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2026 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 2026 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. The reception will be held on Thursday, April 23, 2026, at 5 p.m. in the Hall of Flags at Houston Hall.

See page 2 for photos and detailed information about the award recipients.

2026 School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Awards

The School of Arts & Sciences (SAS) has announced the following recipients of the 2026 SAS Teaching Awards. These honors will be presented on Thursday, April 30, 2026 at a reception open to the University community. The event will take place at noon in College Hall, Room 200.

Ira H. Abrams Memorial Award for Distinguished Teaching



Kim Bowes



Joshua Klein

This year's recipients of SAS's highest teaching honor are Kim Bowes, the BFC Presidential Professor of Classical Studies, and Joshua Klein, the Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Endowed Term Professor of Physics and Astronomy. The Ira H. Abrams Award was established in 1983 and recognizes teaching that is intellectually challenging and exceptionally coherent. The award honors faculty members who embody high standards of integrity and fairness, have a strong commitment to learning, and are open to new ideas.

As an expert on the archaeology and material culture of the Roman and later Roman worlds, Dr. Bowes has a particular scholarly focus on the lived experience of the poor. She has been at Penn since 2010, teaching across divisions and disciplines. Her students report that she is an innovative instructor, both challenging and kind. As one student wrote, "it is in Dr. Bowes' classes that I feel the value of the liberal arts education."

Dr. Klein began at Penn as a postdoctoral student in 1994 and returned in 2008 as an associate professor. As a high-energy experimental particle physicist, Dr. Klein's colleagues report that he is a dynamic lecturer with a knack

for conveying "big picture" physics, and that he makes the topic accessible to students. One student wrote, "What I appreciate most is how Professor Klein teaches you to think. He emphasizes reasoning over memorization, clarity over shortcuts, and deep understanding over superficial coverage. That approach has stayed with me far beyond our final exam."

Dennis M. DeTurck Award for Innovation in Teaching

Kevin Platt, a professor of Russian and East European studies, is the 2026 recipient of the Dennis M. DeTurck Award for Innovation in Teaching. This award, which is named after Robert A. Fox Leadership Professor and former College of Arts & Sciences Dean Dennis DeTurck, recognizes exceptional creativity and innovation in instruction.

Dr. Platt has been at Penn since 2002 and is currently both chair of the department of Russian and East European studies and graduate group chair. His colleagues note that he is particularly skilled in the areas of curricular development, evaluation, and research mentorship, with one colleague referring to Dr. Platt as an "indefatigable program-builder." Dr. Platt's students cite his "collaboration, energy, and curiosity" as well as his "authority and graceful humility," noting his ability to foster environments of mutual trust and accountability.

Paul Sniegowski Award for Mentorship of Undergraduate Research

The 2026 Paul Sniegowski Award for Mentorship of Undergraduate Research goes to Marc Meredith, professor of political science. The award is given in recognition of faculty members who have excelled in nurturing undergraduate students' desires and abilities to conduct meaningful research. Dr. Meredith consistently prioritizes students' needs, his colleagues report, noting that he is "consummately avail-

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A Message to the Penn Community

Community Listening Sessions: Proposed Revisions to the Guidelines on Open Expression

All members of the University community are invited to participate in community listening sessions on the proposed revisions to the Guidelines on Open Expression. These sessions provide an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and postdoctoral trainees to share their perspectives on the proposed revisions to the Guidelines on Open Expression, which can be accessed in [Almanac](#).

Each session will be convened by Eric Feldman, Charles A. Heimbold Professor of International Law, Penn Carey Law, and immediate past chair of the Faculty Senate.

Two opportunities are available:

1. In-Person Session: 4 p.m. on Thursday, April 23, 2026—Perry World House

PennCard holders are encouraged to register in advance using this [registration link](#).

PennCard holders who do not register in advance may still register at the door by presenting their University identification. Please note that due to space limitations, advance registrants will receive priority seating.

2. Virtual Session (Zoom): noon on Friday, April 24, 2026

PennCard holders who wish to attend the virtual session must register in advance using this [registration link](#), so that an email confirmation with a link to the session may be sent.

PennCard holders may register to attend until 4 p.m. on Wednesday, April 22, 2026. The email confirmation with a link to join the virtual listening session will be sent following this deadline.

Please note:

All Penn community members may submit anonymous feedback using this [online feedback form](#). The deadline for submissions is Monday, May 18, 2026.

The community listening sessions will not be recorded. Notetakers will attend both sessions to capture deidentified feedback.

Questions or comments about these sessions may be directed to OpenExpressionFeedback@upenn.edu.

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2026 Provost's Teaching Awards

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

Health Schools

Kimberly Ann Agnello, Professor of Small Animal Surgery, Department of Clinical Sciences & Advanced Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine

J. Margo Brooks Carthon, Professor, Van Ameringen Endowed Chair of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing, Director, Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, School of Nursing

Bryson W. Katona, Jeffery and Cynthia King Associate Professor of Lynch Syndrome Research, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Perelman School of Medicine

Nuala J. Meyer, William Maul Measey Professor of Medicine, Director, Center for Translational Lung Biology, Vice Chief for Research, Pulmonary, Allergy, and Critical Care Division, Perelman School of Medicine

Non-Health Schools

Gad Allon, Jeffrey A. Keswin Professor, Department of Operations, Information and Decisions, Wharton School

Kim Bowes, BFC Presidential Professor of Classical Studies, Department of Classical Studies, School of Arts & Sciences

Chris Callison-Burch, Professor, Department of Computer and Information Science, School of Engineering & Applied Science

Marsha I. Lester, Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, School of Arts & Sciences

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

Ivan J. Dmochowski, Alan G. MacDiarmid Term Professor of Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, School of Arts & Sciences

Dylan Small, Universal Furniture Professor, Department of Statistics and Data Science, Wharton School

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

Jessica Pollock Simon, Associate Director of Legal Practice Skills, Director of Academic Support, Penn Carey Law

Elizabeth M. Woodward, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Biomedical Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine

2026 Earth Week at Penn

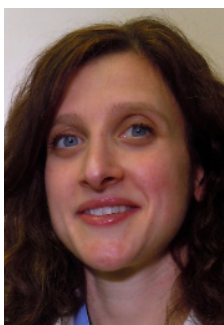
[Earth Week](#) at Penn will take place this year on April 18-24, 2026 and will take the theme of *Inspire Informed Action*. Join students, faculty, and staff in cross-disciplinary events designed to honor Earth Day, educate participants, and spark thoughtful change. Earth Week elevates our collective impact by encouraging involvement from all schools and centers at Penn.

This year's events include:

- April 18: [How to Draw Songbirds](#)
- April 20: [Red Day Readiness Workshop](#)
- April 20: [Penn Climate Launch Party](#)
- April 23: [BioBlitz](#)
- April 23: [Assessing Exposure to Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals Through Ultra-Processed Foods](#)

Visit [Penn Sustainability's Earth Day website](#) for more information.

2026 Lindback Awards for Distinguished Teaching Health Schools



Kimberly Ann Agnello



J. Margo Brooks Carthon



Bryson W. Katona



Nuala J. Meyer

Non-Health Schools



Gad Allon



Kim Bowes



Chris Callison-Burch



Marsha I. Lester

2026 Provost's Awards

For Distinguished PhD Teaching and Mentoring



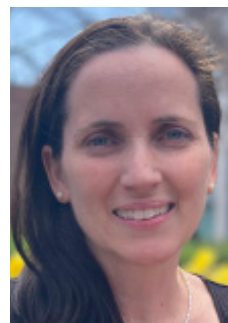
Ivan J. Dmochowski



Dylan Small



Jessica Pollock Simon



Elizabeth M. Woodward

For Teaching Excellence by Non-Standing Faculty

From the Faculty Senate Office

The following agenda is published in accordance with the Faculty Senate Rules. Any member of the standing faculty may attend SEC meetings and observe. Questions may be directed to Patrick Walsh, executive assistant in the Senate Office, either by telephone at (215) 898-6943 or by email at senate@pobox.upenn.edu.

Faculty Senate Executive Committee Agenda

Wednesday, April 15, 2026, 3–5:15 p.m. ET

1. Finalize the Minutes of March 18, 2026, Meeting
2. Report from the Tri-Chairs
3. "Introduction to the Faculty Senate" One-Page Overview
4. Faculty Appointees to the Committee on Open Expression
5. Proposed Amendments to the Faculty Handbook
 - a. Proposal to Revise Section II.E.9.C. (Rights and Privileges of Retired Faculty Members) to Clarify the Use of the Emeritus/a Title
 - b. Proposal to Revise the Policy on Extension of the Probationary Periods that Apply to Granting of Tenure or Promotion to Associate Professor Because of a Catastrophic Professional Event
 - c. Proposal from the School of Veterinary Medicine to Increase the Cap on Clinician Educators in the School from 50% to 60% of the Standing Faculty
6. Update from the Office of the Provost: Discussion with Provost John L. Jackson, Jr.
7. Update from the Office of International Student & Scholar Services: Discussion with Executive Director Rodolfo Altamirano
8. New Business

Deaths

Diane Frey, College of Arts & Sciences

Diane Dailey Frey, former assistant dean and director of academic services in the College of Arts & Sciences, died on January 24, 2026. She was 81.

Born in Boston and raised in Norwell, Massachusetts, Dr. Frey graduated from Norwell High School in 1962, then went on to attend Keuka College, where she graduated in 1966. Dr. Frey earned her doctorate in Eastern European history from the University of Washington in 1977, which included a year (1974) spent in Krakow, Poland on a Fulbright fellowship.

In 1979, Dr. Frey joined Penn's faculty as assistant dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. In 1982, she took a role directing undergraduate advising in the College, helping students find faculty advisors and mentors on campus, and in 1989, she became director of advising. While at Penn, Dr. Frey served on several committees, task forces, and working groups, often in support of improving the quality of faculty/student mentorship and the share of Penn's faculty involved. These included the Task Force on Conduct and Misconduct on Campus; the University Council Committee on Student Affairs; the advisory board of the then-new Penn Women's Center; the Subcommittee on Advising and Retention (part of the late-1980s strategic initiative, *Choosing Penn's Future*); the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education Subcommittees; and the Electronic Degree Planning and Audit Working Group (which launched course registration system Penn InTouch in 2000). Dr. Frey won a Models of Excellence Award in 2006 as part of a project that allowed Philadelphia-area students who had been attending New Orleans-area universities and had been displaced by Hurricane Katrina to apply to be guest students at Penn. She retired from Penn in 2009.

"Diane was an avid reader, a lover of the arts, and a dedicated volunteer," said Dr. Frey's family. "After retirement, she tutored elementary students in reading, assisted formerly incarcerated people, and served in myriad areas for the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. She was a friend to many, a brilliant, supportive, loving listener with a teasing side that loved a pun."

She is survived by her daughter, Julia Patterson Frey; her son-in-law, Jeb Kreager; her brother, William Stewart Dailey; and her grandchildren, William and Llewyn Frey Kreager.

A memorial service for Diane and her husband, Richard Frey, who died three days after she did, will be held this spring.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to [Doctors Without Borders](#), [Planned Parenthood](#), or the [American Civil Liberties Union](#).

Arthur Humphrey, Penn Engineering

Arthur E. Humphrey, a former professor of chemical engineering and inaugural dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science, died on March 21, 2026. He was 98.

Born in Moscow, Idaho, Dr. Humphrey earned a BS in chemical engineering in 1948 and a master's in chemical engineering in 1950, both from the University of Idaho. He then went on to earn a PhD in chemical engineering at Columbia University in 1953, and in 1960 a master's degree in food technology from MIT.

Dr. Humphrey joined Penn's faculty as an assistant professor in chemical engineering in 1953, and was later appointed director of what was then called the School of Chemical Engineering in 1961. In 1972, Penn's four engineering schools merged into the College of Engineering and Applied Science, and Dr. Humphrey was named the dean of the newly formed school ([Almanac May 9, 1972](#)). "We are enthusiastic about the enlightening leadership which Dr. Humphrey will bring in the future development of engineering and applied science," Provost Curtis Reitz said at time. "Dean Humphrey will be instrumental in leading his colleagues in the exciting challenge of working with other faculty members outside engineering, particularly in social and health-related sciences. He will exemplify not only the concern, but a strong desire to focus engineering reason, rigor and relevance on emerging societal problems."

As dean, Dr. Humphrey laid out a forward-looking agenda to broaden and modernize undergraduate engineering education, including integrating engineering into the broader undergraduate experience and promoting "technology literacy" for all students; expanding degree options, including creating the bachelor of applied science; reimagining the field of engineering as preparation for careers in law, medicine and business; and expanding Penn Engineering's offerings of global and experiential learning programs. In addition, Dr. Humphrey focused on improving the quality and quantity of graduate programs, which involved increasing graduate enrollment and increasing financial and research support for students; elevating Penn Engineering's research excellence and national standing; deepening the school's interdisciplinary leadership and collaborations; and increasing investment in faculty hiring, infrastructure, and technology ([Almanac September 25, 1973](#)).

Together with then-associate dean Joseph Bordogna, Dr. Humphrey's visionary leadership also laid the foundation for what is now Penn Engineering's Cora Ingram Center for Community and Outreach, which leads and champions programming to support the Penn Engineering student body and positively impact the Philadelphia community. He served as dean until 1980, when he left Penn to become provost and vice president of Lehigh University. Today, his impact at Penn endures in the form of the Arthur E. Humphrey Professorship, established by his former students at Penn in recognition of his pioneering role in the field of biochemical engineering. Meanwhile, Dr. Humphrey retired from Lehigh in 1992, then served for an additional five years as chair of the Biotechnology Institute and as a professor of chemical engineering at Penn State University, retiring for good in 1997.



Arthur Humphrey

Internationally known for his scholarship and research, Dr. Humphrey concentrated on three major areas in his work as an engineer: alleviating bioengineering problems in food production that caused malnutrition and mass hunger; application of immobilized enzymes to industrial waste and medical problems; and use of oxygen-enriched air in wastewater treatment systems. Dr. Humphrey wrote over 250 technical papers and three books, including the textbook *Biochemical Engineering*. In 1973, Dr. Humphrey was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. He served as president of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers from 1990 to 1991 and received the John Fritz Medal from the American Association of Engineering Societies in 1997. He also received the Pennsylvania Society Gold Medal Award (1988), the Asian Biotechnology Gold Medal (1991), and the Penn Medal for Distinguished Achievement (1993).

Dr. Humphrey is survived by his daughters, Andrea Houston and Allyson Humphrey; sons-in-law, Dan Rinks and Jim Charette; and a grandson, Sam Dyson (Elizabeth).

Scott Lederman, Treasurer

Scott Charles Lederman, WG'69, Penn's treasurer from 1987 to 1999, died on February 25, 2026. He was 84.

Born in 1941 on a United States Army base in Panama, Mr. Lederman grew up in Bellmore, New York. He graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1964, then served in the United States Army, both in Germany and Vietnam, attaining the rank of Captain. He then entered the Wharton School's MBA program in 1967 and earned his degree two years later. Mr. Lederman would spend the rest of his career at Penn.

After completing his studies in 1969, Mr. Lederman worked in the Wharton School's graduate office, where he established Wharton's Office of Student Affairs (becoming the director of student affairs in the school in the process) and helped design a budgeting approach that would serve as the basis for Penn's Responsibility Center Management budgeting process. In 1972, Mr. Lederman became the executive assistant to Paul Gaddis, Penn's inaugural vice president for management (precursor of today's position of executive vice president).

In 1975, Mr. Lederman was elected vice president of Franklin Investment Company, a Penn-owned subsidiary that reported to the University's investment board and managed Penn's endowment and other investment assets. In that position, Mr. Lederman created the first cash management program for the University and the health system and was instrumental in developing and implementing Penn's endowment spending rule. When this investment function was brought back into Penn's administrative structure in 1982, Mr. Lederman became Penn's first director of investments. In this post,

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2026 School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Awards

(continued from page 1)

able.” One colleague said, “Marc is not only interested in showing students how to do research; he transforms them into active interlocutors who learn to trust their own skills and judgment.” Numerous students describe him as a career-defining mentor, noting that he has fostered the scholarship of dozens of students through the Penn Program on Opinion Research and Election Studies and the Fox Leadership Program.



Marc Meredith

Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching by an Assistant Professor

This award recognizes a member of the junior faculty who demonstrates unusual promise as an educator. This year, SAS honors D. Brian Kim, an assistant professor of Russian and East European studies and a specialist in Russian literature of the long 19th century, translation studies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia.

In addition to his regular teaching responsibilities and his role as undergraduate chair, Dr. Kim dedicates himself to the educational support and academic success of his students. He supervises honors theses, mentors independent studies, leads special research initiatives through the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships, and continues to support graduate and undergraduate students well beyond the classroom and the campus.



D. Brian Kim

Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching by Affiliated Faculty



Jane Dmochowski



Valeriya Kamenova

Jane Dmochowski, a senior lecturer in the department of Earth & environmental science, and Valeriya Kamenova, a lecturer in international relations, are the recipients of this award, which recognizes contributions to undergraduate education made by the school’s non-standing faculty.

Dr. Dmochowski has been teaching in the department of Earth & environmental science

since 2014. Her colleagues note that “she has a unique ability to teach with innovation, prioritizing research, curiosity, and community.” Over the past 15 years, she has supervised 16 master’s capstones, 33 senior theses, and one teacher-researcher. Her students report that they are “strongly supported and encouraged” through her teaching.

