Law Professor E. Allan Farnsworth

E. Allan Farnsworth, Alfred McCormack Professor of Law, and one of the world’s foremost legal scholars on contracts, whose U.S. casebook remains the standard reference in courtrooms and law schools, died on Jan. 31. He was 76.

Farnsworth received a B.S. in applied mathematics at the University of Michigan in 1948, and an M.A. in physics at Yale University in 1950. He decided to go on for his Ph.D.

“I wanted to do something which had a human element as it opposed to an amanuus types. I then had the School News in a 1968 interview.

He graduated from Columbia Law School in 1970 and won the Onoranums Prize for scholastic excellence. After serv-

ing in the Air Force as a captain in the JAG Corps and a brief stint as a San Francisco head, he joined the Columbia faculty in 1974, where he would teach for 50 years.

A dedicated teacher, he pub-
ished three textbooks: Nego-

tiable Instruments, Contracts, and Commercial Law; which quickly became the most adopted books in their fields.

Farnsworth soon expanded his horizons, teaching in international courses in com-

mercial transactions. In 1960, he was invited to teach at the University of Istanbul, and dur-

ing the 1960s he became a pro-

fessor in France, Germany, Italy and other places.

The Law School named him the Alfred McCormack Professor of Law in 1980 and he held that at the time of his death.

Between 1966 and 1972, he served at the highest of the U.S. State Department, as the American member of an interna-

tional committee drafting a uni-

form law on the validity of inte-

ernational sales contracts. From 1970 to 1980 he was the U.S. rep-

resentative to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and he represented the United States on diplomatic conferences on international agency and international sales.

In recent years, Farnsworth lent his expertise to questions sur-

rounding the financing of Iraqi assets and contractual issues involving everything from insur-

ance purses resulting from 9/11 to Matariy’s break-up with Virgin Records.

His honors include honorary doctorates from the Dickinson School of Law of the University of Paris and the University of Lowov, the Law School Medal for Excellence, the William Amor for Meyer Schapiro, from Jewels in Her Crown. Treasures from the Special Collections of Columbia’s Libraries, through Feb. 28.

In Memoriam

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said his daughter. Karen Farnsworth-Einsidler, Law ’81. “He was very demanding, but you often got fair notice of what he was thinking. He sat at the beginning of the term and would do the case class discussion involved a case from a state where you from could you assume said you be called on?”

Farnsworth completed his final book last year: Alienating: Malpractice and Forgiveness for Flawed Professionals, which examines the legal issues that arise when people seek to avoid the untoward consequences of an action by claiming that their perception was flawed. True to Farnsworth’s sense of humor, the Edward Munch painting “The Scream” appears on the cover.

In addition to his wife and his daughter Karen, he is survived by two other daughters and five

grandchildren. His son, Edward Alan Farnsworth Jr., died in 1995. Farnsworth will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery.