President’s September 20, 2006 University Council status report

The Class of 2010 is the most selective and diverse class in Penn history. Judging from their spirit at a very wet Convocation, they also are among the most enthusiastic and determined.

Our distinguished faculty now includes a record 40 new recruits (in one year) to the School of Arts and Sciences. SAS now boasts the largest and most distinguished standing faculty ranks since 1990: 495 strong.

Among our many new faculty are two noted scholars of electoral politics, a subject that is increasingly in the news: Richard Johnston, who will run the Annenberg Election Survey along with his political science appointment; and, from Yale, John Lapinski, who studies Congress and elections and has served as an elections consultant to NBC. Along with our first Penn Integrates Knowledge professorship, held by John Jackson, Jr., joint appointments are now held by several of our newly recruited scholars and others who expand our interdisciplinary teaching and research strengths.

Two new science buildings, Bioengineering’s Skirkanich Hall and the School of Veterinary Medicine’s Hill Pavilion, also enhance our core strengths this fall. With its vibrant textures and colors, Skirkanich Hall is a veritable “Please Touch Museum.” Its lab spaces are delighting their eminent occupants.

Our eagerly-awaited state-of-the-art 13,000-square-foot Platt Performing Arts hub in Stouffer College House opens next month.

We marked the fifth anniversary of 9/11 with a moving interfaith vigil on Sunday night. Students, faculty and staff came together to reaffirm our connection to each other and commitment to the values of a free and open society.

Students also are coming together to register and educate voters for the upcoming mid-term elections. Penn’s REV-UP efforts more than tripled voter turnout in the 2004 elections. We are hoping to have a similar impact this year.

We recently received several endorsements of our community’s efforts to create a more diverse and welcoming environment. Black Enterprise magazine has named Penn one of the top ten schools in the country for African American students, and one of the top five for Hispanic students by Hispanic magazine. A new guide for lesbian, gay,
bisexual and transgender college students featured in The New York Times gave Penn its highest rating.

Penn’s increased purchase of wind power recently put us at the top of the Environmental Protection Agency’s list of college and university “green power” purchasers. This is a strong endorsement of our sustainability and conservation policies.

Our Penn Connects campus development plan proceeds apace, as does the “quiet phase” of our capital campaign. Penn Connects already has won two campus planning awards (from the Boston Society of Architects and the Philadelphia Chapter of Lambda Alpha International, an honorary land economics society), and our first year of the quiet phase set several University records, with a total of $494 million in gifts and pledges.

We once again have set our sights very high for this year, as our enthusiastic and determined students realize their enormous potential at Penn and Penn has an even greater impact at home and throughout the world.