Dr. Kamenova has been teaching in the international relations program since 2021 and “has become indispensable to our administrative staff, teaching faculty, and student body,” one colleague reports. Originally from Bulgaria and fluent in English and proficient in German and Russian, Dr. Kamenova has sophisticated experience in the subject of international relations and has led a delegation of students to her native country through a Penn Global Seminar. In her students’ words, she is “interesting, engaging, and intellectually stimulating.”

Liberal & Professional Studies Award for Distinguished Teaching in Undergraduate and Post-Baccalaureate Programs

Since 2010, Simon Tong has been a lecturer, teaching organic chemistry. In addition to this role, Dr. Tong is also a pre-health advisor for post-baccalaureate preparatory students in the College of Liberal & Professional Studies who aspire to attend medical, dental, or veterinary school. Dr. Tong’s colleagues say that he possesses a deep understanding of his subject matter, has excellent communication skills, and employs creative problem-solving exercises within the classroom environment. Students say that he “transformed” their apprehension about organic chemistry into “confidence and appreciation” of the subject.



Simon Tong

Liberal & Professional Studies Award for Distinguished Teaching in Professional Graduate Programs

Once a third-grade teacher with Teach for America in Houston, Texas, Claire Robertson-Kraft is now founder and executive director of ImpactED and faculty co-director of the Fels Institute of Government.

She has more than 20 years of experience working as a teacher, evaluator, and nonprofit leader in the Philadelphia region and has extensive experience teaching research methods and conducting evaluations in education, public policy, positive psychology, social impact, and community engagement. Colleagues said she exemplifies distinguished teaching in professional graduate education and that her instruction is rigorous and disciplined, while remaining closely connected to the realities of students’ professional lives.



Claire Robertson-Kraft

Dean’s Award for Distinguished Teaching by Graduate Students

This award recognizes graduate students for teaching that is intellectually rigorous and has a considerable impact on undergraduate students. This year’s awardees are:

- Andrew Matthias McIntosh Burke, Music
- Idil Çakmur, Philosophy
- Peter E. Diamond, English
- Luca Garzino Demo, Philosophy
- Saul Hilsenrath, Mathematics
- Thomas Pattiz, Political Science
- Alvaro Pintado, Mathematics
- Gabrielle Roehr, Classical Studies
- Kyilah Terry, Political Science
- Ezekiel Vergara, Philosophy

Deaths

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he oversaw the management of Penn’s pooled income endowment, short-term investments, and pension plan assets, as well as over 100 individual trust funds. He also oversaw the “computerization” of Penn’s investment office.

In 1987, Mr. Lederman was appointed treasurer of the University (*Almanac* September 15, 1987). In this position, he lobbied for more child daycare funding, developed an endowment spending rule, and oversaw Penn’s real estate subsidiary. He also spearheaded Penn’s divestment from firms associated with the apartheid government in South Africa and worked with investment managers John Neff and Richard Worley to significantly increase Penn’s endowment fund. Mr. Lederman also served on the board of Penn’s West Philadelphia Partnership, becoming its treasurer in 1988 and chairman in 1994.

Mr. Lederman retired from Penn in 1999 (*Almanac* May 18/25, 1999). Upon his retirement, vice president for finance Kathy Engbretson called him “a true asset to the University whose expansive knowledge of Penn, good humor and warm personality will be missed by all.” John Fry, executive vice president at the time, added, “for thirty years he has provided creative leadership in the financial management of the University. He has also been a supportive colleague to me and to many others. We are all very appreciative of his many contributions and wish him well in his retirement.”

He is survived by his wife, Abby; his children, Timothy (Ginger), Max (Dayna), and Annie (Todd); his grandchildren, James, Scottie, Reese, and Claire; and his sisters, Nancy Foye and Patty Brady. “In lieu of flowers,” said his family in an online tribute, “tell someone you love them.”

To Report A Death

Almanac appreciates being informed of the deaths of current and former faculty and staff members, students and other members of the University community. Call (215) 898-5274 or email almanac@upenn.edu.

However, notices of alumni deaths should be directed to the Alumni Records Office at Suite 300, 2929 Walnut St., (215) 898-8136 or email record@ben.dev.upenn.edu.

Seed Fund for Community-Engaged Research

From its founding, the University of Pennsylvania has been rooted in its community. Benjamin Franklin's vision for Penn emphasized education in the service of society by preparing students to help solve real-world problems rather than serving as a finishing school for the elite. This community ethos has been interwoven in numerous programs across all of Penn's schools, as recently recognized with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (January 2026), and builds on a long-standing commitment to democratic community partnerships advanced by Penn's Netter Center.

Community-engaged research (CER) "involves working collaboratively with community partners, seeking to produce positive change, and in doing so generating new knowledge that can be shared with and evaluated by disciplinary peers" (Faculty Committee Report, June 2022). It integrates rigorous scholarly methods with sustained, mutually beneficial collaboration to address real-world needs and strengthen communities. By aligning scholarly inquiry with the priorities and lived experience of community members, CER connects academic research with community needs, especially in our local community of West Philadelphia and the broader city.

Vice Provost for Research David F. Meaney announces the Seed Fund for Community Engaged Research, open to all standing faculty. The fund supports place-based, partner-focused research, recognizing that building trusting community partnerships often takes more time and different resources than traditional research. Projects are expected to develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial to both the University and its community partner; as outlined in the report of the provost's faculty committee (2022): "Community-engaged scholarship entails working in partnership with the community in a relationship of transparency and trust in order to draw on the expertise of the partners to [contribute to solving] a pressing real-world problem."

Projects are expected to:

- Use the disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary lens of the faculty member's field of research and employ rigorous approaches to scholarship.
- Contribute to solving a real-world, community-identified problem in partnership with the community.
- Develop robust, sustained partnerships that eventually lead to scholarly outputs, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and community reports that draw on disciplinary expertise.

Applications are now being accepted. Details of this new opportunity can be found at the OVPR's funding webpages at: <https://research.upenn.edu/funding-opportunity/seed-fund-for-community-engaged-research/>. Grants of up to \$25,000 per year for two-year projects are possible. The deadline to apply is May 26, 2026.

—Office of the Vice Provost for Research

Salamishah Tillet: 2026 Provost's Distinguished Visiting Faculty Fellow Lecture on April 14

On Tuesday, April 14, 2026 at 4:30 p.m., Salamishah Tillet, this year's Provost's Distinguished Visiting Faculty Fellow, will present a lecture titled *All The Rage: The Myth, Meaning, and Many Afterlives of Nina Simone*.

The Provost's Distinguished Visiting Faculty Fellow Lecture brings Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Salamishah Tillet to the University of Pennsylvania for a special lecture in anticipation of her new book, *Nina Simone and the World She Made*. This book—a blend of criticism, memoir, and biography—examines how Nina Simone has come to embody the struggles of contemporary America more than any other artist of the civil rights era.

Salamishah Tillet, C'96, taught at Penn for more than a decade and is currently a Distinguished Professor of Africana Studies and Creative Writing at Rutgers University-Newark. After her reading, there will be a lively conversation with Penn Provost John L. Jackson, Jr. about Nina Simone's life and enduring legacy, as well as Dr. Tillet's journey as a critic, scholar, and curator, inviting the audience to consider the role of artists, past and present, who use their voices to reflect the times in which they live.

The lecture is co-sponsored by the Office of the Provost, the Annenberg School for Communication, and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. It will be held in the Harold Prince Theatre at the Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut Street.

Please register at: https://upenn.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mmCr6RU4DKsHZ4.

Eidos LGBTQ+ Health Initiative Lecture During Penn Medicine's Health Equity Week on April 10

On Friday, April 10 at noon, join Eidos LGBTQ+ Health Initiative for a collaborative presentation from members of Penn Dental, Nursing, and Medicine on their 2025 study examining students' perceived preparedness to care for LGBTQIA+ patients.

The event is part of Penn Medicine's Health Equity Week. Attendees can explore how training and attitudes have evolved over the past decade, and where opportunities remain to strength LGBTQIA+ health education. [Register here to attend](#); in-person and virtual options are available.

Planning an Event? Email Almanac

If you or your department are mounting an exhibit, orchestrating a concert, planning a play, showing a film, or planning some other event, let *Almanac* know so it can be included in the monthly AT PENN calendar.

Almanac's monthly AT PENN calendar is the only all-inclusive calendar of Penn events on campus. With a significant online readership, a free listing in the AT PENN increases visibility and attendance.

Email us at almanac@upenn.edu with your event details, including the event date, time, topic, speaker information and sponsors. For more information, visit <https://almanac.upenn.edu/deadlines-for-submitting-at-penn-information>.

Honors & Other Things

Five Penn Faculty Members Elected 2025 AAAS Fellows



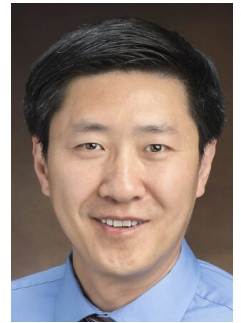
Cherie R. Kagan



Daniel Krashen



George Pappas



Kai Tan

Five University of Pennsylvania professors representing the School of Arts & Sciences, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, and the Perelman School of Medicine have been elected 2025 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Fellows. They are among nearly 500 researchers being honored this year across 24 scientific disciplines.

