Last week’s Pennsylvania primary vaulted Penn to the epicenter of the Presidential race. The candidates and their campaigns came to campus en masse to drum up support from our students. Late-night comedy newsman Stephen Colbert taped four editions of his show at our Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, while NBC Correspondent and Penn Trustee Andrea Mitchell broadcast reports from College Hall on the eve of Election Day. Most exciting was the enthusiasm and engagement of Penn students in getting out the vote and in taking part in the political process. The turnout in our district approached that of the 2006 general election.

The attention shifted to Franklin Field last weekend as the 114th annual Penn Relays attracted track and field athletes from all over the world. This was a particularly high energy year with the Olympics in China only months away.

**Admissions and Tuition Update**

On the heels of last year’s record 10% increase in applications, this year yet again yielded a record number of applications, although unsurprisingly a far smaller proportional increase. Our admit rate grew modestly this year to 16.4% from 16% last year. This year’s applicant pool was even stronger and more diverse than last year’s. Admitting more students therefore has allowed us to improve on the academic talent and diversity of the admitted group. Our strong recruitment programs continue to pay dividends and we have offered admission to more African-Americans (433 v. 422), Latinos (355 v. 310), and international students (470 v. 447) than we did last year. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter spoke at our Penn Preview for Philadelphia area admitted students.

We also posted the lowest tuition increase in seven years: 4.5%. Our average room and board cost increased 4.1%, for an overall increase of 4.4%, also our lowest in seven years.

**Baccalaureate Speaker Chosen**

Our Baccalaureate speaker this year will be Sister Mary Scullion, Philadelphia’s nationally recognized advocate for the homeless and mentally ill and founder of Project
HOME. Under Sister Mary’s leadership, Project HOME grew from an emergency winter shelter to 455 housing units and three businesses that employ formerly homeless people. The organization also provides supportive health and education programs to help break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Sister Mary is a wonderful role model for our students of successful social entrepreneurship.

**Awards and Appointments**

Two distinguished faculty members, Michael Leja, professor of art history and Don Mitchell, a visiting scholar in residence in Annenberg School, have been awarded prestigious Guggenheim Fellowships, bringing Penn’s total number of Guggenheim fellowships to 63 since 1987. Political science professor and Fels Institute Director Don Kettl has been honored with the American Political Science Association’s lifetime achievement award. PIK Professor Jonathan Moreno was invited to receive the Benjamin Rush Medal for 2008, awarded for distinguished written scholarship in health or bioethics law. These honors are wonderful examples of the high regard in which our faculty are held.

Wharton’s Health International Volunteer Project (WHIVP) has received the 2008 Health and Human Rights Award from Doctors of the World – USA. Past winners of this international award have included Desmond Tutu and Kofi Annan. WHIVP is composed of MBA students and alumni who work to help build and strengthen sustainable healthcare systems in communities in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. They have helped to develop a cardiac business strategy for Tanzania’s health ministry and microfinance systems for people living with HIV in Kenya, among other projects.

Chrysta Irolla, a senior in Penn’s School of Engineering and Applied Science, won the $5,000 Grand Prize at the Fourth Annual PennVention competition for student inventors. After working in China with lower-limb amputees, Chrysta developed the Proteza SmartSock, a prosthetic sock that alleviates discomfort and prevents the skin breakdown commonly referred to as “pressure sores” in amputees.

I am proud to report that students at our Penn-assisted Penn Alexander School won 14 awards at the Carver Science Fair, including three first place awards. Graduates of the K-8 school go on to the most selective high schools in our region.
The Trustees’ Council of Penn Women, celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, presented its Beacon Award to former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. O’Connor was the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, where she served for 24 years before retiring in 2005. Justice O’Connor’s remarks sparked a lively cross-generational question and answer period.

Dean Andy Porter of our Graduate School of Education has been named to the Transition Advisory Team for incoming Philadelphia School District CEO Arlene Ackerman. The a panel of 24 local and national experts will evaluate the District in several areas, including teaching and learning, safety, public engagement, capacity building and resource allocation.

Harriet Joseph, interim director of our Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships, has been appointed director. She plans to continue strengthening the pipeline from research to fellowships by targeting and engaging students early on in their college careers in order to continue what has been a "slam-dunk year" for awards. She became associate director of CURF in 2002 after serving seven years as director of the Alumni Council on Admissions and six years as assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. She has served as interim director of CURF since last fall.

