

Almanac

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2024 Lindback Awards for Distinguished Teaching and Provost's Teaching Awards

All members of the Penn community are invited to a reception honoring the recipients of the 2024 Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation Awards for Distinguished Teaching, the Provost's Award for Teaching Excellence by Non-Standing Faculty, and the Provost's Award for Distinguished PhD Teaching and Mentoring on Tuesday, April 16, 2024, at 5 p.m. in the Hall of Flags, Houston Hall.

See page 3 for photos of and information about the award recipients.

Michael Scales: Vice President for the Division of Business Services

Michael Scales has been named vice president for the Division of Business Services, effective June 1, 2024. Mr. Scales, currently the associate vice president for business services at Temple University, was chosen following a competitive national search to find a successor for Marie Witt. The announcement was made on March 19 by Senior Executive Vice President Craig R. Carnaroli.

As division vice president, Mr. Scales will be responsible for the strategic direction and operational management of housing and dining services, Penn Transit, commuter services, parking, conference and hospitality services, PennCard, Penn Mail Services, Campus Express, the Penn Bookstore, University-owned hotels, and other ancillary operations.

Executive Vice President Carnaroli said, "Michael Scales is an effective facilitator, collaborator, and builder of effective partnerships and has been strategically leading his team of more than 1,000 staff, overseeing a slate of capital projects valued at more than \$300 million, and managing Temple's diverse portfolio of auxiliary services across all six of its local and Pennsylvania campuses. We look forward to welcoming him to Penn in this important role."

Mr. Scales holds a master's degree in higher education administration from The Ohio State University and is in the process of completing a doctorate in education from Temple.

Before joining Temple in 2006, he was the
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Michael Scales

Irma Elo: Tamsen and Michael Brown Presidential Professor in Sociology

Irma Elo, a professor of sociology in the School of Arts & Sciences, has been appointed the Tamsen and Michael Brown Presidential Professor. Dr. Elo's main research interests center on socioeconomic, racial and ethnic, immigrant, and geographic inequalities in health and mortality across the life-course and demographic estimation of mortality. In recent years, she has extended her research to include predictors of cognition in high-, middle-, and low-income countries. Dr. Elo, who also holds an appointment as a research associate in the Population Studies Center and the Population Aging Research Center, is currently the primary investigator of the National Institute on Aging-funded study, *Causes of Geographic Divergence in American Mor-*



Irma Elo

tality Between 1990 and 2015: Health Behaviors, Health Care Access and Migration.

Dr. Elo has served as a member and/or chair of several national and international committees, including as chair of the Board of Scientific Counselors of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), as a member of the Census Bureau's Scientific Advisory Committee, as a member and chair of the section on the sociology of population of the American Sociological Association (ASA), as a member of the Population Association of America's (PAA) board of directors, as chair of the PAA's Committee on Population Statistics, and as a member of an international advisory board of the Swedish Initiative for Research on Microdata in the Social and Medical Sciences. This year she was elected the president-elect of the PAA.

Tamsen M. Brown, C'95, and Michael Brown, established this professorship in 2021. Ms. Brown is a member of the School of Arts & Sciences' Board of Advisors and of the Basser Center Advisory Board. Mr. and Ms. Brown are both members of Penn's Parents Council. In addition to the professorship, they also generously support research at Penn Medicine.

Penn Engineering Announces 2024 Student Choice Awards

Penn Engineering has announced the faculty recipients of the 2024 Student Choice Awards. Each year, the Penn Engineering undergraduate student body thoughtfully selects the recipients of these awards for their dedication in teaching, mentorship and student advocacy.

This year's winners are Douglas Jerolmack, Joseph Devietti, Bomyi Lim, Shu Yang, and Mark Licurie.

S. Reid Warren, Jr. Award

Douglas Jerolmack, a professor of mechanical engineering & applied mechanics and Earth & environmental science, has been awarded the S. Reid Warren, Jr. Award. Presented in conjunction with the Engineering Alumni Society, this award recognizes outstanding service in stimulating and guiding the intellectual and professional development of undergraduate students at the school.

Dr. Jerolmack's students describe his dedication to helping students succeed both inside and outside the classroom, stating that "his positive mindset and advice has proved to be invaluable to the development of his students' interest in engineering and applying classroom knowledge to their professional lives."



Douglas Jerolmack

2024 Student Choice Awards

Dr. Jerolmack received his undergraduate degree from Drexel University in 2001 and went on to earn a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006.

Ford Motor Company Award for Faculty Advising

Joseph Devietti, an associate professor of computer and information science, has been awarded the Ford Motor Company Award for Faculty Advising, which recognizes dedication to helping students realize their educational, career, and personal goals.



Joseph Devietti

Dr. Devietti was recognized by students for investing his time in mentoring student projects outside of the classroom. "He allows students to

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From the Senate Office

Faculty Senate Executive Committee Agenda Wednesday, April 10, 2024 3-5 p.m.

1. Finalize SEC meeting minutes of March 20, 2024
2. Tri-Chairs' Report
3. Presidential Commission on Countering Hate and Building Community
Discussion with Commission Co-Chairs Vijay Kumar and Katharine Strunk
4. Internal Discussion
5. New Business

The 2024 Penn Engineering Student Choice Awards

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use his lab's resources for academic exploration and projects and explains technical details that would enable them to succeed outside the classroom," stated one student.

Dr. Devietti received both a BSE in computer science and a BA in English from the University of Pennsylvania in 2006. He then earned MS and PhD degrees in computer science and engineering from the University of Washington in 2009 and 2012, respectively.

Student Advocacy Award

Bomyi Lim, an assistant professor in chemical and biomolecular engineering, is the recipient of the Student Advocacy Award. This award is presented to a member of the Penn Engineering faculty by the Underrepresented Student Advisory Board in Engineering (USABE) in recognition of their outstanding commitment to women and underrepresented student advocacy, equity, and inclusion.

One student remarked, "I would not have persevered and grown as much as I did if it had not been for Dr. Lim's commitment to diversity in engineering and mentorship."

Dr. Lim received a BSE in chemical and biomolecular engineering from the University of Pennsylvania in 2010. She then went on to earn a PhD in chemical and biological engineering from Princeton University in 2015.

Undergraduate Research Mentoring Award

Shu Yang, a professor and chair of the department of materials science and engineering, has been awarded the Undergraduate Research Mentoring Award. Presented in conjunction with the Engineering Alumni Society, this award recognizes outstanding research mentorship of undergraduate students and commitment to the promotion, training, and encouragement of diverse students in research.

Dr. Yang has been described by students as a research mentor who motivates every student to pursue their interests while being supportive of independent projects. "She constantly encourages students to take advantage of all available



Bomyi Lim

Michael Scales: Vice President of the Division of Business Services

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director of university housing at Drexel University. Mr. Scales is also involved with several higher education professional organizations, including the National Association of College Auxiliary Services (NACAS) and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). He is also serves as a trustee of Albright College and is on the boards of directors of Campus Philly and Northeast Treatment Centers.

Executive Vice President Carnaroli said, "I wish to thank my colleagues from across the University who participated in the search process and provided valuable feedback and counsel. I also wish to thank Marie Witt, who has successfully led the Business Services Division for the past 18 years."

opportunities and guides them through every step of the research process, including applying for grants and research presentations," noted one student.

