

ALLEN KENT

Information Science Pioneer

1921 -

Career

- MIT Research Associate
- Battelle Memorial Institute
Principal Documentation Engineer
- Case Western Reserve University
Professor of Library Science and
Associate Director of the Center for
Documentation and Communication
Research
- University of Pittsburgh
Department of Library Science and
Department of Information Science
Professor – established first
Department of Information Science
in 1970



Case Western Reserve University



Allen Kent, third from left, with officials from
the Computer Institute

- Proposed national center for science and technology information
- Studied Institute of Scientific Information in the Soviet Union
- Efforts supported by National Science Foundation, Rand Development Corporation, and U.S. Government
- Worked with officials from the Computer Institute

A Machine that does Research

- Helped develop free-field searching, vocabulary control, semantic code dictionary, telegraph abstract
- Information retrieval research and work with the Soviet Union covered in *Harper's Magazine* April, 1959
- Helped establish Mark I Information Retrieval Service
 - Mechanized information service program led to ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center)



Pioneer of Systems Centered Approach

- Helped standardize information retrieval (IR) within Information Science field.
- Accredited with systems centered IR research that focuses on building of systems of retrievals and processes – does not consider users.
- Dominates much IR research today
- 1970s: Human centered approach in IR began: concerned with users' interaction with systems – not just system as focus
- Today a conceptual and organizational split within IR discipline between systems and human centered approach

The Pittsburgh Study

- “A Cost-Benefit Model of Some Critical Library Operations in Terms of Use of Materials.” published 1977
- Funding: \$140,000 National Science Foundation grant
- Goal to develop long-range acquisitions policies for research libraries based on statistical data of material use and cost of use by patrons
- Root hypothesis: “It was our expectation that much of the material purchased for a research library was little or never used, and that the costs entailed are beyond ordinary expectations.”
- Kent and associates reported waste of funding and lack of use of materials
- Findings widely publicized in Library and Information Science community and several journals

The Pittsburgh Reply

- Casimir Borkowski and Murdo Macleod rebuttal of Kent's research published on behalf of Senate Library Committee of University of Pittsburgh - 1979
- Refuted soundness and validity of Kent's research in areas of data manipulation, text footnotes and structure, and terms of costs, use, and holdings
- Pointed out that Kent does not use valid comparative model in research rendering findings useless for producing cost benefit model
- Faulty research baseline for statistics and left report open for attack
- Report described as "...clear and present danger," and recommendations of study to be "...consequences of some new technology or promotional scheme" that "...bares its fangs."

1979+

- Kent turns attention to co-editing and publishing various and numerous volumes of encyclopedias, including:
 - *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*
 - *Encyclopedia of Computer Science and Technology*
 - *Encyclopedia of Microcomputers*
- Accredited with nearly 700 published works
- Continued to work on behalf of organizations such as EDUCOM and the Knowledge Availability Systems Center that he helped organize

Organizations

- American Library Association
- Pennsylvania Library Association
- American Society of Information Scientists
- American Institute of Chemistry
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- Association for Computer Machinery

Awards

- Information Science Hall of Fame: University of South Carolina and University of Pittsburgh
- 1977 Award of Merit from the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS)
- 1980 Best Information Science Book (ASIS)

Retired in 1991 from University of Pittsburgh

- Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in the Graduate Information Science and Technology Program

- University of Pittsburgh named award after Allen Kent in Department of Information Science



Allen Kent and his wife, Rosalind, at his retirement party in December 1991.