

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



May 2020

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

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In the Nation's Service and the Service of Humanity

CONTENTS

Faculty Members Honored in 2020 for Receiving Emeritus Status

Christopher H. Achen	2
Jay Burton Benziger.	6
Emily A. Carter	9
Joanne S. Gowa	12
Robert C. Gunning.	14
Deborah Epstein Nord.	16
Willard J. Peterson.	18
Warren Buckler Powell	22
Robert Stengel	26
Ezra N. Suleiman	30
Shirley Marie Tilghman.	33

EZRA N. SULEIMAN



Ezra N. Suleiman, the IBM Professor in International Studies and professor of politics, will transfer to emeritus status on July 1, 2020, after more than four decades as a member of the Princeton faculty. With a distinguished scholarly career in political science, Ezra has made lasting contributions to the study of comparative bureaucracy, French politics, and the relationship of bureaucratic and political elites. He is widely recognized as a leader in his field. These recognitions include such high awards as a Guggenheim Fellowship and the French Legion of Honor.

Born in Basra, Iraq, Ezra was sent to school in England at the age of eight, a move obliged by the political turbulence sweeping his native country as well as the entire Middle East. Speaking no English, he entered Whittingehame College, a boarding school in Sussex where he spent the next 10 years. Blessed with an acute intellect, Ezra then moved to Harvard University, where he earned his A.B. degree in three years with honors in economics. Before starting his doctoral studies at Columbia University, he pursued graduate education in Paris at the Sorbonne and in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies. By the time Ezra acquired his American doctorate, he had become what he remains: a cosmopolitan, worldly man who is comfortable in several languages and cultural settings.

While completing his dissertation at Columbia he taught at the City University of New York for a couple of years. It was at this time that he was recruited with tenure by the University of California-Los Angeles. His dissertation won an important prize of the American Political Science Association and shortly after was published by the Princeton University Press. In 1979, Princeton's Department of Politics appointed him as a full professor.

He is the author of numerous books and articles, and his scholarship has made a lasting contribution to a number of fields. His early books analyzed the nature of the ruling elite in France. Based on extensive surveys of the French elite, Ezra probed such issues as how elites are recruited, how they maintain their status, and why in some instances they lose such status. These works were very much in the tradition of "elite theory" associated with the likes of such European thinkers as Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Weber. In his first book, *Politics, Power*

and Bureaucracy in France (Princeton University Press, 1974), for example, he analyzed the relationship of administrative and political elites, a subject hitherto ignored by students of bureaucracy. Based on historical analysis and original data, he explained how French administrators were able to maintain their high status in French society over a prolonged period and how they interacted with the regime in power in the Fifth Republic. For the first time, the bureaucracy became openly aligned with a specific regime. The book was fairly controversial in France because it debunked the myth that the bureaucracy has no client other than the “general interest.” This first book was very well received; it opened up the study of bureaucracy as an integral subject in the study of comparative politics.

A related second book followed shortly thereafter. *Elites in French Society: The Politics of Survival* (Princeton University Press, 1978) probed the mechanisms via which the French state helped France’s bureaucratic elite reproduce itself. Again, based on original survey data, this book emphasized the importance of the grandes écoles in training and promoting French elite and of the grand corps in launching these elites into non-governmental careers. The book also emphasized the durability across different regimes of the French administrative elite as part of their survival strategy.

In short order these two books established Ezra as one of the world’s leading scholars of French politics and of the study of bureaucracy. His books became part of graduate curricula in courses in comparative politics across the country. Moreover, his scholarship was widely read and respected in Europe, especially in France where his books were also translated. James Scott, another distinguished political scientist at Yale University, once remarked that the best scholars of comparative politics ought not only to be respected within American political science, but should also be read and respected in the countries they studied. Ezra came to represent the best of this tradition in comparative politics.

Over the intervening decades, Ezra has continued to publish extensively in both English and in French. In *Private Power and Centralization in France* (Princeton University Press, 1988), he underlined the dangers of clientelism in a centralized state. In 2003, in the post-Reagan and post-Thatcher era, Ezra turned his attention to defend the role of bureaucracy in good governance. With his well-established reputation as a scholar of bureaucracy, in *Dismantling Democratic States* (Princeton University Press, 2003), he took on the “neo-liberal” suggestion that bureaucracy was part of democracy’s ills. Instead he argued forcefully for the need of a skilled civil-service

as agents of good government in Western democracies. This book too was widely regarded as an important statement that helped correct some of the anti-statist zeal of the period. And most recently in a co-authored book, *The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), Ezra again helps us understand how the bureaucracy of the European Commission helps maintain its autonomy and how these bureaucrats have in turn become the “custodians of Europe.”

This brief sampling of Ezra’s scholarship underscores his many and varied accomplishments. He is a leading world-class scholar of bureaucracy and comparative politics. He has opened up new areas of scholarship for others to pursue and has made important public policy statements to help the world understand the important role of bureaucracies in good governance.

In addition to his scholarship, Ezra has a global presence. He has held appointments at the European University Institute in Florence, Nuffield College, Oxford, the Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Paris, the University of Turin, the university of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium, the University of Bordeaux, the University of Lyon, and the University of Grenoble. His honors include the Guggenheim, the French Legion of Honor, and awards from the German Marshall Fund, the ACLS, the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin, and the Institute for Advanced Study in the Netherlands. He is also the recipient of three Honorary Degrees from French universities as well as being elected to the French Academy of Political and Moral Sciences.

At Princeton, Ezra taught and trained generations of students. He also founded and directed the Program in Contemporary European Politics and Society. His lively presence at Princeton as a scholar, teacher, and a colleague will surely be missed. We wish him a happy and healthy future.