AAAS, a society with a mission to "advance science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all," has named a class of fellows since 1874. This year's honorees will be celebrated at a forum in Washington, D.C., in June.

Penn's newest AAAS Fellows are:

Cherie R. Kagan is the Stephen J. Angelo Professor in the department of electrical and systems engineering with secondary appointments in the department of materials science and engineering in Penn Engineering and the department of chemistry in the School of Arts & Sciences. She is widely recognized for her pioneering research on nanostructured materials and their use in advanced devices for electronics, photonics, and sensing. Dr. Kagan directs the National Science Foundation (NSF)-supported Engineering Research Center for the Internet of Things for Precision Agriculture. Since joining Penn in 2007, Dr. Kagan and her lab have explored how to design and integrate materials with unique optical, electri-

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Honors & Other Things

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cal, and mechanical properties into functional technologies. She is a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors and several major scientific societies.

Daniel Krashen is the Presidential Professor of Mathematics in the School of Arts & Sciences. Dr. Krashen's research is in algebra and arithmetic geometry, including the study of division algebras, quadratic forms, local-global principles, moduli stacks, and derived categories. These areas have connections to a wide range of fields, including physics and cryptography. He has been awarded multiple NSF grants, including a CAREER award and the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE), and is a fellow of the American Mathematical Society. Dr. Krashen has also been active in promoting outreach and diversity in mathematics at a range of levels from middle school through early career professors.

George Pappas is the UPS Foundation Professor in the department of electrical and systems engineering in Penn Engineering. He also holds secondary appointments in the department of computer & information sciences and the department of mechanical engineering & applied mechanics and serves as the associate dean for research and innovation in Penn Engineering and as the director of the Raj and Neera Singh Program in Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Pappas' research focuses on control systems, robotics, autonomous systems, formal methods, and machine learning for safe and secure cyber-physical systems. He is a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and the International Federation of Automatic Control, and he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2024.

Kai Tan is the Richard and Sheila Sanford Professor in the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a professor of pediatrics in the Perelman School of Medicine. His research combines experimental genomics and computational modeling to uncover mechanisms of gene regulation in cellular development and cancer. Dr. Tan has made seminal contributions to scientists' understanding of stem cell development within bone marrow, mapping its trajectory and identifying key transcriptional regulators and enhancers that govern this process. He has also developed computational methods to identify noncoding mutations that disrupt transcriptional regulatory networks and rare therapy-resistant cells that contribute to treatment failure. Dr. Tan has contributed significantly to National Institutes of Health-sponsored scientific initiatives, including the Cancer Systems Biology Consortium and the Human Tumor Atlas Network.

Patrick J. Walsh is the Rhodes-Thompson Professor of Chemistry in the School of Arts & Sciences. Dr. Walsh's research focuses on catalysis and chemical synthesis, developing new reactions that help chemists build useful molecules more efficiently. His group studies unusual forms of chemical reactivity that can simplify how complex compounds are made, including the discovery of 2-azaallyl anions, highly reactive molecules that act as powerful "super electron donors." These reactions enable chemists to assemble complex structures without relying on transition metals, opening

new paths for making pharmaceuticals and other useful compounds. Dr. Walsh directs Penn's Chemistry Research Experience for Undergraduates program with Marta Guron.

Inaugural Cohort of Penn AI Fellows

The Penn AI Fellows program, a new interdisciplinary initiative that connects researchers working with AI across the University, has announced its first cohort of AI fellows.

The fellowship brings together doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers from nine schools at Penn who are applying AI in their work. Through regular meetings, collaborative events, and research exchanges, the fellows will examine how AI methods can be translated across fields and how scholars from different disciplines can learn from one another.

"This program grew out of our Data Science Fellows initiative," said Colin Twomey, executive director of the Data Driven Discovery Initiative in Penn's School of Arts & Sciences. "As AI became increasingly relevant across fields, it made sense to expand beyond a single school and bring together researchers who are using and developing these methods in very different contexts."

That expansion has become possible through a partnership with PennAI, a new initiative launched by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research. Fellows participate in weekly lunches with faculty researchers, collaborative discussions, and peer-led events focused on emerging AI tools and research methods. The program's central goal, Dr. Twomey said, is to break down disciplinary silos that often shape academic research.

"When people think about AI, they often focus on the technical side," he said. "But questions about learning, teaching, and human interaction with technology are just as important. Having scholars from education involved in these conversations helps broaden how we think about the impact of AI."

The current Penn AI fellows are:

- Noëmi Aeppli (School of Arts & Sciences, department of linguistics)
- Shreya Arya (School of Arts & Sciences, department of mathematics)
- Fabian Baumann (School of Arts & Sciences, department of biology)
- Yahav Bechavod (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of computer and information systems)
- Supranta Sarma Boruah (School of Arts & Sciences, department of physics and astronomy)
- Tess Cherlin (Perelman School of Medicine, department of pathology and laboratory medicine)
- Angel Tsai-Hsuan Chung (Wharton School, department of operations, information, and decisions)
- Nicolò Dal Fabbro (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of electrical and systems engineering)
- Sourav Dey (School of Arts & Sciences, department of chemistry)
- Sam Dillavou (School of Arts & Sciences, department of physics and astronomy)
- Tianjiao Ding (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of computer and information science)

- Hayoung Donnelly (Perelman School of Medicine, department of psychiatry)
- Marcelo Guzmán (School of Arts & Sciences, department of physics and astronomy)
- Haimin Hu (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of Electrical and Systems Engineering)
- Xinquan Huang (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of mechanical engineering and applied mechanics)
- Jaesik Kim (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of bioengineering)
- Adam Kline (School of Arts & Sciences, department of physics and astronomy)
- Nathan Kong (Nathan Kong School of Arts & Sciences, department of psychology)
- Viet-Anh Le (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of electrical and systems engineering)
- Yoonjae Lee (School of Nursing)
- Chenyu Li (Perelman School of Medicine, department of medicine)
- Jingjing Li (Center for Computational Biomedicine, department of genetics)
- Wei Li (Perelman School of Medicine, department of biostatistics and epidemiology)
- Guiqiu Liao (Perelman School of Medicine, department of surgery)
- Benjamin Lira Luttgies (Wharton School, department of marketing)
- Marvin Maechler (School of Arts & Sciences, department of psychology)
- Shruti Mehta (Graduate School of Education)
- Hancheng Min (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of electrical and systems engineering)
- Luis Morales-Navarro (Graduate School of Education)
- Lucia Nazzaro (School of Social Policy and Practice)
- Felipe Parodi (Perelman School of Medicine, department of neuroscience)
- Liangzu Peng (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of electrical and systems engineering)
- Sydney Pugh (Perelman School of Medicine, department of biostatistics, epidemiology and informatics)
- Shyam Sankaran (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of mechanical engineering and applied mechanics)
- Melanie Segado (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of bioengineering)
- Brynn Sherman (School of Arts & Sciences, department of psychology)
- Sergey Shuvaev (Perelman School of Medicine, neurosurgery)
- David Snyder (School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of electrical and systems engineering)
- Yan Sun (Wharton School, department of statistics and data science)
- Adrien Thob (School of Arts & Sciences, department of physics and astronomy)
- Carolina Torreblanca (School of Arts & Sciences, department of political science)

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- (Joey Velez-Ginorio School of Engineering and Applied Science, department of computer and information science)
- Ezekiel Vergara (School of Arts & Sciences, department of philosophy)
- Coby Viner (School of Arts & Sciences, department of biology)
- Sheng Wang (Perelman School of Medicine, department of radiology)
- Xiaozhi (Taro) Yang (School of Arts & Sciences, department of psychology)
- Qijia Ye (Annenberg School for Communication)
- Shengao Yi (Stuart Weitzman School of Design, department of city and regional planning)
- Sang Bin You (School of Nursing)
- Tianhua Zhai (Perelman School of Medicine, department of biostatistics, epidemiology and informatics)

Annenberg Researchers Awarded Information and Democracy Research Grants from the Penn Center for Media, Technology, and Democracy

Sixteen researchers at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania have been awarded Information and Democracy Research Grants from the Penn Center on Media, Technology, and Democracy.

Information and Democracy Research Grants support critical research contributions across three dimensions of information and democracy research: unpacking how media ecosystems shape public understanding, examining AI's expanding role as an information intermediary, and investigating communication strategies that enable persuasion and common ground.

