University of Wyoming; as Professor of Criminology at the University of British Columbia; and as Professor of Public Administration and Dean of the School of Public Administration at the University of Southern California.

Kim was a gifted teacher, scholar, and leader. Teaching excellence was a hallmark of his career. Kim’s classes in organizational psychology and behavior were treasured by his students and highly respected by his academic colleagues. Numerous doctoral students benefitted from his wise counseling.

Early professional experiences that informed Kim’s teaching included military service as a lieutenant during World War II and work in correctional facilities as a Psychologist and as a Warden. His combined interests in Law and Psychology led him to accept an appointment to the faculty at the University of British Columbia, where he founded the first program in Criminology at a Canadian University.

Professor Nelson’s sustained scholarly interests focused upon correctional institutions and criminal justice. Kim served as the Director of the Ford Foundation funded Youth Studies Center at USC. Along with the then Law School Dean, Dorothy Nelson, he established a joint degree in Judicial Administration.

Kim was a facilitative leader who fostered many innovations. During his Deanship years, the School established Centers in Washington, DC, and in Sacramento; initiated a Master’s degree program in Intergovernmental Management; and pioneered the use of Intensive Semesters to increase access by working professionals to graduate education.

Professor Nelson’s leadership roles extended beyond the campus. Taking leaves of absence during Governor Pat Brown’s and Jerry Brown’s Administrations, he served as Deputy Administrator of the California Youth and Adult Corrections Agency, and later at the request of the U.S. Attorney General, he served as the Associate Director of Lyndon Johnson’s Presidential Crime Commission.

Kim Nelson was married to his wife, Jane Nelson, for 61 years. The Nelson’s are survived by their son, Kirk.