Dr. Yang received a BS in materials science from Fudan University in 1992. She then earned both MS and PhD degrees in chemistry and chemical biology from Cornell University in 1997 and 1999, respectively.

Hatfield Award for Excellence in Teaching for Faculty in the Lecturer/Practice Professor Track

Mark Licurse, a lecturer in materials science and engineering, has been awarded the Hatfield Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Lecturer and Practice Professor Track. Presented to a lecturer, senior lecturer, or practice professor in Penn Engineering, the award recognizes outstanding teaching ability, dedication to innovative undergraduate instruction, and exemplary service to the school by consistently inspiring students in the engineering and scientific profession.

Students commended Dr. Licurse's ability to clearly communicate complex concepts and topics in a way that students can understand. One student commented that Dr. Licurse "goes above and beyond to engage students, creating interactive learning exercises and demonstrations." Students also cited his genuine care for student success and noted how he always made students feel confident in their ability to learn the material.

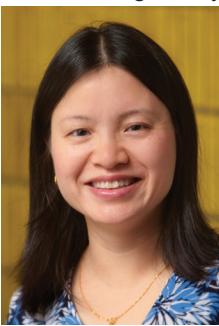
Dr. Licurse earned both a BSE and a PhD in materials science and engineering from the University of Pennsylvania in 2006 and 2013, respectively.

University Council March Meeting Coverage

The March University Council meeting was held on Wednesday, March 27, 2024 in the Hall of Flags in Houston Hall. Associate University Secretary Lizann Boyle Rode provided updates on topics raised by speakers during the February 21 meeting.

- Regarding University-level support for cross-school psychedelic research, Ms. Rode said that the Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Research has met with the Penn Psychedelics Collaborative to discuss next steps for integrating research efforts.
- Regarding support for Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian members of the Penn community, Ms. Rode emphasized that staff in the Division of Public Safety, the Spiritual & Religious Life Center (SPARC), Wellness at Penn, and University Life are available to support students affected by the global crisis. In addition to the work of the Presidential Commission on Countering Hate and Building Community, Provost John L. Jackson, Jr. and Interim President J. Larry Jameson have met with Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian students.
- Penn takes doxing and online harassment seriously ([Almanac February 27, 2024](#)), and resources are available to ensure the safety of members of the community.
- Regarding a call to divest from support of Israel, Penn will consider how to proceed, following procedures set forth in the [Guidelines and Procedures for Consideration by the Trustees of Proposals for Divestment from the University Endowment](#).
- Regarding concerns that the University inconsistently prohibits pro-Palestinian rallies and events, Ms. Rode emphasized that, in accordance with the [Guidelines on Open Expression](#), potential events are evaluated not on the basis of content but on the basis of conduct and disruption. Disciplinary procedures for community members who violate these standards are also set forth in the guidelines.
- Regarding University contributions to postdoctoral trainees' retirement funds, Penn leaders are in contact with the newly-created Office of Postdoctoral Affairs to develop new support programs for postdocs.
- Regarding a call to rename the Ted Nash Rowing Center, the University has removed Mr. Nash's name from the center and will follow the guidelines set forth in the Campus Iconography Group Report ([Almanac April 6, 2021](#)) to determine next steps.
- Regarding alleged isolation of the transfer student community, Penn staff are talking to transfer student leaders about how to better support and integrate them into the college houses and into student life.
- Regarding concerns about faculty diversity in Penn Engineering, it was noted that Penn regularly assesses and considers ways to cultivate a more diverse and excellent faculty. Several avenues students and other members of the Penn community may utilize to offer advice and opinions were enumerated.
- Regarding concerns about limitations of the Penn Dining Plan for students with religious and allergy-based dietary restrictions, affected students were referred to the Office of Disability Services and to SPARC, which can advise on the best options available through Penn Dining.

Interim President Jameson gave the President
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Shu Yang



Mark Licurse

Models of Excellence Celebration in Harrison Auditorium

The Penn community is invited to the 25th anniversary Models of Excellence Award Program ceremony on Tuesday, April 9 from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. in Harrison Auditorium in the Penn Museum. There will be a reception following the program from 5 p.m. until 6:30 p.m. in the Penn Museum's Chinese Rotunda. Fifty-two staff members from schools and centers across the University will receive 2024 [Models of Excellence honors](#).

Penn's premier campus-wide staff recognition event is a unique opportunity to connect with coworkers from around campus to mark staff achievements in an array of professions.

See the 2024 Models of Excellence in person and hear their inspiring stories at the April 9 celebration, featuring:

- Interim President J. Larry Jameson
- Senior Executive Vice President Craig R. Carnaroli
- Provost John L. Jackson, Jr.
- Senior Vice President for Human Resources Jack Heuer
- Musical guests the Penny Loafers

[Register for the Models of Excellence ceremony and reception](#). For more information, visit www.hr.upenn.edu/models.

University Council March Meeting Coverage

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dent's Report and introduced Vice President for the Office of Budget Planning and Analysis Trevor Lewis to discuss Penn's FY2024 budget. Mr. Lewis stated that Penn operates under a responsibility centered management financial model, which allows for broad stewardship of funds and rewards innovation and efficiency. Penn's FY2024 budget was driven by priorities of health/well-being, diversity, faculty recruitment, financial support for students, expanding and maintaining Penn's physical campus, and sustainability.

For FY2024, Penn had expenses of \$4.402 billion, of which the largest components were compensation (59%-Penn's largest single expense) and current expenses (30%). Revenue in FY2024 was \$4.734 billion, of which the largest components were tuition and fees (29%) and sponsored programs (19%). Revenue from tuition was \$1.804 billion; though undergraduate charges of \$84,600, the FY2024 financial aid budget totaled \$288 million, with 46% of students receiving financial aid. Almost all of the 3,655 PhD students at Penn receive full funding. Despite geopolitical instability, federal budget challenges, and labor market pressures, Mr. Lewis expressed optimism for FY2025.

Provost Jackson gave the Provost's Report, introducing Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives David Asch to discuss Penn's implementation of its new strategic framework, [In Principle and Practice](#). Despite being released at a challenging time for the University, he said *In Principle and Practice* continues to reflect Penn's vision and values and is a living document that informs the work being done daily.

During the New Business portion of the meeting, speakers urged Penn to make Penn Transit more easily accessible to disabled members of the Penn community, asked Penn to cover chest binders for transgender people in insurance plans, and encouraged Penn to continue its process of reviewing campus iconography. The next University Council meeting will take place on April 17, 2024 in the Hall of Flags in Houston Hall.

