

In Memoriam, Leif Finkel, Professor of Bioengineering

In addition to his work on visual processes, Leif Finkel worked on the applications of neuroengineering to disease, starting from the cellular and molecular levels to develop models of the hippocampus, corpus striatum and prefrontal cortex with applications to epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, and schizophrenia.

A physics major at the University of Maryland, Leif graduated summa cum laude in 1976, then completed an M.D. in 1981 and a Ph.D. in Biophysics in 1985, both from Penn. His advisor was Nobel Laureate Gerald Edelman, himself a Penn graduate, who was then at the Rockefeller University and later became the founding director of the Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, California.

Leif joined Rockefeller as an assistant professor in 1985, was recruited back to Penn in 1989, tenured in 1995 and promoted to professor in 1998. At Penn, he became a strong link between Engineering and numerous neuroscience researchers in the School of Medicine, with whom he collaborated widely. He built a world-class laboratory in neuroengineering, published approximately 90 papers, proceedings and book chapters, gave countless lectures, mentored 17 doctoral students, 5 masters and 6 post-doctoral fellows, and raised an impressive amount of grant support.

Among Leif's many honors was the 1996 Faculty Recognition Award of the Institute of Neurological Sciences. The award, which was presented only several times in the 40-year history of the Institute, was given to Leif in recognition of:

"Contributions to developing computational neuroscience at Penn, talent and contagious enthusiasm for science, extraordinary efforts and skills as a teacher, generosity in the services of the Institute and the neuroscience community at Penn and for the overall high regard in which he is held by his colleagues."