The honorees are:

- Deen Freelon (Presidential Professor)
- Sandra González-Bailón (Carolyn Marvin Professor of Communication and Sociology)
- Matthew Levendusky (Professor of Communication and Political Science)
- Duncan Watts (Stevens University Professor)
- Yphtach Lelkes (Associate Professor of Communication)
- Andy Tan (Associate Professor of Communication)
- Diego Reinero (MindCORE Postdoctoral Research Fellow)
- Erin Walk (Polarization Research Lab Postdoctoral Fellow)
- James Houghton (Computational Social Science Lab Postdoctoral Fellow)
- Amir Tohidi (Computational Social Science Lab Postdoctoral Fellow)
- Baird Howland (George Gerbner Postdoctoral Fellow)
- Neil Fasching (doctoral candidate)
- Calvin Isch (doctoral candidate)
- Vishwanath E.V.S. (doctoral student)
- Gayoung Jeon (doctoral student)
- Billy Pierce (doctoral student)

Four Penn Juniors Awarded Goldwater Scholarships

Four Penn juniors have received 2026 Goldwater Scholarships, which are awarded to stu-

dents who are planning research careers in the sciences, engineering, and mathematics.

Penn's 2026 Goldwater Scholars are Shreya Nair and Pranav Sompalle of the College of Arts & Sciences and Ian Peng and Emily Valerio of the School of Engineering and Applied Science.

They are among the 454 students named Goldwater Scholars, out of more than 5,000 nominees by 482 academic institutions in the United States, according to the Barry Goldwater Scholarship & Excellence in Education Foundation.

Each scholarship provides up to \$7,500 per year for up to two years of undergraduate study.

The students applied for the Goldwater Scholarship with assistance from Penn's Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships (CURF). Penn has had 72 Goldwater Scholars since Congress established the scholarship in 1986 to honor U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater.

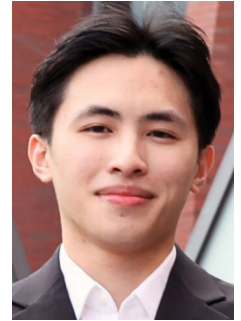
Shreya Nair, from Allen, Texas, is majoring in biology and minoring in engineering entrepreneurship in the College of Arts & Sciences and submatriculating for a master's degree in bioengineering. She conducts research in Ben Stanger's laboratory under Minh Than at Penn's Perelman School of Medicine, investigating cancer interception with KRAS inhibitors in pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma, and at MD Anderson Cancer Center under the mentorship of Michael Andreeff, studying the combined use of menin inhibitors and c-MYC degraders in KMT2A-rearranged acute myeloid leukemia. At Penn, Ms. Nair serves as a research peer advisor for the Center for Undergraduate Research & Fellowships, is a member of the department of biology's student advisory committee, and participates in the Venture Lab and Wharton Undergraduate Entrepreneurship Club, where she is building her startup. She plans to pursue graduate studies in cancer engineering.

Ian Peng, from Arcadia, California, is majoring in bioengineering in the School of Engineering and Applied Science and is enrolled in the accelerated master's program in bioengineering. He works in the lab of ophthalmologist Lucie Guo, where he is building synthetic biology tools for precision medicine and dynamic gene therapies. Previously, he worked in the labs of neuroscientists Guo-li Ming and Hongjun Song, exploring platforms that recapitulate neural tube formation in vitro, as well as in the lab of materials scientist Yuanwen Jiang, investigating bio-electronic systems. At Penn, Mr. Peng is vice president of the Biomedical Engineering Society and serves on the boards of *Grey Matters*—Penn's undergraduate neuroscience journal—and the Penn Immunology Club. He plans to pursue an MD-PhD in bioengineering.

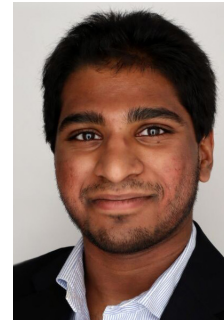
Pranav Sompalle, from Cleveland, Ohio, is majoring in biochemistry and biophysics and minoring in history, and submatriculating to earn a master's degree in chemistry through the Vagelos MLS program in the College of Arts & Sciences. Mr. Sompalle is interested in making precision medicine accessible by developing AI tools to predict new diagnostic insights from low-cost imaging and innovating care delivery. He is the policy and outcomes lead of Penn's Shelter Health Outreach Program and undergraduate coordinator at the University City Hospitality Coalition Free Medical Clinic.



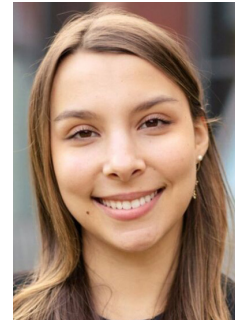
Shreya Nair



Ian Peng



Pranav Sompalle



Emily Valerio

He is a U.S. Presidential Scholar and has won the Roy and Diana Vagelos Science Challenge Award. He hopes to become a physician scientist who integrates biomedical engineering and AI with community health.

Emily Valerio, of The Woodlands, Texas, is majoring in chemical and biomolecular engineering with a concentration in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology in the School of Engineering and Applied Science. She conducts cancer evolution research, exploring how cells circumvent cancerous mutations and how mechanisms can be used for treatments. Ms. Valerio also serves as president of the Penn Engineering Dean's Advisory Board. She plans to pursue a PhD in chemical engineering to design advanced therapeutics for under-researched diseases and advocate for equitable research funding.

Penn Nursing Ranked #1 in 2026 QS World University Rankings

Reclaiming the top spot, Penn Nursing is once again ranked the world's #1 nursing school in 2026 securing its position as the world's leading nursing school according to the latest subject rankings by *QS World University*.

The 2026 rankings evaluated more than 1,900 institutions across 55 different subject areas. Penn Nursing's return to the #1 position was bolstered by a perfect score for academic reputation. This achievement underscores Penn Nursing's enduring influence and its role as a premier destination for nursing education and research on the global stage.

"All of us are very proud to be ranked the #1 school of nursing in the world—it very much affirms our school's mission and values of unflinchingly working for better health, better policy, and better futures for all people everywhere," said Antonia M. Villarruel, the Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing.

Division of Human Resources Announces Benefits Open Enrollment April 20 Through May 8

Penn's Benefits Open Enrollment is fast approaching. This year's Open Enrollment will be Monday, April 20 through Friday, May 8.

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 postdocs plenty of time to learn about the upcoming 2026-2027 plan changes, on-campus Open Enrollment Benefits Fair, virtual and on-campus benefits presentations, and other available resources. For more information about your benefits, visit www.hr.upenn.edu/openenrollment.

Plan Year Changes for 2026-2027

Working Spouse Contribution—Effective July 1, 2026, a working spouse contribution of \$100 per month (\$23.07 weekly for 52 paychecks) may apply if your spouse has access to group medical coverage through an outside employer but enrolls in one of Penn's medical plans. The working spouse contribution will be deducted on a pre-tax basis (post-tax for NRSA postdocs).

The working spouse contribution applies to:

- A spouse/domestic partner eligible for medical coverage through their employer but is covered on one of Penn's medical plans
- A spouse/domestic partner eligible and enrolled in medical coverage through their employer and covered on one of Penn's medical plans
- A spouse/domestic partner eligible for pre-65 retiree medical coverage through their former employer but who is covered on one of Penn's medical plans

The working spouse contribution *does not* apply to:

- Medicare, Tricare, Medicaid
- Married couples who are both employed at Penn
- A spouse/domestic partner who is only eligible for Penn's retiree medical benefits
- A spouse/domestic partner who is not employed
- A spouse/domestic partner who is self-employed
- A spouse/domestic partner who is employed but not eligible for medical coverage through their employer
- A spouse/domestic partner who works for an employer that does not offer medical coverage

During Open Enrollment, faculty, staff, postdocs, and NRSA fellows who have a spouse enrolled in one of Penn's medical plans or who add a spouse to one of Penn's medical plans will be required to log into Workday and select or waive the working spouse contribution. By waiving the contribution, you are attesting that your spouse/domestic partner does not have access to other coverage through their employer. Even if you do not make changes to your benefits coverage, you must complete the process in Workday if you are covering your spouse/domestic partner on one of Penn's medical plans. If you do not take any action, you will be defaulted to the \$100 monthly contribution.

For more information, please review the [Working Spouse Contribution FAQ](#) on the [Working Spouse Contribution webpage](#).

Re-elect to Continue Participating in Flexible Spending Accounts—You will need to re-elect your Health Care and/or Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts to continue coverage in the new plan year.

- Unlike your medical, dental, vision, and life insurance, which roll over to the next plan year if you don't make changes, you must re-elect your Flexible Spending Account this year if you wish to continue participation in the plan.
- If you do not re-elect the coverage for the upcoming plan year, you will be defaulted with a \$0 annual goal amount, and you will not be able to enroll in the plan until the next Open Enrollment period unless you have a qualifying life event.
- Please log in to Workday to review and re-elect your FSA. If you need assistance, please contact Health Advocate at 1(866) 799-2329.

Higher Contribution Amount Allowed for Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account—The maximum contribution you can make to your Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account (DCFSA) is increasing from \$5,000 to \$7,500. Highly compensated employees' maximum remains at \$2,500. You cannot roll over any unused DCFSA funds to the following plan year. Due to an IRS regulation known as "use it or lose it," if you don't use the full balance in your DCFSA each plan year, you forfeit the unused money.