ALMANAC April 2, 2024

Lindback Awards for Distinguished Teaching Health Schools



Julie Engiles

John Holmes

Sara Jacoby

Ilene Rosen

Non-Health Schools



Gary Bernstein

Catherine Struve

Jules van Binsbergen

David Wallace

Provost's Awards



Holly Pittman

Arjun Yodh

Judith Curran

Nancy Gartland

Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching

Health Schools

Julie B. Engiles, professor of anatomic pathology, departments of pathobiology & clinical studies, New Bolton Center, School of Veterinary Medicine

John H. Holmes, professor of medical informatics in epidemiology, department of biostatistics, epidemiology, and informatics, Perelman School of Medicine

Sara F. Jacoby, associate professor, Calvin Bland Faculty Fellow, department of family and community health, School of Nursing

Ilene M. Rosen, associate professor of medicine in the division of sleep medicine, Vice Chair for Education, department of medicine, Perelman School of Medicine

Non-Health Schools

Gary Bernstein, Reese W. Flower Professor of Physics & Astronomy, department of physics & astronomy, School of Arts & Sciences

Catherine T. Struve, David E. Kaufman & Leopold C. Glass Professor of Law, Penn Carey Law School

Jules H. van Binsbergen, Nippon Life Professor in Finance, Wharton School

David Wallace, Judith Rodin Professor of English & Comparative Literature, department of English, School of Arts & Sciences

Provost's Award for Distinguished PhD Teaching and Mentoring (Non-Health Schools)

Holly Pittman, Bok Family Professor in the Humanities, department of history of art, School of Arts & Sciences

Arjun Yodh, James M. Skinner Professor of Science and chair, department of physics and astronomy, School of Arts & Sciences

Provost's Award for Teaching Excellence by Non-Standing Faculty

Judith N. Curran, head, Chemistry Library, department of chemistry, School of Arts & Sciences

Nancy Gartland, adjunct professor of biomedical sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine

Deaths

Nathaniel Gordon, College of Arts & Sciences

Nathaniel Gordon, a sophomore in the College of Arts & Sciences, died on March 23. He was 20.

Mr. Gordon was born in Covington, Georgia, and moved to Philadelphia when he was 13. There, he attended the Community College of Philadelphia's Gateway to College program, a School District of Philadelphia initiative that allows high school students to enroll in community college courses. Mr. Gordon actively engaged in civic activities and showed leadership within his service endeavors, leading a project on civic engagement for children and completing an internship with Pennsylvania State Senator Sharif Street. Upon graduation, he became the first graduate from a Philadelphia School District alternative program to attend an Ivy League institution.

At Penn, Mr. Gordon studied economics and urban studies. He participated in the Pre-First Year Program and was an engaged member of the community of Makuu: The Black Cultural Center. He was also a member of the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity on campus.

Students mourning Mr. Gordon's loss are encouraged to stop by the Student Health and Counseling Office for confidential conversations. A memorial service is being planned by Gateway to College.

Jack Guttentag, Finance

Jack M. Guttentag, professor emeritus of finance in the Wharton School, died on February 6. He was 100.

Dr. Guttentag, a native of Brooklyn, New York, obtained his bachelor's degree from Purdue University. He continued his studies at Columbia University, earning both his master's and doctoral degrees there. During World War II, he served as an army artillery spotter (a dangerous position with a low survival rate), then served as the chief of domestic research at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

In 1962, Dr. Guttentag joined the faculty at Penn's Wharton School, where he dedicated his research to reform and innovation in banking, monetary policy, and housing finance. Alongside fellow faculty member E. Gerald Hurst and Wharton MBA program student Allan Redstone, he co-founded GHR System INC., a financial service provider for the mortgage and consumer banking industry, which was later acquired by Metavante in 2005. "He was scrupulously honest and had the highest level of integrity of any person I ever met," said Mr. Redstone. "If he thought a policy issue was detrimental, he was



Nathaniel Gordon

completely unabashed about laying it out there. He developed what he thought was the right answer, and he would doggedly pursue it."

"Jack was a wonderful colleague and friend," said Wharton finance professor Richard J. Herring, and Dr. Guttentag's colleague, in an online tribute. "He had an innate curiosity about how things work and, equally importantly, how they could be made to work better. Jack's passing marks the end of an era. He was the last of a small group of scholars who set the finance department on its trajectory to become one of the world's leading centers for financial research."

After retiring in 1996, Dr. Guttentag remained active in housing finance and consumer advocacy. He published *The Pocket Mortgage Guide* in 2003 and gained recognition through his website, "The Mortgage Professor," which offered free advice to consumers on mortgage-related matters, and his nationally syndicated advice column, "Ask a Mortgage Professor."

Outside of Wharton, Dr. Guttentag worked with the United Nations, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the National Bureau of Economic Research.

"I deeply admire him, and what's become clear is there are many other people out there who also deeply admire him," said his son, Bill Guttentag. "He was the hardest-working person I ever knew, and he always made time for family." Dr. Guttentag retained relationships with peers, colleagues, former students, and others throughout his life.

Dr. Guttentag is survived by his sons, Bill (Marina) and Adam (Susan); grandchildren, Misha, Sasha, Rebecca, and Benjamin; and great-grandson, Micah Jin Kim.

Anjali Rajagopal, Wharton

Anjali Venkatesh Rajagopal, an MBA student in the Wharton School, died on January 23 due to a brain hemorrhage. She was 40.

Ms. Rajagopal was born in Chennai, India. She earned her bachelor's degree in international relations and affairs from the University of San Diego. In 2013, she founded and launched Touché PR, a marketing company based in Chennai whose mission was to empower women to discover their unique identities. This visionary project was driven by Ms. Rajagopal's own experience after a traumatic car collision at the age of 19, which necessitated months of rehabilitation.

Ms. Rajagopal then furthered her education by obtaining a master's degree in public relations and corporate communications from New York University before joining the Wharton School to pursue her MBA. She had an impressive track record at Penn, receiving the Silverstein MBA Fellowship Fund, participating in the Forté Foundation (representing the MBA Women's Leadership Conference in 2021), and participating in various Wharton clubs, including Wharton Women in Business, retail, general management, technology, marketing, consulting, and media & entertainment.

She is survived by her family members, Rama and Venky Rajagopal and Chandhana and Vidyuth Rajagopal.

Judy A. Shea, PSOM

Judy A. Shea, a retired professor of general internal medicine in the Perelman School of Medicine, died on March 14. She was 70.

Dr. Shea was born in Fort Riley, Kansas. Education was always a driving force in Dr. Shea's life: She began her education in a one-room school in rural Dawson County, Nebraska. After graduating from Lexington High School in Lexington, Nebraska in 1972, she completed a BS in psychology from Kearney State College in 1975; a MS in family and human development from Utah State University in 1978; and a PhD in human development and family studies from Pennsylvania State University in 1981.

Dr. Shea went on to work at Penn Medicine, eventually becoming the Leon Hess Professor of Medicine in the division of general internal medicine. Dr. Shea served on the Committee on Diversity & Equity (as chair), the Committee on Pluralism, the Joint Faculty Senate/Provost Committee to Assess the Evaluation of Teaching, and the Affirmative Action Council advisory committee; she also joined Penn's 25 Year Club in 2016.

Dr. Shea received numerous prestigious awards. At Penn, she received the Special Dean's Award (2007), the FOCUS Award for the Advancement of Women in Medicine (2009), the Arthur K. Asbury Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award (2018), and the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching (2020). Nationally, she received the Society of General Internal Medicine Career Achievement in Medical Education Award (2011), the Hubbard Award from the National Board of Medical Examiners (2011), the AAMC NEGEA Distinguished Educator Award (2016), and the AAMC Merrell Flair Award (2018).

