The Romans named the first month of their calendar after Janus, the god of doors, gates, and new beginnings. Over the course of the last month and a half, we at Penn have admitted a talented new crop of students, appointed stellar new faculty and administrators, peered into the future during a lively faculty symposium on integrating knowledge, and affirmed anew our dedication to uphold the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

On the morning of Martin Luther King Junior’s birthday, I joined musician and entrepreneur Kenny Gamble and a great crowd of Penn volunteers to launch our annual MLK Day of Service. Other highlights of this year’s MLK symposium included the Interfaith Program with guest speaker Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, and the Lecture in Social Justice, at which TransAfrica Forum founder Randall Robinson and Carlos Alfonso Rosero of Colombia’s Black Communities Process organization discussed their work around civil rights and reparations.

I also had the pleasure of moderating this year’s Founder’s Day symposium on January 18, aptly titled *Aristotle’s Brain, Integrating Knowledge for the 21st Century*. Four of our Penn Integrates Knowledge professors and a large, diverse, and engaged audience of students, faculty and administrators explored both the benefits and challenges of our drive toward more integrated problem-solving. I thank the Faculty Senate for reviving Founder’s Day, a great Penn tradition, by making it an annual occasion to discuss important academic issues of interest and concern to the entire Penn community.

Meanwhile, we added our sixth Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor with the appointment of path-breaking genetics researcher Sarah Tishkoff, whose work on genetic diversity in African populations is unprecedented in its scope and potential for extending our scientific and social leadership. Tishkoff’s arrival underscores Penn’s leadership in encouraging innovative scholarly exploration across disciplines.
I am happy to report the most far-reaching financial aid initiative in Penn history. Starting next fall, students with calculated family incomes of less than $100,000 will receive loan-free aid packages, while families above that level will receive a 10 percent reduction in need-based loans. By September 2009, all undergraduate students eligible for financial aid -- currently 40% of our undergraduate enrollment -- will receive loan-free aid packages. With this program, which we will fund in perpetuity through our Making History campaign, we are fulfilling our Penn Compact commitment to make a Penn education ever more accessible to high-achieving students with extraordinary leadership potential.

I am also delighted to report the selection of Eric J. Furda as our new dean of admissions, effective July 1. Eric is vice president for alumni relations and former executive director of undergraduate admissions at Columbia University, where he guided a historic rise in undergraduate admissions and engineered the successful merger of Columbia College’s and the School of Engineering & Applied Science’s admission processes. Eric also has deep Penn roots: He is a 1987 graduate of the College, where he was a four-year letter winner in lightweight football. He also served as regional director of admissions from 1987 until 1991.

Eric’s 17 years of experience in competitive undergraduate admissions, combined with his keen understanding of the complex issues facing major urban research universities today, make him the ideal choice for this critical position. Eric is as thrilled to be back at Penn as we are to have him. To facilitate a seamless transition, he will join Penn March 1 as special assistant to the president.

Later this semester, after the good work of admitting the Class of 2012 is complete, we will all have an opportunity to thank Eric Kaplan, who has taken leave from his position as associate university secretary to serve as our interim dean of admissions. Eric already has completed leading the Admissions Office through this year’s Early Decision process, which produced the strongest, most talented, and most diverse cohort in Penn history. Under Eric’s direction, our Admissions Office is doing masterful work in completing the process of admitting our next great class.
Our early admissions cohort for the Class of 2012 is our highest-achieving group yet. We saw a five-point increase on SAT scores and a two-point increase on SAT II scores over the previous year’s record high class. Our early admits also are more diverse than any previous group: Under-represented minorities constitute 13.5% of the cohort, up from 12.6% during the previous year; international students constitute 10.2%, up from 9.5%. Overall, we admitted 1,147 students who will make up 48% of the incoming Class of 2012.

Since Council last convened, Penn students won prestigious Rhodes, Marshall and Fulbright scholarships. Our Rhodes Scholarship winner, Huntsman Scholar Joyce Meng (C’08, W’08), plans to pursue master's degrees in economics for development and financial economics at Oxford University. Our Marshall Scholarship winner, Stephen Danley, a 2007 alumnus from the College, will pursue a master’s in comparative social policy at Oxford. Seventeen other extraordinarily impressive Penn students won Fulbright fellowships to study, teach, and conduct research in their choice of more than 150 countries.

Two other senior administrative appointments are worthy of note. Stephen D. Golding will become our Vice President of Finance and Treasurer on February 1. He built a stellar record of financial management leadership during the past 17 years as executive director of financial affairs at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Stacey Lopez has taken up her responsibilities as our new Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Analysis. She previously led the institutional research operation at Carnegie Mellon University, where she earned an exceptional reputation for her commitment to excellence in data analysis and reporting.

Once again, Penn has earned well-deserved national recognition for our record of safety on campus. A survey by Security Magazine ranked Penn number one among institutions of higher education and sixth overall out of 500 businesses and organizations recognized for being proactive in improving security.

Finally, our Making History campaign is off to a blazing start. In a resounding vote of confidence in Penn’s future, we thus far have raised $1.77 billion -- 51% of our $3.5 billion goal. (Please check out www.makinghistory.upenn.edu for campaign updates and information about upcoming events.)
I also returned earlier this month from meetings with Penn alumni and friends in Hong Kong and Tokyo. The Hong Kong campaign event, a dinner hosted by local Penn Trustees Raymond Ch’ien (GR’78) and Bill Cheung (D’81, GD’82), drew a capacity crowd of 150 alumni, parents, and friends. Chairman Riepe and I spoke, with Deans Bushnell, Glandt, Robertson, and Fitts in attendance. Dean Robertson joined me for the Tokyo event, which drew 180 attendees.

Both Asian events were reminders of how exciting it is to bring Penn to regional alumni, parents, and friends, and how interested and engaged Penn’s Asian constituents are in the life of the University. We have scheduled campaign kickoff events for next month in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York.