

SEAP History: Professor Lauriston Sharp (1907-1993)

Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies, Emeritus

Founder of the Southeast Asia Program

Professor Sharp, pictured here, joined Cornell's faculty in 1936 after receiving an MA degree from Harvard and training in East Asian and Pacific Anthropology at the University of Vienna. He later went on to receive his PhD from Harvard, and chaired the fledgling Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Cornell. During the Second World War, Professor Sharp took leave from Cornell to serve in the Department of State as the Assistant Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, where he was a policy advisor for United States relations with Thailand and Indochina. After the war, Professor Sharp returned to Cornell and began working to establish programs and initiatives for the academic study of non-European peoples. In 1947 he founded the Cornell Thailand Project with the support of the Carnegie Corporation, and in the 1950-51 academic year he and Professor Emeritus Knight Biggerstaff of the History Department founded the Cornell Southeast Asia Program with the support of the Rockefeller foundation.

Professor Sharp played a key role in the hiring of SEAP's first faculty members, Professor George Kahin, Professor John Echols, and Professor Frank Golay. Together, they directed the Southeast Asia Program for ten years, overseeing the development of Southeast Asian language classes at Cornell, pioneering the Cornell Library's world-class Southeast Asian collections, and helping to secure subsequent grants from the Rockefeller Foundation.



Lauriston Sharp's Oral History of SEAP

A video recording of an interview conducted with Professor Lauriston Sharp on November 17, 1993 can be found here: <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/60852>

Here Professor Sharp recounts his experience of spearheading the study of Southeast Asia at Cornell, focusing on the "proto-history" of SEAP in the late thirties to its founding in the early fifties. Professor Sharp outlines a sketch of the early program, putting particular emphasis on the early stages of Southeast Asian language training at Cornell and the interdisciplinary nature of the Southeast Asia Program.

Lauriston Sharp in the Words of His Colleagues

Memorial Statement for Professor Sharp prepared by the Office of the Dean of the University Faculty of Cornell University – <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/18163>

"Lauriston Sharp and Southeast Asian Studies at Cornell" – by Professor Stanley O'Connor in the 1982 SEAP Bulletin p 3-4 <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/59208>

"Celebrating Our Founder's Birthday" – by Professor George Kahin in the 1986 SEAP Bulletin p 7-8 <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/59213>

"Lauriston Sharp (1907-93)" – by Professor George Kahin in the 1994 SEAP Fall Bulletin p 2-5 <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/59250>

"Reflections About an Anthropologist" – by Professor A. Thomas Kirsch in the 1996 SEAP Fall Bulletin p 6-8 <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/59251>