I am pleased to report on several key initiatives at the start of my first term as Provost.

It is especially exciting to report on the extraordinary response of Penn faculty members to the research funding opportunities available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Penn has ranked consistently among the top five universities in dollars awarded: more than $76 million as of today (September 23), with more than $800,000,000 in additional proposals in the pipeline, as such agencies as the National Science Foundation have only just begun their grant evaluation process. Topics funded thus far include urban public schools, neurodegenerative brain disorders, tobacco smoke exposure, and summer research experiences for high school teachers.

The updates to Courses in Touch put in place by ISC over the summer have been extremely well-received by students returning for the fall term. We have also developed a more flexible and customizable version of the Penn Portal that has been made available to students in the Class of 2013. We hope to expand these enhancements to all students in the future. The response rate to our first semester of online course evaluations was an extraordinary 91%, surpassing the most optimistic projections; this new system has greatly improved our ability to provide the most useful teaching and curricular information for students and faculty.

We are moving forward this semester with two important new programs for women faculty. We recently issued a Call for Nominations for an Award of Recognition, co-sponsored by the Trustees’ Council of Penn Women, for faculty members whose achievements have significantly advanced the role of women in the Penn community. The deadline for nominations is October 15, with the award announcement scheduled for Spring 2010. At the same time, we initiated a Women’s Faculty Forum, designed to help build networks and mentoring for women faculty across the university, which held its first session on September 23.

Finally, I am delighted that my first semester as Provost marks the start of our Arts & The City Year, which has already received significant public notice in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Chronicle of Higher Education, Daily Pennsylvanian, and Penn Gazette. We have just inaugurated a significant, multi-year partnership with the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and now look forward to an exciting year of events celebrating the great arts and culture organizations on our campus and in our city!

Vincent Price
Provost