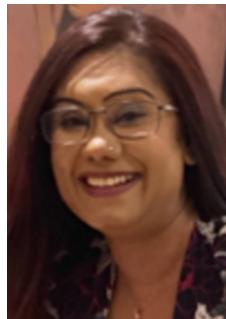
Dr. Shea dedicated her career to working with faculty and fellows to design and execute research projects. Much of her work focused on the psychometric properties of evaluation tools and developing measures to assess components of health such as health literacy, patient satisfaction, and health-related quality of life. She was PSOM's go-to expert in quantitative survey research and qualitative methods, including focus groups and interviews, and was critical to the success of Penn's reputation as a leader in the field of medical education research.

Dr. Shea is survived by her partner, John Norcini; her sons, Shea and Michael Norcini; her siblings, Susan Burch and Doyle Shea (Georgiann); her sisters-in-law, Joyce Norcini and Sue Stevenson; her nieces and nephews, Brandy Fogarty (Todd), Brent Burch, Grace Norcini and Helen Norcini; and a great-niece and two great-nephews.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to DGIM Judy A. Shea, PhD Faculty and Fellow Development Award Fund at <https://givingapps.upenn.edu/fund?program=MED&fund=406934>.



Judy Shea



Anjali Rajagopal

Honors & Other Things

Bryce Louie: Individual Foil National Champion

Bryce Louie, a senior foil on the men's fencing team, won the individual foil national title at the 2024 NCAA Fencing Championships in Columbus, Ohio. He is Penn's first national champion since Michael Mills in 2013 and the University's first foil national champion since Cliff Bayer in 1997.

Mr. Louie, from Los Angeles, defeated teammate and fellow Californian Blake Broszus 15-9 in the final round to win the gold medal. They were two of the four members of the number 8-ranked men's fencing team who competed in the Championships; freshman sabre Gian Dhingra finished 15th and freshman epee Joseph Wu placed 12th. Mr. Louie and Mr. Broszus earned First-Team All-American honors for their performances and Mr. Wu was named an All-American honorable mention.

On the first day of the championships, Mr. Louie won 12 of 15 bouts and led all 24 fencers at day's end. He maintained his lead on Sunday, adding seven more victories, and won 19 out of 23 bouts in all. He earned Second-Team All-Ivy honors in the foil and was named First-Team All-Region in the Men's Mid-Atlantic/South All-Region by the United States Fencing Coaches Association.

Penn Gymnastics: Gymnastics East Conference Championship

On March 23 at Yale's John J. Lee Amphitheater, the gymnastic team topped seven other schools to win their third consecutive Gymnastics East Conference (GEC) Championship. The Quakers won with a team score of 196.275, their highest of the season. They outdueled, in order of finish, Yale, Brown, Southern Connecticut, William & Mary, West Chester, Cornell, and Bridgeport.

Penn scored a 49.200 on the floor. Sophomore Skyelar Kerico produced a team-high score of 9.875. Five Quakers scored a 9.8 or higher.

On the vault, the Red & Blue scored a 48.775. Freshman Jordan Barrow scored a team-high 9.825, the second-highest overall score. Senior Sara Kenefick scored a 9.800.

The Quakers scored a 49.175 on the bars, which tied for the third-highest mark in school history. Freshman Sophia Paris led the Red & Blue with a career- and team-high score of 9.875, and placed second overall. Ms. Kerico scored a 9.850 and finished third.

On the beam, Penn scored a 49.125. Ms. Kerico scored a 9.900, a career-high mark that won her the GEC individual beam title and locked up the GEC Championship for the Quakers. Sophomore Samantha Wu placed second with a score of 9.875.

Ms. Kerico also won the GEC all-around individual title with a score of 39.300, making her the first Quaker to win two individual titles in

the same season since Kirsten Becker, her current head coach, did so in 2012.

After the conclusion of the GEC Championships, Ms. Kerico was named GEC Gymnast of the Year. She is the first Quaker to win the award since Coach Becker in 2012, and only the sixth in program history.

Parker Norman and Samarth Setru: National Leadership Posts in ASDA

The American Student Dental Association (ASDA) has announced the inauguration of its 2024-2025 Executive Committee and Board of Trustees, with two Penn Dental Medicine students securing key national leadership positions. They were chosen by the ASDA House of Delegates, which represents 70 dental schools across the United States.

Samarth Setru, D'25, assumes the role of ASDA president for the 2024-2025 term, while Parker Norman, D'25, has been elected as ASDA's Speaker of the House. In expressing his sentiments about the collective strength of ASDA, Mr. Setru said, "Every ASDA member has a powerful voice, and together, 23,000 voices nationwide make us the strongest student-run organization in the country. Moreover, we are very comprehensive, with programming related to advocacy, community outreach; mentorship; wellness; and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging."

Mr. Setru most recently served as ASDA's District 3 trustee. In his capacity as ASDA president, he will spearhead the development and execution of ASDA's strategic plan and provide approval for the annual budget. Additionally, he will assume responsibility for managing ASDA's agenda and overseeing business between board meetings. He also has a special interest in health policy research, temporomandibular disorders research, and orthodontics.

In her role as Speaker of the House, Ms. Norman will preside over all house meetings, delivering guidance on rules and procedures. Her responsibilities extend to informing delegates and members about the resolution process. Ms. Norman currently serves as vice president of the ASDA chapter at Penn Dental Medicine and recently served on ASDA's National Council on Advocacy as Legislative Coordinator for Districts 1-3.

"I feel very honored and privileged to have been elected as Speaker of the House," said Ms. Norman. "ASDA has given me my voice. It has empowered me to be an advocate for myself, my patients, and other dental students. I am eager to give back to the organization through this role and help ensure all voices are heard and that anybody can be an advocate."

Both Ms. Norman and Mr. Setru are concurrently pursuing their master's in law degrees at Penn Carey Law.

2024 Women of Color at Penn Awards

Women of Color at Penn (WOCAP) hosted its 37th annual award ceremony on March 15, 2024. WOCAP is based in the African-American Resource Center (AARC). Interim President J. Larry Jameson paid homage to the event's history and growth, noting the importance of recognizing diversity and community involvement at Penn.

Events like the WOCAP awards embody the University's new strategic framework, *In Principle and Practice*, where the words "interwoven" and "engaged" are core values, Interim President Jameson said.

The award winners were:

Joann Mitchell Legacy Award

Colleen Winn is the staff assistant at the AARC, where she co-chairs Penn's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Symposium and organizes Penn's Annual Day of Service activities. Ms. Winn has over 20 years of counseling, program planning, and training development experience. She holds a BS in social rehabilitation/social service from Sam Houston State University and a master's degree in public administration with a concentration in non-profit management from Keller Graduate School of Management at DeVry University.

Undergraduate Student Award

Sade Taiwo, C'25, is a junior from Philadelphia majoring in global health with minors in Latin American studies, urban studies, and international development. Ms. Taiwo currently runs an organization under the Netter Center for Community Partnerships that connects West Philadelphia families with free and low-cost public health resources. She has also served as community service chair for UMOJA, an umbrella organization for the Black student community, and is a founding member of Monolith, Penn's Black arts collective.

Graduate Student Award

Kyndall Nicholas is a fourth-year neuroscience PhD candidate and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Gilliam Fellow. Ms. Nicholas researches the relationship between diet and post-traumatic brain injury. She holds leadership positions at Penn, including as the Neuroscience Graduate Group recruitment chair and as president of the Ernest E. Just Biomedical Society, an organization that supports the social, academic, and professional well-being of Black and Brown graduate students. She is also a fellow at both the Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Innovation and the Center for Undergraduate Research Fellowships.