Higher Health Care Flexible Spending Account Rollover Increase—The Health Care Flexible Spending Account (HCFSA) helps you pay for

eligible healthcare expenses with pre-tax dollars. The maximum annual contribution remains \$3,400. In the new plan year, the amount you can roll over to the next plan year will increase from \$660 to \$680. You will forfeit any remaining balance over \$680.

Health Savings Account Contribution Increase—The High-Deductible Health Plan and the Health Savings Account work together to help manage healthcare costs. In the new plan year, you can contribute more: up to \$3,400 for individual coverage and up to \$6,750 for family coverage.

Additional Voluntary Benefits Options—Penn is enhancing its Penn Benefits Extras program, administered by Corestream, with new voluntary benefits such as legal services, purchase financing, and pet wellness. Learn more on the [Penn Benefit Extras webpage](#).

PennCare/Personal Choice PPO Transitions to New Behavioral Health Provider—Independence Behavioral Health Network (IBX) will replace Quest Behavioral Health as the behavioral health provider for the PennCare/Personal Choice health plan. Independence has made significant investments to expand and strengthen its behavioral health network, which now includes Penn Medicine providers. IBX is working with Quest to ensure a smooth transition, continuity of care, and expanded provider participation, including to bring some Quest providers onboard as an in-network provider. For information about your providers' participation, contact the Benefit Solution Center at (866) 799-2329. Behavioral health providers for all other medical plans will remain the same.

Health Plan Deductible Increase—Effective July 1, 2026, health plan deductibles will increase by \$125. This adjustment helps manage rising healthcare costs while continuing to offer comprehensive coverage for our faculty, staff, and postdocs.

Curalinc is Penn's Employee Assistance Program Provider—Curalinc, a recognized leader in providing comprehensive EAP solutions, is Penn's Employee Assistance Program provider. Penn offers both preventative and treatment services to Penn employees and their families through the EAP. All Penn benefits-eligible faculty, staff, and postdocs have 24/7 access to masters-level intake counselors via the EAP, which offers free confidential counseling services to help you manage challenges. You can reach out in any of the following ways:

- Call 1(888) 503-2380
- Email support@curalinc.com
- Visit <https://www.hr.upenn.edu/eap>

Medical, Dental and Vision Rates—For the 2026-2027 plan year, medical plan rates and Penn Dental Plan rates will increase, while MetLife Dental Plan and vision plan rates will remain the same. Visit the [Open Enrollment webpage](#) or the *Benefits Enrollment Guide* for complete rate information.

New Identification Cards for Penn Care/Personal Choice Plan Holders—All PennCare/Personal Choice Plan holders will receive new identification cards mailed to their homes at the end of June.

All changes are effective July 1, 2026.

Open Enrollment Benefits Fairs and Presentations

The Open Enrollment Benefits Fair will be held on Tuesday, April 28, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Bodek Lounge, Houston Hall. Penn HR staff and representatives from Penn's healthcare providers and wellness partners will be there to answer questions. A benefits fair will also be held at New Bolton Center on April 29, 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 21	11 a.m. 12 p.m.	Houston Hall, Golkin Room
April 23	12 p.m. to 1 p.m.	Virtual
April 27	12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.	Virtual
April 30	12 p.m. to 1 p.m.	Houston Hall, Golkin Room
May 1	12 p.m. to 1 p.m.	Virtual
May 7	11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	Virtual

Visit www.hr.upenn.edu/openenrollment for login links for the virtual sessions and other information session details.

Workday@Penn Features

During Open Enrollment, you can make changes to your benefits coverage anytime—24 hours a day, 7 days a week—by visiting Workday@Penn. Login at <http://www.myworkday.com/upenn/login.html>.

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Division of Human Resources Announces Benefits Open Enrollment April 20 Through May 8

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How to Enroll or Make Changes

- From the left-hand navigation on the Workday homepage, select *Personal*, then select *Benefits, Comp and Pay Hub*.
- Review and update your benefit elections.
- Print a confirmation statement for your records.
- Refer to the [Self-Service: Manage, View and Change Your Benefits](#) Workday tip sheet for step-by-step instructions.

Model My Pay Tool Feature

- While in Workday, click on the Model My Pay feature to estimate how 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.

- Note: Model My Pay is 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. To update your retirement plan beneficiaries, log in to your retirement planning account through [Penn's TIAA.org SSO link](#).

Additional Resources

To learn more about Benefits Open Enrollment:

- Watch for the [2026-2027 Benefits Enrollment Guide](#), which will be mailed 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.

Health Care Rates for Eligible Full-time Faculty and Staff 2026–2027

	Full-time Weekly Paid				Full-time Monthly Paid			
	Employee	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family	Employee	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family
MEDICAL								
PennCare/Personal Choice	\$64.85	\$162.23	\$109.15	\$201.46	\$281.00	\$703.00	\$473.00	\$873.00
Aetna Choice POS II	\$44.54	\$114.69	\$75.69	\$142.62	\$193.00	\$497.00	\$328.00	\$618.00
Keystone/AmeriHealth HMO	\$30.46	\$81.92	\$51.46	\$100.85	\$132.00	\$355.00	\$223.00	\$437.00
Aetna HDHP	\$26.54	\$75.92	\$48.69	\$94.85	\$115.00	\$329.00	\$211.00	\$411.00
DENTAL								
Penn Family Plan	\$10.74	\$21.06	\$23.75	\$33.50	\$46.52	\$91.28	\$102.92	\$145.18
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	\$1.81	\$3.90	\$2.93	\$4.98	\$7.83	\$16.90	\$12.71	\$21.56
VSP Choice Plan	\$2.72	\$5.88	\$4.43	\$7.50	\$11.80	\$25.50	\$19.19	\$32.52

Medical, Dental and Vision Rates for Part-time and ACA Eligible Employees 2026–2027

	Weekly Paid				Monthly Paid			
	Employee	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family	Employee	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family
MEDICAL								
Aetna POS II Standard	\$26.54	\$273.00	\$151.38	\$377.31	\$115.00	\$1,183.00	\$656.00	\$1,635.00
DENTAL								
Penn Family Plan	\$16.01	\$31.40	\$35.40	\$49.94	\$69.36	\$136.06	\$153.40	\$216.41
MetLife Dental	\$9.33	\$18.65	\$20.52	\$27.98	\$40.41	\$80.82	\$88.90	\$121.23
VISION								
Davis Vision	\$1.09	\$2.36	\$1.77	\$3.00	\$4.73	\$10.21	\$7.65	\$13.01
VSP Plan	\$1.81	\$3.90	\$2.93	\$4.98	\$7.83	\$16.90	\$12.71	\$21.56
VSP Choice Plan	\$2.72	\$5.88	\$4.43	\$7.50	\$11.80	\$25.50	\$19.19	\$32.52

Medical, Dental and Vision Rates for Postdoctoral Researchers and Fellows 2026–2027

	Full-time Monthly Paid			
	Employee	Employee & Spouse	Employee & Child(ren)	Employee & Family
MEDICAL				
Keystone/AmeriHealth HMO	\$61.00	\$355.00	\$223.00	\$437.00
Aetna Choice POS II	\$78.00	\$497.00	\$328.00	\$618.00
PennCare/Personal Choice	\$281.00	\$703.00	\$473.00	\$873.00
DENTAL				
MetLife Dental	\$27.34	\$54.62	\$60.18	\$82.03
VISION				
VSP Plan	\$7.83	\$16.90	\$12.71	\$21.56
VSP Choice Plan	\$11.80	\$25.50	\$19.19	\$32.52

**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 23-29, 2026**. 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 23-29,**

