

# AI's Next Frontier: Who Gets to Lead?

When elite minds are chosen by national academies, what does it mean for AI in education?

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## THE DATA

### Faculty Elected to National Academy of Medicine

Seven Penn faculty were elected to the National Academy of Medicine in 2026, a rare honor reflecting elite academic influence.

This election is not just a personal milestone—it signals the institutional capacity to shape future research directions. In higher education, such recognition often translates into AI research funding, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and influence over curriculum design in emerging fields like AI health applications.

Source: University of Pennsylvania • Published October 21, 2026  
<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/seven-penn-faculty-elected-national-academy-medicine>



# 01

## Recognition Drives AI Research Equity

The fact that seven faculty from one institution were elected to the National Academy of Medicine in a single year underscores how institutional prestige concentrates AI research capital. In higher education, such electees become gatekeepers of funding, mentorship networks, and AI ethics frameworks—determining which questions get asked and which students get access to next-gen tools.



# 02

## AI in Education Needs Diverse Gatekeepers

When elite institutions dominate national recognition, the resulting AI research agendas risk reflecting a narrow set of values and priorities. For AI in higher education to be truly transformative, we must ensure that future electees represent a broader range of institutions, geographies, and disciplinary perspectives—especially in underfunded or historically marginalized academic communities.

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