**Research News**

Penn Medicine researchers have made a dramatic breakthrough in using gene therapy to safely restore vision in three young adults with a rare form of congenital blindness. Dr. Albert M. Maguire, associate professor of ophthalmology and his wife Dr. Jean Bennett, professor of ophthalmology and a senior investigator at Penn’s Scheie Eye Institute, led an international team that reported their findings this week in an online article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Although the patients have not achieved normal eyesight, the preliminary results set the stage for further studies of an innovative treatment for this and possibly other retinal diseases.

Penn Engineering will receive more than $22 million over 10 years from the Army Research Laboratory to help create teams of robots that can operate with little or no human supervision to support security or rescue personnel in dangerous environments. Dr. Vijay Kumar, chair of mechanical engineering and applied mechanics, will lead the multi-university consortium. This is the largest research award in SEAS history. The
school also received two $7.5 million grants from the Office of Naval Research; the first grant is to lead a collaborative study of cooperation in organisms like ants and dolphins to create cooperative principles for unmanned robots. The second grant is to study the principles that govern networks, from Facebook to gene regulatory networks and financial markets.

Penn Nursing has received a $10 million grant from National Institutes of Health to investigate better ways of managing sedation for children on life-saving ventilators. The grant, the largest in the school’s history, will be devoted to conducting one of the most comprehensive studies ever undertaken in pediatric critical care. The study will involve more than 2,750 patients in 18 of some of the most prestigious pediatric hospitals in the United States and Canada.

**Sustainability Initiatives**

Penn’s new Initiative for Global Environmental Leadership (IGEL) sponsored a cross-disciplinary conference on the environmental issues facing businesses today. Panels on decision-making and measuring environmental performance as well as on new laws, low-carbon alternatives included faculty from schools of Arts and Sciences, Design, Engineering and Applied Science, Law and Medicine as well as government and non-governmental organizations. I had the opportunity to give a luncheon keynote discussing Penn’s perspective on sustainability. IGEL’s corporate advisory board includes representatives from BASF, Exelon, General Electric, Goldman Sachs, Interface, Xerox, International Paper, Merck, Rohm & Haas and United Water Suez.

**Marking the Darwin Year**

Penn is joining with major Philadelphia cultural organizations city-wide to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin (in February 2009) with Year of Evolution, a series of public programs and events running from now through May 2009. Penn Museum kicked off the celebration with “Surviving: The Body of Evidence,” an exhibition exploring the process of evolution and its impact on humans. Penn’s offerings will also include programs for children and families and scholarly symposia. See Year of Evolution website [www.yearofevolution.org](http://www.yearofevolution.org), for more information. Our special Penn
Reading Project book will be paleontologist Neil Shubin’s *Your Inner Fish: A Journey Into the 3.5 Billion-Year History of the Human Body.*

**Penn Connects News**

We held a topping off and signing ceremony for the new Annenberg Public Policy Center building at 36th and Walnut streets. The innovative four-story glass and wood structure designed by Tokyo architect Fumihiko Maki will house administrative offices of the Annenberg Public Policy Center as well as research facilities and a public meeting space. It will be open in fall, 2009.

We have selected Patkau Architects of Vancouver, British Columbia as the designer for the new College House at Hill Square. This will be the first new residential hall to be constructed at Penn in more than three decades. The working version of the college house plan calls for low-rise buildings that partially enclose a Quad-like square and will feature approximately 340 units in a variety of room configurations. The existing green space on Hill Square will be redesigned to accommodate the building while still serving as a locus for gathering and recreation. In line with Penn’s goals for environmental sustainability, the project aims to secure a rating of LEED Gold or higher on the scale developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

**Penn Alumnus in Space**

I close by directing our thoughts skyward. One of the astronauts on the space shuttle Endeavour launched last month was Flight Engineer Garrett Reisman, a 1990 graduate of Penn’s Fisher Management and Technology program. Garrett, who currently is on the International Space Station, credits his career in mechanical engineering to the mentoring and hands-on engineering experience he gained at Penn. We now are one of the few schools that can boast an alumnus in space!