2026. 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>	03/23/26	4:13 PM	3400 Spruce St	Patient made threats to hospital staff; was escorted off the property
	03/24/26	4:27 AM	3744 Spruce St	Unknown persons assaulted a store employee
	03/25/26	6:13 AM	3700 Chestnut St	Simple assault on highway
<i>Auto Theft</i>	03/28/26	8:22 PM	3400 Ludlow St	Complainant was assaulted by an unknown offender
	03/23/26	6:50 PM	201 S 34th St	Theft of a secured electric bike from bike rack
	03/24/26	5:33 PM	3300 Chestnut St	Theft of complainant's secured electric scooter from bike rack
	03/24/26	8:49 PM	3702 Spruce St	Theft of a secured electric scooter from inside secured building
	03/29/26	6:58 PM	210 S 34th St	Theft of a secured motorized bicycle from bike rack
<i>Bike Theft</i>	03/29/26	8:12 PM	3400 Locust Walk	Theft of a secured electric scooter from bike rack
	03/28/26	4:09 PM	423 Guardian Drive	Theft of a secured bicycle from bike rack
<i>Fraud</i>	03/24/26	10:26 AM	3400 Civic Center Blvd	Unauthorized person picked up medication from pharmacy
	03/28/26	7:14 PM	3333 Walnut St	Complainant reported that unknown person attempted to defraud her through a social media account
<i>Other Offense</i>	03/28/26	10:43 AM	2930 Chestnut St	Verbal dispute
<i>Retail Theft</i>	03/23/26	3:21 PM	3604 Chestnut St	Retail theft of consumable goods; offenders fled the area
	03/27/26	6:13 AM	3744 Spruce St	Retail theft of consumable goods; offenders fled the area
<i>Theft from Building</i>	03/23/26	5:46 PM	3421 Chestnut St	Card holder containing currency, credit and debit cards taken from pocketbook
	03/23/26	10:51 AM	210 S 34th St	Theft of an unsecured backpack left in common area
<i>Theft from Vehicle</i>	03/24/26	5:48 PM	3744 Spruce St	Theft of cash from open register
	03/26/26	9:37 AM	3801 Market St	Theft of a laptop from desk in unsecured office
	03/23/26	12:54 PM	3900 Ludlow St	Unknown person broke the window of secured parked vehicle; nothing taken
	03/28/26	11:25 PM	4200 Ludlow St	Complainant reported his vehicle was broken into; nothing taken. Six other vehicles were broken into as well
	03/29/26	12:03 PM	4100 Ludlow St	Unknown person broke into complainant's parked vehicle; nothing taken
<i>Theft Other</i>	03/29/26	6:48 PM	3421 Chestnut St	Theft of complainant's wallet from inside a coffee shop; credit card used shortly after

Philadelphia Police 18th District

Schuylkill River to 49th Street & Market Street to Woodland Avenue

Below are the crimes against persons from the 18th District: 10 incidents were reported for **March 23-29, 2026** by the 18th District, covering the Schuylkill River to 49th Street & Market Street to Woodland Avenue.

Crime Category	Date	Time	Location
<i>Assault</i>	03/24/26	4:44 AM	3744 Spruce St
	03/25/26	12:53 AM	220 S 47th St
	03/25/26	6:16 AM	3728 Chestnut St
	03/25/26	8:00 PM	4500 Blk Market St
	03/28/26	9:54 PM	34th & Ludlow Sts
	03/29/26	5:25 AM	4719 Baltimore Ave
<i>Rape</i>	03/26/26	12:18 AM	3400 Blk Civic Center Blvd
<i>Robbery</i>	03/27/26	11:23 AM	S 41st St & Woodland Ave
	03/27/26	7:04 PM	900 Blk Farragut Terrace
	03/28/26	11:10 AM	4500 Blk Baltimore Ave

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 [UPennAlert 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

CONFERENCES

7 *Anticipating the Trump-Xi Summit in Beijing*; the Penn Project on the Future of U.S.-China Relations will convene five of its current and alumni fellows to share their expectations for the upcoming Trump-Xi summit and what it may portend for the near-term future of U.S.-China relations; 4:30-7:30 p.m.; 2nd floor forum, PCPSE; register: <https://tinyurl.com/csc-conf-apr-7> (Center for the Study of Contemporary China).

EXHIBITS

Allison Zuckerman: Remixed and Reclaimed; a selection of recent paintings by Penn alum Allison Zuckerman, C'12, that exemplify her exuberant, layered approach to image-making, using paint and collage; Annenberg Center grand lobby, Penn Live Arts. Opening reception: April 12, 2-4 p.m. Through March 28, 2027.

FITNESS & LEARNING

Center for Undergraduate Research & Fellowships

Various locations. Info: <https://curf.upenn.edu/events>.

7 *Class of 2030 Scholars Programs Information Session*; learn about some of Penn's specialized academic communities that are available to you as an incoming first-year student; 5:30 p.m.; Zoom webinar.

8 *Disability-Inclusive Research at Penn*; learn about navigating research as a disabled student, accessing accommodations, and building confidence in discussing disability in academic spaces; 7 p.m.; Zoom webinar.

Penn Libraries

Various locations. Info: <https://www.library.upenn.edu/events>.

9 *Making Books for Class Projects*; learn how to make books with printed content for class projects, focusing on the saddle-stitch structure and the single-page book structure; 11 a.m.; lower level seminar room, Fisher Fine Arts Library.

QPenn

Info: <https://lgbtcenter.universitylife.upenn.edu/>.

7 *Pride Day @Campus Rec*; pride-themed events at all of Penn's campus recreation facilities; 7:45 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Coloring and Connections Workshop with Wellness At Penn; stop by to color while having open and creative conversations about sexuality, relationships, and ourselves; 3-5 p.m.; Penn Women's Center.

Speed Friending with Penn Non-Cis and Aces & Aros; a series of short, one-on-one conversations where you'll rotate and meet someone new each round; 6-8 p.m.; Goodhand Room, LGBT Center.

8 *Yarn Painting with Office for Academic Excellence & Engagement and GSWS*; join this fun and creative yarn painting event; no prior experience is needed, and all supplies will be provided; 11 a.m.-1 p.m.; room 345, Fisher-Bennett Hall.

Queer & Trans Healing and Solidarity Circle with RP@P; a community building circle for LGBTQIA+ students, staff and faculty; 12:30 p.m.; Goodhand Room, LGBT Center.

Queerness & Sobriety with Wellness At Penn; a conversation on substance use and sobriety within the queer community; 2 p.m.; Kaplan Perry Library, LGBT Center.

LEAP Trivia Night and Happy Hour; a fun night of food, drink, culture, and community; 6 p.m.; Goodhand Room, LGBT Center.

9 *Sapphic Visibility Day: Tea Party & Crafts*; celebrate sapphic identities with a tea party, snacks, and crafting; all supplies for making collage self-portraits will be provided; noon-2 p.m.; patio, Penn Women's Center.

A Dialogue on Self-Expression in the Image Economy; a conversation with LGBT Center scholar-in-residence Niambi E. Stanley about visibility, truth, and liberation; 1:30 p.m.; Goodhand Room, LGBT Center.

LGBTQ+ Alumni Spotlight & Student Mixer; features brief spotlights from accomplished LGBTQ+ Penn alumni, including Penn Trustee Joan Lau, followed by an open Q&A and informal mingling over dinner; 7 p.m.; Sweeten Alumni House.

10 *Culture Shift: Deconstructing the Continuum of Harm*; discussion-based workshop that focuses on primary prevention and understanding gender dynamics and the culture of harm on college campuses; 1 p.m.; 2nd floor multipurpose room, 3935 Walnut Street.

Pre-Drag Show: Drag Makeup Tutorials with Queer & Asian; join Queer & Asian and drag king Eugene Rideher for a pre-drag show makeup tutorial; makeup supplies will be provided; 5 p.m.; Kaplan Perry Library, LGBT Center.

Drag Show; annual capstone event of QPenn, featuring performances by Laganja Estranja, Icon Ebony Fierce, Eugene Rideher, Henlo Bullfrog, and Karma; 7 p.m.; rooftop lounge, Harrison College House.

READINGS & SIGNINGS

7 *Enduring Hostility: A Book Talk on the Making of America's Iran Policy*; Dalia Dassa Kaye, UCLA Burke Center; 5:30 p.m.; Perry World House; register: <https://tinyurl.com/kaye-talk-apr-7> (Perry World House).

TALKS

7 *Rethinking Transaction Scheduling for Database Performance*; Audrey Cheng, University of California, Berkeley; 11 a.m.; room 225, Towne Building (Electrical & Systems Engineering).

Machine Learning and Symmetries; Soledad Villar, Johns Hopkins University; noon; room 414, Gutmann Hall (PennAI).

Zhanguo ce and Persuasion in Warring States Literature; Zhenchang Ke, Jiujiang University; noon; room 543, Williams Hall (East Asian Languages & Civilizations).

8 *Machine Learning for Discrete Optimization: Theoretical Foundations*; Ellen Vitercik, Stanford University; noon; room 414, Gutmann Hall (AI-Enabled Systems: Safe, Explainable, and Trustworthy Center).

The Forbidden Image: Art and Censorship Then and Now; Shira Brisman, history of art; Sharon Hayes, fine arts; Jessa Lingel, Annenberg School; 3 p.m.; room 113, Jaffe Building (History of Art).

Toward Scalable Robot Learning via World Models; Chuning Zhu, University of Washington; 3 p.m.; room 307, Levine Hall, and Zoom webinar; join: <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/94772435044> (GRASP Lab).

9 *Capturing Lightning—Making Art and Discoveries! Investigating the High-Speed Dynamics of Novel Dielectric Tree Formation in PMMA*; Tim Koeth, University of Maryland; 10:30 a.m.; Wu & Chen Auditorium, Levine Hall (Materials Science & Engineering).

Surrogate-Model Approaches to Optimizers for LLM Training; Weijie Su, statistics & data science; noon; room 414, Gutmann Hall, and Zoom webinar; join: <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/98220304722> (IDEAS Center, Statistics & Data Science, PennAI).

