

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Allen Sessoms

PERSON

Sessoms, Allen , 1946-

Alternative Names: Sessoms, Allen , 1946-;

Life Dates: November 17, 1946-

Place of Birth: Bronx, New York

Residence:

Occupations: Physicist; University President

Biographical Note

Physicist and education administrator Allen Lee Sessoms was born in 1946. He attended Union College in New York where he graduated with his B.S. degree in physics in 1968. He then attended the University of Washington, where he obtained his M.S. degree in physics the following year. Sessoms went on to Yale University where he earned his Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree in physics in 1971 and his Ph.D. degree in physics in 1972. Following his graduate school work, Sessoms became a postdoctoral research associate at the Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) where he wrote computer programs and studied the production of quarks by high-energy protons at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab).

In 1973, Sessoms was hired to work as a scientific associate at the European Organization of Nuclear Research (CERN), where he researched quarks and similar particles. While at CERN, Sessoms became an assistant professor of physics at Harvard University. Sessoms moved to the U.S. State Department in 1980 as a senior technical advisor for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. From 1982 to 1987, Sessoms served as Director of the Office of Nuclear Technology and Safeguards in the same Bureau before becoming a Counselor for Scientific and Technological Affairs at the United States Embassy in Paris, France.

Sessoms then traveled to Mexico, where he was a Minister-Counsel for Political Affairs at the United States Embassy before serving as its Deputy Chief of Mission, then the largest United States diplomatic mission in the world. In 1993, Sessoms left the United States State Department and began working as executive vice president at the University of Massachusetts system and also became its vice president for academic affairs. Following his time in Massachusetts, Sessoms was named president of Queens College, part of The City University of New York. Sessoms then spent time at Harvard University, first as a visiting scholar and then as a fellow of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and as a lecturer in public policy. From 2003 to 2008, Sessoms served as the ninth president of Delaware State University prior to his appointment as president of the University of the District of Columbia. He is also a consultant to the U.S. intelligence community.

Sessoms has received a Ford Foundation Travel and Study Grant and an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Fellowship. He has been bestowed two honorary doctorates from Union College and Soka University in Japan. Sessoms also received the Medal of Highest Honor from Soka University and the Seikyo Culture Award in Japan. In 1999, the Yale University Graduate School Association awarded him the Wilbur Lucius Cross Medal and he was named the Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques ("Officer of the Order of Academic Palms) in France.

Related Entries

Sessoms, Albert Earl [CHILD OF]

Father

Leff, Lottie Beatrice [CHILD OF]

Mother

Yale University [STUDENT OF]

[from ? to 1972]

Ph.D.

Yale University [STUDENT OF]

[from ? to 1971]

M. Phil.

University of Washington [STUDENT OF]

[from ? to 1969]

M.S. degree in physics

Union College [STUDENT OF]

[from ? to 1968]

B.S. in physics

US Department of State [EMPLOYEEOF]
Deputy Chief of Mission

Brookhaven National Lab [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1972 to 1973]

Postdoctoral Fellow

European Organization of Nuclear Research [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1973 to 1975]

Associate

Harvard University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1974 to 1981]

Assistant Professor, Physics

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1977 to 1981]

Fellow

US Department of State [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1987]

Director

Bureau of Oceans & International Environmental and Scientific Affairs
[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1982]

Senior Technical Advisor

Bureau of Oceans & International Environmental and Scientific Affairs
[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1982 to 1987]

Director, Office of Nuclear Technology & Safeguards

US State Department [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1987 to 1989]

Counselor, Scientific and Technological Affairs

US Department of State [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1989 to 1991]

Minister-Counselor, Political Affairs

University of Massachusetts [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1993 to 1995]

Executive Vice President

Queens College [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1995 to 2000]

President

Harvard University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2000 to 2003]

Lecturer

Delaware State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2003 to 2008]

President

University of the District of Columbia [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2008 to ?]

President

Chapman University Board of Trustees [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

Nuclear Energy Advisory Board [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

U.S. -China Coop. Program in Science Policy, Research and Education
[MEMBEROF]
Advisory Board Member

American Physical Society [MEMBEROF]
Member

Fermilab National Accelerator Laboratory [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

US Secretary of Energy Advisory Board [MEMBEROF]
Advisory Board Member