Faculty or Staff Award

Eugenia South, the Ralph Muller Presidential Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine in the Perelman School of Medicine, was honored for her work in health justice. Dr. South is faculty director of the Penn Medicine Center for Health Justice and associate vice president of health justice for the University of Pennsylvania Health System. Her research centers on place-based interventions—including transforming vacant lots into green space, abandoned house remediation, tree planting, and structural repairs to homes—and their impact on gun violence prevention along with mental and physical health.

Community Award

Janice Sykes-Ross is executive director at the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's Paul Robeson House and Museum. Through her management and curation of the Paul Robeson House and Museum, Ms. Sykes-Ross also nurtures young scholars in West Philadelphia. "It's about creating safe spaces with a community hub and giving artists a platform," Ms. Sykes-Ross said.

Penn Benefits Open Enrollment: April 29-May 10

Penn's Benefits Open Enrollment is fast approaching. This year's Open Enrollment will be Monday, April 29 through Friday, May 10.

Open Enrollment is your annual opportunity to make changes to your health plans, life insurance, and flexible spending accounts. While Open Enrollment is still a few weeks away, we want to give faculty, staff, and postdoctoral researchers and fellows plenty of time to learn about the upcoming 2024-2025 plan changes. The Division of Human Resources will once again host an on-campus Open Enrollment Benefits Fair and virtual and on-campus benefits presentations. For more information about your benefits, visit www.hr.upenn.edu/openenrollment. You'll have access to benefit comparison charts, contribution charts, and more.

Domestic Partner Eligibility for Benefits:

The University values diversity and is committed to providing benefits for staff, faculty, postdocs, and their families, whether traditional or non-traditional. Effective July 1, you can elect to enroll your domestic partner under Penn's comprehensive benefit offerings. This applies for both same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

In order for your domestic partner to receive benefits coverage, you must complete the University Domestic Partnership affidavit and provide supporting documentation to the Benefits Office. You can download a copy of the affidavit by visiting the Verification Documents section of the [Dependent Eligibility Verification](#) webpage. More details on how to complete the process will be available soon. If you choose to access this benefit, you will have to pay federal, Social Security, and Medicare taxes on the value of the benefits extended to your partner and their children.

The domestic partner eligibility for benefits also extends to other Penn benefits including:

Tuition Assistance. The tuition benefit for your domestic partner covers 50% of the tuition and technology fees for an undergraduate degree at Penn. For more information, visit the [Tuition Benefit webpage](#).

Plan Changes as of July 1, 2024

Wellness and Work-life Support. If covered under a Penn medical plan, your domestic partner can access [nutrition counseling](#) through RAMP Health. Domestic partners can also connect with [MindWell](#) for emotional well-being resources for strength and care.

Dependent Care. This support is provided through Penn's [backup care](#) and [snow day child care](#) programs.

Adoption Benefit Increases: Penn understands the new financial responsibilities that come along with expanding your family through adoption. To help offset some of the costs, the University is increasing its adoption benefit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per child. Eligible faculty, staff, and postdocs may be reimbursed for up to \$10,000 in qualified expenses. The benefit will be administered by Carrot Fertility.

Contribution and Rollover Amounts Increase for Healthcare Flexible Spending Accounts: The maximum contribution you can make to your Health Care FSA is increasing from \$3,050 to \$3,200. The rollover amount will also increase from \$610 to \$640. You have until June 30, 2025 (end of the plan year) to incur expenses and until September 30, 2025, to submit eligible claims for services you received before June 30. Any remaining balance you have over \$640 will be forfeited.

Aetna High Deductible Health Plan Raises Deductibles:

The Aetna High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) with a Health Savings Account (HSA) will increase its deductible for individuals from \$1,500 to \$1,600 and for families from \$3,000 to \$3,200. All other medical plans—PennCare/Personal Choice PPO, Aetna Choice POS II, and Keystone/AmeriHealth HMO—will raise deductibles for individuals by \$100.

Life Insurance Rates Increase: There will be an increase in life insurance rates per \$1,000 for Supplemental Life Insurance and Dependent Life Insurance. For more information and to view the new rates, visit the [Supplemental Life Insurance](#) and [Dependent Life Insurance](#) webpages.

Medical Plan and Dental Rates: Medical rates for PennCare/Personal Choice PPO, Aetna Choice POS II, Keystone/AmeriHealth HMO, and Aetna High Deductible Health Plan (spouse and dependent tiers), will have an increase in the upcoming plan year. There will also be a small increase for the Penn Family Dental Plan. Rates for the MetLife Preferred Dental Program and Vision plan will remain the same. For a complete list of new rates, check the Medical, Dental, and Vision rates for 2024-2025 chart in the [Benefits Enrollment Guide](#).

All changes are effective July 1, 2024.

Open Enrollment Benefits Fairs and Presentations

The Open Enrollment Benefits Fair will be held on campus on Tuesday, April 30 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Gimbel Gym, [Pottruck Health and Fitness Center](#). Penn HR staff, representatives from Penn's healthcare providers and wellness partners will be there to answer your questions. A benefits fair will also be held at New Bolton Center on May 1, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Alumni Hall.

Virtual and on-campus Open Enrollment presentations will be held on the following dates:

Presentation Date	Time	Location
April 16	11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	Virtual
April 18	12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.	Houston Hall, Golkin Room
April 23	11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	Virtual
May 7	11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	Virtual

Carrot Fertility will also hold two virtual sessions on April 10 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and April 22 from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. Visit www.hr.upenn.edu/openenrollment for log in links for the virtual sessions and other information session details.

Workday@Penn Features

During Open Enrollment, you can make changes to your benefits coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the new [Benefits, Comp and Pay Hub](#) via Workday@Penn at <http://www.myworkday.com/upenn/login.html>.

To access the hub, click on "View All Apps" or "Menu" from your homepage, then select "Benefits, Comp and Pay Hub" from the Apps menu. Please remember to print a confirmation statement for your records. Read the [Self-Service: Manage, View and Change Your Benefits](#) Workday tip sheet for instructions.

While in Workday, you can also check out the [Model My Pay](#) feature. This tool can help you see how making hypothetical changes to your pre-tax and post-tax deductions and federal and state tax elections may impact your net,

or take home, pay. Read the [Self-Service: Model My Pay](#) tip sheet for step-by-step instructions as well as information on performing self-service changes to your actual pay. Model My Pay should be used for informational purposes only.

Update Your Beneficiary

Please review and update your life insurance beneficiary information in the Benefits, Comp and Pay Hub in Workday@Penn. To update your retirement plan beneficiaries, log in to your retirement planning account through [Penn's TIAA.org SSO link](#).