Teaching Historical Research for Practice; Clare Gaynor Willis, Northwestern University; Steven Mitchell, Yale University; 3 p.m.; Zoom webinar; register: <https://tinyurl.com/willis-mitchell-apr-9> (Penn Carey Law Biddle Speaker Series).

Structures of Survival: Lebanon Across an Affective and Material Landscape; Yara Damaj, political science; Jowel Choufani, George Washington University; 3:30 p.m.; room 135, Fisher-Bennett Hall (Andrea Mitchell Center for the Study of Democracy).

One Health & Science Diplomacy Panel; Blair Hedges, Haiti Trust Fund; Ricardo Castillo, PSOM; Neha Pondicherry, CHOP; 5 p.m.; room 131, Hill Pavilion; RSVP: <https://forms.gle/ZyA3YfYwT96o6uJo8> (Penn Science Policy Diplomacy Group).

10 *Sacred Times: How Ancient Etruscan Women Wove Meaning Through Cloth*; Gretchen Meyers, Franklin & Marshall College; 6 p.m.; Penn Museum; register: <https://www.penn.museum/calendar/1620/etruscan-foundation-lecture> (Etruscan Foundation, Penn Museum).

This is an update to the [April AT PENN calendar](#), which is online now. Submit events for future AT PENN calendars and updates at almanac@upenn.edu.

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Awareness of Alcohol-Cancer Link Holds Steady Despite Official in New U.S. Dietary Guidelines

Public awareness of the link between drinking alcohol and elevated cancer risk remains unchanged since February 2025, with over half of Americans saying that regularly consuming alcohol increases your chances of later developing cancer, according to a new survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

APPC's February 2026 survey was conducted about a month after the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) unveiled its 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans on January 7, 2026.

The earlier, 2020-2025 guidelines explicitly warned that "alcohol has been found to increase risk for cancer, and for some types of cancer, the risk increases even at low levels of alcohol consumption (less than one drink in a day)." While the new 2025-2030 guidelines call for limiting alcoholic beverages for better health, they contain no mention of a link between alcohol consumption and cancer risk.

Findings

In the survey, conducted from February 3-17, 2026, with 1,650 U.S. adults:

- Over half (53%) said that regularly consuming alcohol increases your chances of later developing cancer—statistically unchanged from 56% who said this in February 2025
- 16% said alcohol consumption has no effect on cancer risk, also statistically unchanged from February 2025
- Over a quarter (29%) were not sure how alcohol consumption affects cancer risk, statistically unchanged from 26% in February 2025.

For context, APPC's earlier, February 2025 survey was fielded about a month after then-U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued his January 3 advisory on alcohol and cancer risk. His advisory called for updated warning labels on alcoholic beverage containers to alert consumers to the increased risk for at least seven types of cancer, including breast, colon, and liver cancer. The advisory was followed by a meaningful shift in public awareness: in September 2024, several months earlier, only 40% of respondents reported knowing that regularly consuming alcohol increases cancer risk, compared with 56% in February 2025.

"When it removed the warning linking alcohol consumption to cancer from the guidelines, the USDA turned its back on a substantial body of research," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "The Surgeon General's finding that alcohol consumption raises cancer risk gained attention. A clear, strong statement in the dietary guidelines could have amplified that impact—and helped to save lives."

ASAPH Survey

Wave 28 of the Annenberg Science and Public Health (ASAPH) panel survey was conducted from February 3-17, 2026 among 1,650 U.S. adults. Data were collected by SSRS, an independent research company, via web and telephone using a nationally representative probability sample from SSRS's Opinion Panel. The margin of error is ± 3.5 percentage points. The panelists are quarantined from other survey panel membership to avoid response bias from other surveys. The ASAPH panel has been fielded continuously since April 2021 across 28 waves.

The APPC has been tracking the American public's knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors regarding vaccination, COVID-19, flu, RSV, and other consequential health issues through the Annenberg Science and Public Health (ASAPH) survey and separate national samples since April 2021. APPC's health survey team includes Ken Winnege, managing director of survey research, research analyst Laura A. Gibson, and Patrick E. Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Health and Risk Communication Institute.

Adapted from an [Annenberg School for Communication](#) news release, March 25, 2026.

Nurses' Human Moral Agency Irreplaceable in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

As artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly integrates into clinical settings—from predicting patient outcomes to deploying humanoid "robotic nurses"—an article published in the *Hastings Center Report* warns that the core of nursing, its moral agency, must remain a human-driven responsibility.

The article "What Does Moral Agency Mean for Nurses in the Era of Artificial Intelligence?" explores the growing tension between advanced algorithmic capabilities and the ethical obligations of the world's most trusted profession. While AI systems can now simulate empathy and generate context-aware responses, Penn Nursing's Connie M. Ulrich, the Lillian S. Brunner Chair in Medical and Surgical Nursing, professor of nursing, and professor of medical ethics and health policy, and her co-authors argue that AI lacks sentience, intentionality, and accountability. The authors define a moral agent as a person capable of discerning right from wrong and being held accountable for their actions.

Key findings from the article include:

- *AI as "Moral Zombies"*: The authors note that algorithms lack the sentience required for true moral accountability.
- *The Relational Value*: Nursing is characterized by a "therapeutic presence" and an intuitive exchange of shared humanity that algorithms cannot replicate, particularly in sensitive areas like end-of-life care.
- *A Growing Industry*: The global robotic nurse industry is projected to reach over \$2.7 billion by 2031, underscoring the urgency of establishing ethical guardrails.

Recommendations for Health Systems

The article emphasizes that nurses must not be passive users of technology but active leaders in its design and implementation. To preserve the public's trust, the authors offer several critical recommendations:

- *Design Participation*: Nurses must be part of AI design teams to ensure tools align with clinical values and preferences.
- *Transparency as Default*: Facilities should explicitly disclose when AI is used to generate summaries or treatment suggestions, allowing patients and clinicians to understand the source of information.
- *Boundaries on AI Hiring*: AI should never be used to determine the hiring of nurses, as algorithms cannot identify the human characteristics of empathy and critical reasoning.
- *Preserving Accountability*: AI should be treated as a resource to support, rather than supplant, human moral deliberation.

"Patients come to healthcare settings to be heard, seen, and valued by skilled professionals, not to seek care from machines," the authors stated. "While AI may simulate compassion... it cannot 'care' in the moral sense."

Co-authors from Penn Nursing include George Demiris, Patricia Brennan, Oonjee Oh, and Sang Bin You.

Adapted from a [Penn Nursing news release](#), March 10, 2026.

A Stiff Defense: Rethinking Gum Disease

Periodontitis is a serious chronic inflammatory form of gum disease that affects millions worldwide. It can lead to tooth loss and the destruction of supporting bone. This disease has also been linked to other health problems, including diabetes, respiratory infections, and heart disease—impacting quality of life and increasing healthcare costs.

Current treatments target bacterial infection and inflammation through nonsurgical therapies, such as scaling and root planing, commonly known as "deep cleaning." However, they do not repair the gum's extracellular matrix (ECM), the gingival tissue's structural support that is damaged by chronic inflammation. Without this foundation, gingival tissue cannot function properly, allowing inflammation to persist and slowing healing.

Now, new research led by Kyle H. Vining and Hardik Makkar of Penn's School of Dental Medicine demonstrates how the physical properties of the gingival tissue impact periodontal health and disease. Their findings are published in *Advanced Materials*.

Other studies have shown that physical properties such as structure and stiffness influence inflammation in chronic conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and fibrosis, explained Dr. Vining, an assistant professor in Penn Dental Medicine's department of preventive and restorative sciences. But the role of these properties in periodontal disease, which shares characteristics with other chronic inflammatory diseases, is not well understood.

"In this study, we took a biomaterials approach to prove that rigidity—the stiffness—of the healthy gingiva is important for maintaining gingival health," said Dr. Vining, who is also an assistant professor in the School of Engineering and Applied Science.

The team used a "tunable" hydrogel composed of natural biopolymers, resembling a form of Jell-O, to isolate how the mechanical environment influences cellular behavior. "Hydrogel stiffness can be tuned to model the properties of human gingiva, from the firmness of healthy tissue to the softened features of diseased tissue," he said.

They first encapsulated gingival fibroblasts—the predominant cell type in the connective tissue of the gums that is responsible for secreting and maintaining the ECM—in this hydrogel system to test whether changes in tissue stiffness drive these cells to exacerbate the inflammatory response that characterizes periodontal disease.

"In periodontal disease, bacteria secrete enzymes that break down the ECM, causing the tissue to soften," said Dr. Makkar, a postdoctoral fellow in Dr. Vining's lab. And as the tissue softens, he added, cells shift into a higher inflammatory state that triggers even more tissue degradation, creating a destructive feedback loop in which tissue damage and inflammation feed each other.

"When we stiffen these tissues experimentally, the inflammatory response goes down," said Dr. Makkar.

Adapted from a [Penn Today article by Deborah Stull](#), March 20, 2026.