After graduating from OWU in 1962, James H. Charlesworth studied at Duke University and earned the BD (1965) and PhD degrees (1967). In 1967, he went to Edinburgh on a Fulbright Scholarship and played on the University basketball team, earning All East, All Scotland, and All Great Britain [second team]. He was awarded the Full Blue from the Royal and Ancient Academy of Athletics, University of Edinburgh. In 1968, he won the Thayer Award from the American Schools of Oriental Research and studied with Roland de Vaux, the excavator of Qumran and first editor of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1969, he was awarded the Eleve Titulaire de 1'École biblique avec la mention "Très Honorable." He was then offered a professorship at Duke University where he taught from 1969 to 1984 when he accepted the George L. Collord Professor of New Testament Language and Literature. In 1986, he became editor and director of the Princeton Dead Sea Scrolls Project.

He specializes in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old and New Testaments, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Jesus Research, the Gospel of John, and the Apocalypse of John.

Charlesworth has worked with JPL, the West Semitic Research Institute, Xerox, Kodak and Rochester Institute of Technology, as well as the Israel Antiquity Authority, to obtain computer enhanced images of 2000-year old scrolls. He is working with over 50 Jews and Christians to make available accurate texts (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), English translations, and introductions to these documents. He has excavated at Migdal, Bethsaida, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Qumran, and elsewhere.

Twice he has served as Lady Davis Professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was Annual Professor at the Albright Institute in Jerusalem (1998-99), and three times an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Tübingen. He served as Distinguished Visiting Professor in Naples University (2003) and McCarthy Professor in the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome (2005). He received two honorary doctorates and numerous medals, including the medal from Brancoveanu Monastery in Sâmbãta de Sus (Romania), the Distinguished Achievement Citation, Ohio Wesleyan University (1994), the Comenius Medal, Charles University, Prague (2003), and the Pentecost Medal which was presented by his Beatitude, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilus III (2006). He received the Samaritan Medal of Honor in 2010. Among his Certificates of Appreciation for scholarly contributions include those from De La Salle University and the Philippine Christian University. The Philippine Bible Society awarded him with the "Plaque of Appreciation." He has written over 65 books and 400 articles or reviews, has been honored by the following Biblical Archaeology Society Publication Awards: the Best Book on the Old Testament for 1984, the special Award for a Book of Outstanding Merit in 1986, and the best scholarly book on archaeology in 1995. His book on serpent symbolism was awarded the 2010 "best book on the Bible" by the Christian Century. The American Schools of Oriental Research presented him with the first Frank Moore Cross Award ["for outstanding Contributions as editor and author to philology and archaeology"] in 1997. He has been honored by over 20 countries and is a member of the Royal Norwegian Academy. In 2010

he presented the Chuen-King Lectures in Hong Kong, also lecturing in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Seoul (Korea). He has been featured on BBC 1, BBC 2, the History Channel, and the Discovery Channel. An ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, he serves as advisor to the denomination's World Missionary Council. He lectures throughout the world.