The University Council Committee on Campus and Community Life met four times as a full committee this year to address charges as follows:

1. Review the quality of the University experience for students, faculty and staff concerning recent committee areas of interest including: public safety, graduate housing, and the provision of mental health services. Consider making appropriate recommendations.

2. Continue to assess the interaction of the Penn community and the broader community. Assure that the University is taking appropriate steps to further positive interaction, recognizing that the implications of current economic conditions may both create greater needs and constrain University actions.

3. Investigate particular needs of students with families, including child care, family housing, and other facility issues, to assure student needs are addressed.

4. Review and discuss the committee’s general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given highest priority for the committee’s work in AY 2010-2011.

There was excellent attendance and engagement at committee meetings from faculty and staff representatives; graduate and undergraduate representatives were appointed late in the year and did not attend all meetings.

Activities:

1. Graduate Student Housing – The Committee met with Doug Berger and Ed Datz, and received comments from representatives of GAPSA. Anita Mastroieni, Director of the Graduate Student Center, submitted written comments suggesting that Penn could benefit from more on-campus housing for graduate students. To the Committee’s surprise, the GAPSA representatives reported that the quantity of on-campus housing is not a problem; rather, the representatives reported concerns regarding the quality of on-campus housing. GAPSA representatives reported that this includes married students and students with children. Housing confirmed that most graduate students do find housing within a short period of arriving on campus. The Committee recommends continued attention but no longer feels that this is an issue of immediate concern.

2. Other Housing Issues – Both Housing and Conferences Services and Facilities and Real Estate reported that the construction of the Radion, Domus and the Hub have affected student residential patterns in ways that benefit Penn and the broader
community, and also reported that they have not adversely affected the College Houses. Also, while graduate housing did not present the issues that the Committee anticipated, reports from Faculty and Housing did raise two issues of concern. (1) Short Term Housing – There is a dearth of affordable and easily-accessed short term housing on or near campus. Penn is making a concerted and admirable effort to reach out to persons from countries or institutions that are not well-funded. The Committee foresaw possible problems as Penn continues to reach out to a diverse range of partners, and suggests that attention be paid to this issue. (2) Some faculty reported problems in recruiting doctoral candidates because they could not provide information regarding housing. Housing and Conferences Services reported that they surveyed department chairs and heard of no concerns.

3. Dining Services – The Committee met with Laurie Cousart and representatives of Bon Apetit. The Committee was deeply impressed by Bon Apetit’s commitment to both quality dining and to integrating dining into the Penn community. The Committee noted that many dozens of food sources compete with dining, many of which are placed on or near campus by Penn; it was not clear to the Committee what the overall plan is regarding dining. The Committee notes that Housing and Conference Services has put together a committee to clarify the role of dining within Penn’s overall mission, and looks forward to the report of that committee. The Committee also hopes that the University can facilitate community-enhancing practices such as student employment within the dining system.

3. Counseling and Psychological Services – The Committee once again was impressed by and grateful for the services of Counseling and Psychological Services. The Committee paid particular attention to services to international students. CAPS did report one issue that merits further review: the extent to which the compensation offered by Penn allows or inhibits Penn to attract candidates for positions within the system.

4. Bicycles on Campus – The Committee is aware that in general this issue falls within the jurisdiction of another committee, and limited its conversation with Mark Kocent to how proposed policies for bicycles might affect the quality of life on campus and might affect relationships with the community. The liveliness of the debate within the committee suggests that these policies could generate strong reactions in Penn and in the community; the committee looks forward to further discussions on this matter.

5. Cultural Centers – The Committee had a very fruitful discussion with Karlene Burrell-McRae, June Chu, America Espinal, Felicity Paxton, and Bob Schoenberg, Directors of Cultural Centers at our University. The Committee was deeply impressed by the degree to which the Cultural Centers contribute to the quality of life at Penn and to the extent to which they act as bridges between Penn and the broader community. Cultural Centers provide critical support to individual students and are deeply
integrated into the support network at Penn. Individual Directors have established close relationships with academic divisions; it might be useful to develop more institutionalized relationships. The Directors identified the following groups of students as those who might not be supported as well as they should be: transgender students, LPS students, non-traditional students, post-bac students, and graduate students. The Committee concluded the following: (1) As Penn’s community includes a greater number of non-traditional students it should evaluate the extent to which it provides support for these students. (2) The University should audit the extent to which its buildings conform to the needs of transgender members of our community. (3) The Directors reported a need for information on the climate of the University; the PULSE survey and other climate surveys may be of assistance.

6. Faith-Based Organizations – The Committee met with Chas Howard, Beverly Dale, Suzie Flood, Jeff Klein, Tony Liang and Ephram Lubin, Directors of Religious Centers at Penn. As with the Cultural Centers, the Committee was deeply impressed by the contributions of these Centers. These Centers provide a great deal of support to individual students, and contribute to the texture of life at Penn. The Centers also educate the broader community about different cultures and faiths. These contributions are made in the context of a secular university that embraces numerous viewpoints. The Directors suggested several ways that their contributions could be made even greater: (1) It is sometimes difficult for the Centers to obtain timely information about the University. (2) Religions or faith could be made part of the discussion about diversity in our university. (3) Knowledge about these Centers could be included in RA/GA training, so that RAs and GAs could better serve those students with questions about faith-based issues.

Priority for the committee’s work in AY 2010-2009

1. Review the PULSE survey and other information about the climate among students, staff and faculty; evaluate the findings of these surveys; and consider how this information could be used to improve the quality of life at Penn.

2. Follow-up on recent committee areas of interest, including dining, graduate housing, and provision of mental health services to ensure the highest quality University experience for students, faculty, and staff.

3. Continue to investigate the contributions of centers and other entities throughout the University, and particularly to how the contributions can be enhanced.

Respectfully submitted,
Philip Nichols
Chair