

Jack Nachmias, Psychology

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Jack Nachmias

Jacob ("Jack") Nachmias, emeritus professor of psychology in the School of Arts & Sciences at Penn, died March 2 after a brief illness. He was 90.

Born in Athens, Greece, he left his home in Sofia, Bulgaria, with his family in 1939 to come to America and escape the Nazis. Their departure on the last ship to sail from Paris is documented in files now stored online with the Holocaust Museum. Dr. Nachmias was legally blind his entire life but refused to consider that a disability. After graduating from Cornell in 1950 with a degree in psychology, he obtained an MA, also in psychology, from Swarthmore College in 1952 while teaching and working with Hans Wallach and Wolfgang Kohler, who also escaped the Nazis, and then earned his PhD in psychology from Harvard. He also studied at the University of Cambridge in England on a Fulbright scholarship. Dr. Nachmias' specialty

was in visual perception.

After a year as an NIH Fellow in the psychology department at the University of Rochester, he joined the faculty at Swarthmore. In 1961, he joined the faculty at Penn as an assistant professor of psychology as one of several new senior appointments made by Robert Bush, who revolutionized the department during his tenure as chair starting in 1958. A few years later Dr. Nachmias was promoted to full professor. He served two terms as department chair, 1974-1979 and 1988-1991, and also served for a time as director of graduate studies. He took leaves for a visiting professorship at Harvard and again to do research at University of Cambridge, working with John Robson and Murray Sachs on visual channels. He served on the search committee for a new dean of admissions and financial aid for Penn in 1971. Dr. Nachmias earned emeritus status in 1995.

Among his honors, Dr. Nachmias was elected to the National Academy of Sciences (*Almanac* May 8, 1984 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v30pdf/n33/050884.pdf>)); he was awarded a Biomedical Research Support Grant in 1987; and he was given an honorary doctorate from the SUNY College of Optometry (*Almanac* September 9, 2014 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v61/n04/hot.html>)).

He is survived by his wife, Vivianne, emerita professor of cell and developmental biology in the Perelman School of Medicine; daughters, Lisa Nachmias Davis and Sarah Nachmias; grandchildren, Ann C.T. Davis and Luke L.B. Davis; step-grandchild, Laura Reardon; sister, Rachel Franco; niece, Karen Porper; nephew, Albert Franco; cousins, Yvette Baeu, Liliane Benardete, Relly Davidson, Susan Kennedy and Tina Kennedy; and members of his wife's family.