Additional Resources

To find out more about Benefits Open Enrollment:

- Review the [2024-2025 Benefits Enrollment Guide](#) coming soon to your home address.
- Visit www.hr.upenn.edu/openenrollment for details and useful tools.
- Contact Health Advocate at answers@HealthAdvocate.com or call 1 (866) 799-2329, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

—Division of Human Resources

Health Care Rates for 2024–2025

Full-time Weekly Paid				Full-time Monthly Paid				
	Single Coverage	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family	Single Coverage	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family
Medical								
PennCare/ Personal Choice	\$56.77	\$141.92	\$95.54	\$176.31	\$246.00	\$615.00	\$414.00	\$764.00
Aetna Choice POS II	\$39.00	\$100.38	\$66.23	\$124.85	\$169.00	\$435.00	\$287.00	\$541.00
Keystone/Ameri- Health HMO	\$26.77	\$71.77	\$45.00	\$88.38	\$116.00	\$311.00	\$195.00	\$383.00
Aetna HDHP	\$23.31	\$66.46	\$42.69	\$82.85	\$101.00	\$288.00	\$185.00	\$359.00
Dental								
Penn Family Plan	\$10.12	\$19.86	\$22.39	\$31.58	\$43.86	\$86.04	\$97.01	\$136.84
MetLife Dental	\$6.31	\$12.60	\$13.89	\$18.93	\$27.34	\$54.62	\$60.18	\$82.03
Vision								
Davis Vision	\$1.09	\$2.36	\$1.77	\$3.00	\$4.73	\$10.21	\$7.65	\$13.01
VSP Plan	\$1.64	\$3.54	\$2.66	\$4.51	\$7.10	\$15.33	\$11.53	\$19.55
VSP Choice Plan	\$2.47	\$5.34	\$4.02	\$6.81	\$10.71	\$23.13	\$17.40	\$29.50

Medical, Dental and Vision Rates for Part-time and ACA Eligible Employees 2024–2025

Weekly Paid				Monthly Paid				
	Single Coverage	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family	Single Coverage	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family
Medical								
Aetna POS II Standard	\$23.31	\$238.85	\$132.46	\$330.00	\$101.00	\$1,035.00	\$574.00	\$1,430.00
Dental								
Penn Family Plan	\$15.09	\$29.60	\$33.37	\$47.07	\$65.38	\$128.25	\$144.59	\$203.99
MetLife Dental	\$10.33	\$20.65	\$22.72	\$30.98	\$44.75	\$89.50	\$98.45	\$134.25
Vision								
Davis Vision	\$1.09	\$2.36	\$1.77	\$3.00	\$4.73	\$10.21	\$7.65	\$13.01
VSP Plan	\$1.64	\$3.54	\$2.66	\$4.51	\$7.10	\$15.33	\$11.53	\$19.55
VSP Choice Plan	\$2.47	\$5.34	\$4.02	\$6.81	\$10.71	\$23.13	\$17.40	\$29.50

Division of Public Safety
University of Pennsylvania Police Department Crime Report

About the Crime Report: Below are the Crimes Against Persons and/or Crimes Against Property from the campus report for **March 18-24, 2024**. The Crime Reports are available at: <https://almanac.upenn.edu/sections/crimes>. Prior weeks' reports are also online. –Eds.

This summary is prepared by the Division of Public Safety (DPS) and contains all criminal incidents reported and made known to the Penn Police, including those reported to the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) that occurred within our patrol zone, for the dates of **March 18-24**,

2024. The Penn Police actively patrol from Market Street to Baltimore Avenue and from 30th Street to 43rd Street in conjunction with the Philadelphia Police.

In this effort to provide you with a thorough and accurate report on public safety concerns, we hope that your increased awareness will lessen the opportunity for crime. For any concerns or suggestions regarding this report, please call DPS at (215) 898-7297. You can view the daily crime log on the [DPS website](#).

Penn Police Patrol Zone
Market Street to Baltimore Avenue and from 30th Street to 43rd Street

Crime Category	Date	Time	Location	Description
<i>Assault</i>	03/23/24	5:37 PM	3755 Spruce St	Simple assault
<i>Auto Theft</i>	03/24/24	1:55 PM	3900 Baltimore Ave	Theft of a secured motor vehicle from highway
<i>Burglary</i>	03/19/24	9:54 AM	4247 Locust St	Theft of package from apartments/Arrest
<i>Fraud</i>	03/20/24	9:23 PM	119 S 41st St	Credit card taken and used without authorization
	03/22/24	8:52 AM	3900 Delancey St	Attempted credit card fraud
<i>Other Assault</i>	03/18/24	2:05 PM	3400 Civic Center Blvd	Patient threatened staff via telephone
	03/20/24	2:23 PM	4042-4044 Chestnut St	Threats made to complainant via text message
<i>Other Offense</i>	03/19/24	12:00 AM	3400 Civic Center Blvd	PFA and warrant service/Arrest
<i>Theft from Building</i>	03/18/24	11:22 AM	3942 Spruce St	Currency taken from register
	03/18/24	1:10 PM	3601 Walnut St	Wallet taken from purse
	03/19/24	5:23 PM	4022 Market St	Unattended backpack containing MacBook and iPad taken
	03/21/24	10:32 AM	3501 Sansom St	Wallet theft with fraudulent credit card use
	03/23/24	1:06 PM	3701 Walnut St	Theft of a wallet from gym
<i>Theft from Vehicle</i>	03/18/24	11:42 AM	4000 Spruce St	Theft of items from unsecured vehicle
	03/22/24	10:13 AM	200 S 42nd St	Items taken from vehicle
<i>Theft Other</i>	03/18/24	4:21 PM	3925 Walnut St	Secured scooter taken from bike rack
	03/18/24	4:57 PM	3701 Chestnut St	Theft of scooter
	03/19/24	5:40 PM	3901 Locust Walk	Secured scooter taken from bike rack
	03/20/24	3:02 PM	3615 Civic Center Blvd	Theft of unsecured scooter from bike rack
	03/20/24	6:12 PM	3942 Spruce St	Theft of items from an unattended backpack
	03/21/24	6:35 PM	3501 Sansom St	Secured scooter taken from bike rack
	03/21/24	7:10 PM	3231 Walnut St	Secured scooter taken
<i>Vandalism</i>	03/20/24	5:45 PM	3700 Civic Center Blvd	Rear driver side door scratched
	03/23/24	11:30 PM	3934 Spruce St	Patio furniture broken

Philadelphia Police 18th District
Schuylkill River to 49th Street & Market Street to Woodland Avenue

Below are the Crimes Against Persons from the 18th District: 3 incidents were reported for **March 18-24, 2024** by the 18th District, covering the Schuylkill River to 49th Street & Market Street to Woodland Avenue.

Crime Category	Date	Time	Location
<i>Assault</i>	03/20/24	12:19 PM	31 S. 50th Street
	03/22/24	11:56 PM	4700 blk of Locust Street
	03/23/24	5:37 PM	3724 Spruce Street

The Division of Public Safety offers resources and support to the Penn community. DPS has developed a few helpful risk reduction strategies outlined below. Know that it is *never* the fault of the person impacted (victim/survivor) by crime.

- See something concerning? Connect with Penn Public Safety 24/7 at (215) 573-3333.
- Worried about a friend's or colleague's mental or physical health? Get 24/7 connection to appropriate resources at (215) 898-HELP (4357).
- Seeking support after experiencing a crime? Call Special Services (support and advocacy resources) at (215) 898-4481 or email an advocate at specialservices@publicsafety.upenn.edu.

- Use the [Walking Escort](#) and [Riding](#) services available to you free of charge.
- Take a moment to update your cell phone information for the [UPenn-nAlert Emergency Notification System](#).
- Download the [Penn Guardian App](#), which can help police better find your location when you call in an emergency.
- Access free [self-empowerment and defense courses](#) through Penn DPS.
- Stay alert and reduce distractions. (Using cell phones, ear buds, etc. may limit your awareness.)
- Orient yourself to your surroundings. (Identify your location, nearby exits, etc.)
- Keep your valuables out of sight and only carry necessary documents.

