Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

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The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.
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ROBERT OWEN KEOHANE

Robert O. Keohane, an intellectual leader and tireless scholar, transformed the field of international relations. Throughout his career, Bob has been fearless in challenging conventional wisdom and tackling some of the most important problems in international affairs.

Bob was born and raised in Chicago. His parents were anti-communist social democrats, who instilled in Bob a deep sense of social responsibility and an “active sense of politics.” After his sophomore year of high school, Bob enrolled at Shimer College and graduated “with great distinction” (equivalent to summa cum laude) in 1961. While his passion was political theory, Bob was driven by his mother’s commitment to activism and social justice. He developed a desire to understand the structures and dynamics behind an increasingly changing and globalized world. This led him to pursue master’s and doctoral degrees in government at Harvard University. At Harvard, he studied with Stanley Hoffmann and Judith Shklar. His dissertation, on the politics of influence in the General Assembly of the United Nations, won the Sumner Prize for the best Ph.D. dissertation in the department in 1966.

Bob held academic appointments at Swarthmore College (1965–73), Stanford University (1973–81), Brandeis University (1981–85), Harvard University (1985–96), and Duke University (1996–2005), before coming to Princeton University. He also served as chair of the Department of Government at Harvard and Department of Political Science at Stanford. He joined the faculty of the Woodrow Wilson School as a professor of international affairs in 2005. At the Wilson School, Bob has been at the center of school life, dispensing insightful, sharp critiques at research colloquia, as well as generously offering advice and encouragement to countless students.

Bob’s scholarly accomplishments easily make him one of the most distinguished contemporary political scientists. International relations, the field in which Bob works, was long dominated by a paradigm called Realism. This paradigm focused on how the anarchic conditions of world politics meant that the distribution of capabilities among states in the world became the prime mover. In addition, a central
feature of this system was the balance of power, which animated states’ actions. Bob’s research challenged this paradigm directly and powerfully. His work came to define a new paradigm called neoliberal institutionalism, which focused on how institutions in world politics could develop and help ameliorate the problems caused by anarchy in a world without government.

His first landmark study, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (1977), with Joseph S. Nye, argued that world politics had evolved into a system of complex interdependence in which the conditions assumed by Realism had changed. The use of force and conflict no longer pervaded all international relations; rather, countries could cooperate and find mutual benefits in different issue areas because of this complex interdependence. This upended the predominant theory of the time, i.e., Realism, which posited that the international system was characterized almost solely by distrust, competition, and conflict between states.

In the decades to follow, Bob solidified his role as one of the most original and consequential theorists of international affairs. With *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (1984), Bob highlighted the pivotal role of international regimes—institutions and norms in the international system like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or International Monetary Fund—in reducing the transaction costs of cooperation between states. In doing so, he expertly integrated standard economic theories and insights from organizational theory into international relations, showing that rational self-interest could lead states to cooperative relations even in a world operating under the assumptions of realist theory. His goal in doing so was to show that even after American hegemony had eroded, states could still find ways to avoid conflict. This was truly path-breaking as it demonstrated why states would choose to create international institutions and how they could then use these to foster cooperation. The book also addressed the issue of why states would comply with international norms and institutions when they did not possess the capability to enforce their rules.

Moreover, Bob’s work has demonstrated remarkable breadth and depth. Frequently “dismayed” or “dissatisfied” with the current state of the field, Bob relishes in pushing the discipline’s boundaries. He has set new research agendas by studying issues like international institutions, transnational actors, and environmental politics long
before they became recognized topics in the discipline. He edited a series of seminal volumes on virtually every major topic in the past few decades from shifting paradigms in international relations theory (Neorealism and Its Critics), the role of domestic politics (Internationalization and Domestic Politics with Helen V. Milner), and the influence of ideas in foreign policy (Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change with Judith Goldstein).

Bob pushes himself through continuous growth as much as he urges the discipline to transform itself. For example, Bob with Peter Katzenstein drew on individual attitudes, social psychology, and constructivist orientations for Anti-Americanism in World Politics, a volume offering fresh perspectives on nationalism and biases in global politics. He has written and edited countless other books and articles on a huge range of topics.

Bob has transformed not only what we study in international affairs, but also how we study it. With Gary King and Sydney Verba, Bob wrote Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, an authoritative and indispensable guide for qualitative research in political science. Bob showed that scholars need not choose between studying “important topics” and methodological advancement. When equipped with a deep understanding of history, scholarship, and methodological training, students of world politics can conduct methodologically rigorous research on “important” topics.

Bob’s seminal contributions have been recognized with the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order in 1989 and the Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science in 2005, which some consider to be the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for political science. He has also garnered the James Madison Award for lifetime achievement from the American Political Science Association in 2014, the Centennial Medal from the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 2012, the Susan Strange Award from the International Studies Association in 2012, and honorary doctorates from Science Po (Paris) and the Aarhus University (Denmark). He is a fellow of numerous academic institutions of distinction: the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, the American Philosophical Society, and the British Academy. In 2009, he was named the most influential scholar of the preceding 20 years in the field of international relations by Foreign Policy magazine.
Beyond his scholarly contributions, Bob served as president of the American Political Science Association from 1999–2000 and the International Studies Association from 1988–89. As editor from 1974–1980, he also helped transform *International Organization* into the flagship journal for world politics. Its annual award for the best paper published in the journal by an untenured scholar bears his name. He was chair of the Triangle Land Conservancy when he was on the Duke University faculty. More recently, Bob has served as a member of the board of director of Shimer College, his alma mater. He has been centrally involved in trying to help Shimer raise funds in order to navigate a new life in these changing times.

Moreover, Bob has been a motivating force as an adviser. His students rank among the most accomplished and prolific scholars of world politics and hold appointments in top political science departments including Princeton University, Harvard University, Stanford University, University of California, Berkeley, New York University, Duke University, Columbia University, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, University of Rochester, University of Oxford, University of Pennsylvania, Ohio State University, and University of Wisconsin–Madison. Bob has been an extremely important mentor to women in the field as well. Bob is beloved by his many former students and has been celebrated by a number of them in his festschrift volume, *Power, Interdependence, and Non-State Actors in World Politics: Research Frontiers* (edited by Helen V. Milner and Andrew Moravcsik, 2009).

In short, Bob is a commanding presence in international relations scholarship and an authoritative voice on world politics. He will remain so even as he retires from Princeton University this summer.