

Michael Topp, Chemistry

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Michael Topp

Michael Richard Topp, an emeritus professor of chemistry in the School of Arts & Sciences, died on June 18. He was 79.

Born in Bolton, England, Dr. Topp studied chemistry at Sheffield University, where he graduated at the top of his class. He went on to earn his PhD in chemistry from the Royal Society of Great Britain in London in 1968. Following his doctoral studies, Dr. Topp moved to the United States to complete his postdoctoral research at Bell Labs in New Jersey before returning to the U.K. in 1971 to teach at Oxford University.

In 1973, Dr. Topp joined Penn's faculty as an assistant professor of chemistry. In 1979, he became an associate professor, and in 1990, a full professor. Alongside his work in the chemistry department, he held an assistant professorship in the College of General Studies, now known as the College of Liberal and Professional Studies (LPS). During his time at Penn, Dr. Topp also served as a member of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and as chair of the Senate's Committee on Academic and Related Affairs. In 1998, he was inducted into Penn's Twenty-Five Year Club.

Dr. Topp's research primarily focused on physical chemistry, with specific interests in conformational relaxation in isolated molecular clusters, hydrogen-bonded molecular dimers, and ultrafast electronic relaxation of hydrogen-bonded molecules, studied through femtosecond pump-probe spectroscopy. Much of his research was conducted at Penn. In 1987, he received a University Research Foundation (URF) award for his project "High-Resolution Spectroscopy of Metalloporphyrins, Polyenes, and Novel Organometallic Compounds." Two years later, he was awarded a biomedical research grant for his study on the "Laser Photolysis of Coenzyme B12 and Model Compounds." In 1992, he earned another URF award for his project "Photochemistry in Molecular Clusters." Dr. Topp retired from Penn in 2017 and was awarded emeritus status.

Dr. Topp is survived by his wife, Elaine; his children, Roger, Colin, and Stephanie; and his grandchildren, Kaelin and William.