Update

April AT PENN

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

Penn Museum

Info: <https://www.penn.museum/calendar>.

2 *K-12 Archaeology Talk with Dr. Steve: Is Archaeology Really Like Indiana Jones?*; students are invited to a lively talk with Steven Phillips with exclusive, behind-the-scenes tales of the excavation of Petra's Temple of the Winged Lions; 11 a.m.; Rainey Auditorium, Penn Museum.

CONFERENCES

5 *Global Perspectives on Education, Environment, and Sustainability*; features nine speakers in three sessions; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; room 403, McNeil Building (Population Studies Center).

7 *Confronting Antisemitism: A Symposium on Its Past and Present*; scholars will convene to discuss the ways in which the term itself has been and continues to be matter of powerful political contest, will explore the relationship between antizionism and antisemitism, and will consider Jewish responses to such challenges as agents of history in their own right; 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Fitts Auditorium, Penn Carey Law School; register: <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/confronting-antisemitism/> (Jewish Studies).

EXHIBITS

3 *Stand/Still: Undergraduate Fine Arts Senior Thesis Exhibition*; includes work by Adeline Brown, Alyssa Chandler, Catia Colagioia, Michael Heath, Lilian Liu, Zuhu Nasim, Yao Wang, and Jonathan Xue; Charles Addams Fine Arts Gallery. *Opening reception: April 3, 2-5 p.m.*

Penn Parking & Commuter Services Announces Launch of Campus-Wide Parking Improvement Project

Penn Parking & Commuter Services has announced the launch of a major parking improvement project that includes modernizing both the hardware and software for the University's parking environment. Work is underway at campus parking facilities and is scheduled to be completed in the coming months. Permit holders will be notified in advance when these improvements are implemented at their designated parking garages.

According to Joe Russo, senior director of the Division of Business Services, the transformation of the campus parking facilities will improve the customer experience. "The investments in equipment, systems, and new product development will not only address current needs in our facilities but will allow us to provide more parking options in the future." Once the upgraded technology is in place, additional enhancements are scheduled, which include new permit options for employees.

In the coming months, all parkers can expect:

- Real-time, video-on-demand customer support at all entrances, exits, and payment kiosks, enabling 24/7 live-assistance when the facility is not staffed.

FILMS

2 *All That Breathes*; film follows siblings Mohammad Saud and Nadeem Shehzad, who rescue and treat injured birds in India; features Q&A with director Shaunak Sen; 5 p.m.; room 108, Annenberg School (Cinema & Media Studies, Center for the Advanced Study of India, Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication).

9 *A New Peace of Münster*; premiere of a documentary about climate mitigation on the Dutch-German border; includes discussion with Penn faculty members; 6 p.m.; Public Trust, 4017 Walnut Street (Cinema & Media Studies).

FITNESS & LEARNING

2 *Helping Students Read More Effectively*; Michael Kane, economics, and Paul Saint-Amour, English, will talk about how they motivate students to do readings and help students understand the purposes of the texts they assign; noon; room 134, Van Pelt Library; register: <https://cetli.upenn.edu/event/helping-students-read/> (Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning Innovation).

9 *Meet the Penn Master's in Health Care Innovation Network*; casual online conversation with alumni from the University of Pennsylvania's online Master of Health Care Innovation; learn from examples of impact in their work and ask your questions about the degree experience; 6 p.m.; online webinar; register: <https://improvinghealthcare.mehp.upenn.edu/meet-penn-mhc-in-network> (MHCI).

ON STAGE

4 *A History of Hands: A Multimedia Mixtape on Philly Queer/Trans Community and Artistry, Memory and Insurgency, Pre Civil War to Present*; performances by a myriad of local artists in the media of video, puppetry, poetry, sermon, remixes, theater, performance, tarot readings,

time capsules, and PowerPoint; 7 p.m.; the Rotunda, 4014 Walnut Street (Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies). *Also April 6, 2 p.m.; April 7, 5 p.m.*

SPECIAL EVENTS

3 *Penn History Review Spring Launch Event*; pick up a copy of the latest edition and meet other lovers of history, politics, and culture; includes a panel discussion with the authors featured in this issue and dinner; 7 p.m.; room 200, ARCH (History).

TALKS

2 *Tedori-Callinan Distinguished Lecture: Origami*; Glauco H. Paulino, Princeton University; 10 a.m.; Wu & Chen Auditorium, Levine Hall (Mechanical Engineering & Applied Mechanics).

Preserving Chinatowns in Philadelphia and Beyond; Kenny Chiu, Students for the Preservation of Chinatown; Domenic Vitiello, city & regional planning; Deborah Wei, Asian Americans United; Aaron Wunsch, historic preservation; noon; upper gallery, Meyerson Hall; register: <https://tinyurl.com/hist-pres-talk-apr-2> (Historic Preservation).

Lost City, Forgotten Country: Quivira and the Wichita Tribe; Don Blakeslee, Wichita State University; 4:30 p.m.; Penn Museum; register: <https://tinyurl.com/blakeslee-talk-apr-2> (Center for Ancient Studies).

Minerva Parker Nichols: The Search for a Forgotten Architect; Elizabeth Felicella, photographer; Margaret Lester, Urban Heritage Project; Heather Isbell Schumacher, Architectural Archives; William Whitaker, Architectural Archives; 6:30 p.m.; Kleinman Energy Forum, Fisher Fine Arts Library; register: <https://tinyurl.com/arc-arc-talk-apr-2> (Architectural Archives).

This is an update to the [April AT PENN calendar](https://www.upenn.edu/almanac), which is online now. Email almanac@upenn.edu to submit events for a future AT PENN calendar or weekly update.

Almanac

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Phone: (215) 898-5274 or 5275
Email: almanac@upenn.edu
URL: www.upenn.edu/almanac

The University of Pennsylvania's journal of record, opinion and news is published Tuesdays during the academic year, and as needed during summer and holiday breaks. Its electronic editions on the Internet (accessible through the Penn website) include HTML, Acrobat and mobile versions of the print edition, and interim information may be posted in electronic-only form. Guidelines for readers and contributors are available on request and online.

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RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Accelerating CAR T Cell Therapy: Lipid Nanoparticles Speed Up Manufacturing

For patients with certain types of cancer, CAR T cell therapy has been nothing short of life changing. Developed in part by Carl June, the Richard W. Vague Professor at Penn Medicine, and approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2017, CAR T cell therapy mobilizes patients' own immune systems to fight lymphoma and leukemia, among other cancers.

However, the process for manufacturing CAR T cells themselves is time-consuming and costly, requiring multiple steps across days. The state-of-the-art process involves extracting patients' T cells and activating them with tiny magnetic beads before giving them genetic instructions to make chimeric antigen receptors (CARs)—the specialized receptors that help T cells eliminate cancer cells. Penn engineers have developed a novel method for manufacturing CAR T cells, one that takes just 24 hours and requires only one step, thanks to the use of lipid nanoparticles (LNPs), the potent delivery vehicles that played a critical role in the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines.

