

Arthur Humphrey, Penn Engineering

APRIL 7, 2026 | VOL 72 ISSUE 30 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-72-NUMBER-30](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-72-number-30)) | DEATHS | PRINT



Arthur Humphrey

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 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v18pdf/n34/050972.pdf>)). "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 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v20pdf/n05/092573.pdf>)).

Together with then-associate dean Joseph Bordogna, Dr. Humphrey's visionary leadership also laid the foundation for what is now Penn Engineering's Cora Ingrum 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.

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).

Penn Engineering will be hosting a memorial celebration for Dr. Humphrey on June 15, 2026, from 4-6 p.m. at The Singh Center for Nanotechnology, 3205 Walnut Street.