

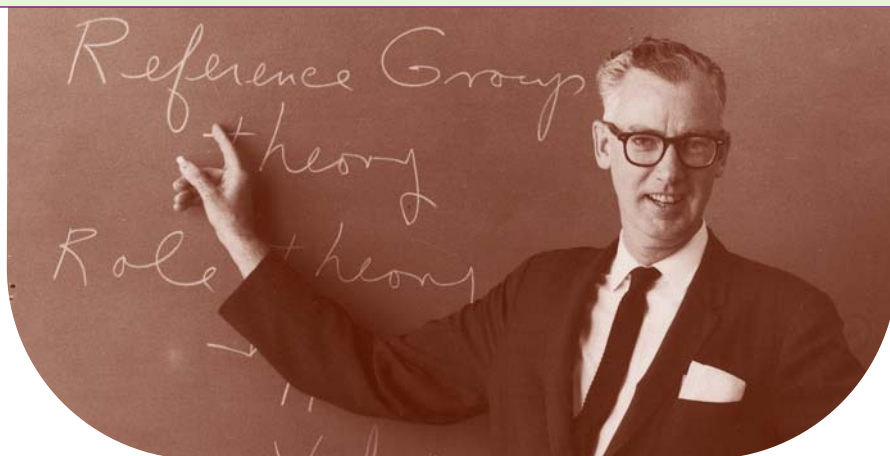
William Griffiths, Ph.D.: Health Educator and Family Planning Expert

Bill Griffiths, who passed away in 1998, was a presence on campus for nearly 50 years—29 years as a professor and 18 years as an active emeritus member of the faculty at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health. Griffiths was well known as a pioneer in the field of health education and played a vital role in building the health education program's international reputation as the program for future leaders of ministries of health and family planning in the developing world.

A psychologist by training, he was a champion of applying the behavioral sciences to public health. He helped develop and refine methodologies of program planning and evaluation, community organization, and group process. Especially in his international work, he stressed the roles of needs assessment, leadership, power and influence, and the involvement of people in their own health behavior changes.

"Griffiths's research was intensely pragmatic," remembered colleagues at the time of his death. "His underlying objective was to explore ways to deliver public health services more effectively to identified target populations, always recognizing the uniqueness of each situation." Griffiths's sensitivity to the structures of societies came into play in his early work in Native American communities—both before coming to UC Berkeley, working with the Chippewa in Minnesota, and after, as principal investigator on the Navajo Health Education Project from 1955 to 1962.

The Navajo Project, under the purview of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and conducted on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Arizona, had the end goal of helping the USPHS's Division of Indian Health improve delivery of hospital and field health services on the reservation. In addition to identifying certain needed changes in delivery systems, a major long-range outcome of this project was the stimulation of the



development of a training program for Native American public health workers at Berkeley and other schools of public health.

Two subsequent projects in the 1960s and 1970s respectively, took Griffiths halfway around the world to develop family planning programs in Dacca, East Pakistan (now part of Bangladesh), and Nepal, a country particularly disadvantaged by geography and lack of natural resources. Despite the challenges of insufficient infrastructure and clashes (and ultimately war) between coexisting communities with vastly different religious and cultural beliefs and practices, both projects resulted in substantial local planning activity and the stimulation of indigenous career advancement.

His work in family planning grew out of an awareness of the pressing need among his foreign students to address the problems of overpopulation in their countries. Initially he responded by establishing in 1958 the first academic seminars on family planning in this country. This, in turn, led to the opportunities for conducting action-research projects abroad.

Griffiths's Bangladesh and Nepal family planning projects, funded by the Ford Foundation, Population Council, and USAID, helped solidify the role of education in changing people's behaviors and acceptance of family planning—especially recently developed non-invasive methods such as the contraception pill and intrauterine device (IUD).

In Bangladesh, the most-densely populated country in the world, Griffiths's project influenced the course of the country's second and third national five-year plans, which brought about long-term reforms in family planning and contributed to the growing success of the program in that country. The Nepal project had similar impacts on that country.

Griffiths was widely sought as a consultant on public health and family planning and was engaged (often by former students) as a consultant and adviser to governments and non-governmental organizations in Burma (Myanmar), Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tonga, and Turkey. He also served on the World Health Organization's Expert Advisory Panel on Health Education.

All told, Griffiths mentored more than 300 international graduate students. "Of all the things which Bill did in his busy life, he most loved teaching, mentoring, and working with the graduate students who came to him from the far corners of the earth for inspiration and methodology," remembers his wife, Sylvie Griffiths, who was a great supporter of his work, often opening her home to the visiting scholars. "To guide them to an appreciation of the key questions for an understanding of health behavior and to stimulate them to seek new solutions to outstanding problems was his greatest satisfaction." 