In a new paper in *Advanced Materials*, Michael J. Mitchell, an associate professor in bioengineering, describes the creation of “activating lipid nanoparticles” (aLNPs), which can activate T cells and deliver the genetic instructions for CARs in a single step, greatly simplifying the CAR T cell manufacturing process. “We wanted to combine these two extremely promising areas of research,” said Ann Metzloff, a doctoral student and NSF Graduate Research Fellow in the Mitchell lab and the paper’s lead author. “How could we apply lipid nanoparticles to CAR T cell therapy?”

In some ways, T cells function like a military reserve unit: in times of health, they remain inactive, but when they detect pathogens, they mobilize, rapidly expanding their numbers before turning to face the threat. Cancer poses a unique challenge to this defense strategy. Since cancer cells are the body’s own, T cells do not automatically treat cancer as dangerous, hence the need to first “activate” T cells and deliver cancer-detecting CARs in CAR T cell therapy.

Until now, the most efficient means of activating T cells has been to extract them from a patient’s bloodstream and then mix those cells with magnetic beads attached to specific antibodies—molecules that provoke an immune response. “The beads are expensive,” said Ms. Metzloff. “They also need to be removed with a magnet before you can clinically administer the T cells. However, in doing so, you actually lose a lot of the T cells, too.”

Made primarily of lipids, the same water-repellent molecules that constitute household cooking fats like butter and olive oil, lipid nanoparticles have proven tremendously effective at delivering delicate molecular payloads. Their capsule-like shape can enclose and protect mRNA, which provides instructions for cells to manufacture proteins. Due to the widespread use of the COVID-19 vaccines, said Ms. Metzloff, “the safety and efficacy of lipid nanoparticles has been shown in billions of people around the world.” To incorporate LNPs into the production of CAR T cells, Ms. Metzloff and Dr. Mitchell wondered if it might be possible to attach the activating antibodies used on the magnetic beads directly to the surface of the LNPs. Employing LNPs this way, they thought, might make it possible to eliminate the need for activating beads in the production process altogether.

“This is novel,” said Ms. Metzloff, “because we’re using lipid nanoparticles not just to deliver mRNA encoding CARs, but also to initiate an advantageous activation state.” Over the course of two years, Ms. Metzloff carefully optimized the design of the aLNPs. One of the primary challenges was to find the right ratio of one antibody to another.

By attaching the antibodies directly to LNPs, the researchers were able to reduce the number of steps involved in the process of manufacturing CAR T cells from three to one, and to halve the time required, from 48 hours to just 24 hours. “This will hopefully have a transformative effect on the process for manufacturing CAR T cells,” said Dr. Mitchell. “It currently takes so much time to make them, and thus they are not accessible to many patients around the world who need them.”

CAR T cells manufactured using aLNPs have yet to be tested in humans, but in mouse models, CAR T cells created using the process described in the paper had a significant effect on leukemia, reducing the size of tumors, thereby demonstrating the feasibility of the technology.

Adapted from a Penn Engineering Today news release, March 18, 2024.

A Closer Look at the Role of Healthcare Algorithms in Racial and Ethnic Disparities

For years, it was harder for Black patients to secure a coveted spot on the national kidney transplant waitlist because a clinical algorithm was making Black patients appear healthier than they were. After a Penn Medicine researcher exposed the problem in 2019—and showed how it exacerbated racial disparities in kidney disease—a national task force recommended removing race from the algorithm’s scoring, a move that has quickly been adopted throughout the country.

That wasn’t the only impact, according to a comprehensive new study by Penn researchers that digs deeper into the complicated issue of race and ethnicity in healthcare algorithms. Removing race from the kidney function algorithm also appeared to reduce chemotherapy access, reduce eligibility for Black patients in clinical trials, and affect medication dosing.

The new paper, published this month in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, paints a nuanced picture of algorithms in healthcare—a ubiquitous, but often unseen, force in clinical decision making—and how their use can impact racial and ethnic disparities. The research team, led by Shazia Mehmood Siddique, an assistant professor of gastroenterology in Penn’s Perelman School of Medicine, found that algorithms can mitigate, perpetuate, and exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities, regardless of whether they explicitly use race or ethnicity as an input.

“Intentionality matters,” said Dr. Siddique, who also serves as director for research for Penn Medicine’s Center for Evidence-Based Practice (CEP) and the Penn Center for Healthcare Improvement and Patient Safety (CHIPS). “Racial and ethnic disparities cannot be an afterthought.”

The researchers defined algorithms as mathematical equations that combined various data points and inputs, such as sex and age, to inform clinical care. Algorithms are embedded throughout healthcare, Dr. Siddique said, to help providers make complex clinical decisions, such as whether a patient should be diagnosed with a disease or is eligible for a particular treatment, and to help health systems determine how to allocate resources, such as care management and critical care services. Importantly, algorithms are often embedded in electronic health records and patients and clinicians themselves are often not always aware they are being used.

To patients, it might seem as if medical criteria such as risk scores or treatment thresholds are based entirely on objective factors, said study co-author Brian Leas, a senior research analyst at CEP. But algorithms introduce a social component to clinical decision making. “How algorithms are constructed is a choice made by the developers,” he said. “It’s a decision to put certain factors together into a formula, and those decisions can be made differently.”

Traditionally, healthcare algorithms were developed by researchers in academic settings. More recently, however, health systems, insurance companies, and electronic health record companies have begun to develop their own algorithms, while artificial intelligence tools have rapidly assumed a major role in fueling new algorithms—a shift that researchers said heightens the need for scrutiny.

In 2020, healthcare algorithms caught the attention of four U.S. senators, including New Jersey’s Cory Booker. Citing the detrimental kidney disease algorithm, as well as another that unjustly lowered settlement benefits for concussion-related injuries for Black players in the National Football League, the lawmakers called on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a review of race-based clinical algorithms in medical practice. The agency subsequently commissioned the Penn team’s study, which was conducted in collaboration with ECRI, a nonprofit healthcare research organization focused on patient safety and reducing preventable harm.

In a systematic review of 63 studies, the researchers found that there is no silver bullet fix for issues associated with algorithms. Instead, they identified several strategies to mitigate disparities in healthcare algorithms, including adding a non-race variable, using data that reflects diverse racial and ethnic groups when developing algorithms, and swapping race with another more precise variable, such as genetic data or social factors that may impact care.

Healthcare algorithms are most successful at reducing disparities when they intentionally reduce documented inequalities, Dr. Siddique said. In some cases, this meant including race as an algorithm component. For instance, a prostate cancer screening algorithm was found to overtest Black men, which led to unnecessary biopsies and complications. Adding Black race as an input in the algorithm mitigated the disparity.

But sometimes, as with the kidney disease algorithm, reducing disparities means compromising other outcomes. When race was removed as a variable from an algorithm for lung cancer screening eligibility, disparities in eligibility for Hispanic and Asian Americans improved, while disparities deepened for Black patients.

A better option: replace race with a more precise variable. Dr. Siddique is now studying, for instance, whether replacing race with country of origin in a liver cancer screening guideline would reduce disparities. In a commentary in *Health Affairs* published in October 2023, Dr. Siddique and others promoted a “race-aware”—rather than race-based—approach to algorithms, calling for increased diversity in clinical trials, a focus on precision medicine and improved education on the factors that shape health outcomes.

The study was funded by the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research.

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