

Alex Heller (July 9, 1925-January 31, 2008) worked in algebraic topology and homological algebra. He was also one of the early leaders in category theory and made very important contributions to abstract homotopy theory.

Heller was born and bred in New York City and spent most of his academic career there. He received his A.B. with honors in Mathematics from Columbia University in 1947. He was one of the first students of Sammy Eilenberg at Columbia University and earned his Ph.D. in 1950. After graduating, he held fellowships at the Institute of Advanced Study (1950-1951) and Harvard (1952-1953).

From 1954 to 1964, Heller was a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana. He was part of a group including Michael Barr, John Beck, John Gray, and Max Kelly that worked on representation theory, homological algebra and category theory. In 1965 he returned to his beloved hometown to be part of the founding of the mathematics Ph.D. program in the Graduate School of the City University of New York. He held the title of Distinguished Professor from 1970 and he retired in 2002. Heller was an amazing teacher who had 17 Ph.D. students. While insisting that the students maintain the highest level of mathematical rigor, Heller nevertheless demanded that the students develop their own independence.

Over the years, Heller was a visiting professor in Oxford, Paris, Milan, and Sydney. Along with Peter Freyd, he was the founding co-editor of the influential Journal of Pure and Applied Algebra. He wrote numerous well-received papers and (co-)edited two books of proceedings.

Alex had many interests outside of mathematics such as computability theory, cognitive science, philosophy, poetry and cooking. He was a brilliant, charming, genial, cultured gentleman who was loved by all who knew him. He always had a large cigar and a warm smile. He is survived by his wife Grace, to whom he was married for 52 years, and their son Nicholas.



