Professor emeritus Njoku Ekpe Awa died on July 21, 2013, after several years of illness. Professor Awa was literally a royal: born in Nigeria to a tribal village chief, he retained ties to his traditional community throughout his life. He was buried in Nigeria according to Nigerian customs.

After early education in Presbyterian schools in British colonial Nigeria (in what became the East Central State), and work as a sales manager, Professor Awa came to London for further work, earning a London University General Certificate of Education in 1963. He returned to Nigeria and began his career in education, serving as a coordinator and field representative for the University of Nigeria. At the same time, through correspondence he earned a London University external diploma in history in 1966. Moving to the United States with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Professor Awa received a B.A. in Communication Arts from Michigan State University in 1969, soon after his 30th birthday. Academia was now firmly established in Professor Awa’s
life; in the same year, he earned his M.A. jointly in Communication Arts and in Continuing and Adult Education. His thesis showed his commitment to the specific challenges of his native country, while simultaneously recognizing the universal links between communication, education, and democracy; it was titled “University Extra-Mural Education in Nigeria and Biafra, 1947-1967: The Impact of Communication and Adult Education on Nation Building.”

In 1970, Professor Awa moved to Cornell, where he would remain for the rest of his life. He earned a Ph.D. in Education in 1973. By then, he had already joined the department then named Communication Arts (since 1988, Communication) in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. His core teaching focused on interpersonal and small group communication, with a substantial presence in the department’s active oral communication program. But he also introduced courses on intercultural communication, and in 1976 during the national bicentennial he participated in a university-wide course on “America and the World Community.”

Professor Awa joined Cornell’s communication program just as it began its transition from being a service unit tied to production of agricultural extension materials to being a traditional research-oriented academic department. His research was both local and international: At one point, he was working both on a study addressing social participation in low-income, low-density populations in upstate New York, and on a study examining Ibo and Ibibio farmers’ adaptation to change after the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, when the state of Biafra briefly seceded. His work was published in the Journal of Extension, the Journal of African and Afro-American Affairs, Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization (a journal later renamed Science Communication) and the Handbook of Intercultural Communication. He was an early proponent of participatory research methods, recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge in rural development. He particularly shed light on the underutilization of knowledge held by women, highlighting the effect of stereotypes.
Because of his interest in intercultural communication, Professor Awa became deeply involved in the Department of Communication’s international development activities, including, for 15 years, the Communication Planning and Strategy series that offered training for people from developing countries. He participated in programs that took him back to Africa many times – to Ethiopia, to Egypt, and often to his native Nigeria. At Cornell, he advised many master’s students in intercultural and development communication.

Professor Awa was also active across the university, serving as a faculty senator and as a member of the Faculty Senate executive committee, and on advisory committees to religious affairs programs.

Religion played its part throughout Professor Awa’s life. He was a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, where he was an ordained Deacon and Elder. He taught Sunday School there and, continuing his international work, participated in the church’s International Hunger Program.

Family also played a central role in Professor Awa’s life. He married Ella Awa in 1970; she survives him. Together they raised three children: Njoku, Jr. (“Ogbo”), Adaku, and Apia, and he had two grandchildren. Among his enthusiasms was soccer; he is reported to have carried a soccer ball and shoes in the trunk of his car in case a soccer game appeared, and he informally helped coach the Cornell soccer team.

Illness led to Professor Awa’s early retirement in 1995.

A memorial service for Professor Emeritus Njoku E. Awa was held in Ithaca on July 27, 2013.

Bruce V. Lewenstein, Chair; Royal D. Colle; Clifford Scherer