MEMORANDUM

To: Members of University Council
From: Amy Gutmann, President
Date: January 28, 2009
Subject: Report to the University Council

Though the winter wind has kept many of us chilled to the bone, the events of the past few weeks have been a heartwarming affirmation of our shared purpose as citizens of Penn, the nation, and the world. On January 20, students, faculty and staff gathered in small and large spaces to witness and celebrate the inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States of America. The same energy that drove up participation rates on Election Day filled rooms around campus and, if recent Penn events are any indication, that energy is here to stay.

Less than a week ago, members of the Penn community gathered on College Green for a candlelight vigil to honor the innocent lives lost in the conflict in Gaza and Southern Israel. A diverse coalition of student groups – including Penn for Palestine, the Penn Israel Coalition, the Penn Pakistan Society, and the Undergraduate Minorities Council – came together to reflect on the lives lost in the conflict and on our common humanity. Though a tragic loss of life prompted the event, the hope and mutual understanding that the gathering generated were uplifting.

Earlier this month, I launched the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Symposium on Social Change at the annual Day of Service. Throughout the day, volunteers created books on tape for Philadelphia Reads, refurbished donated computers, and breathed new life into the Community Education Center by cleaning and painting. Other symposium highlights included the Lecture in Social Justice by actor, producer and humanitarian Danny Glover, and the Interfaith Program with guest speaker Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. Events continue through the end of the month and include an analysis of race in mainstream movies by The Minority Reporter.

While we serve our local community and the City of Philadelphia, we also honor our commitment to global engagement. The Peace Corps recently recognized Penn on its annual list of “Top Peace Corps Volunteer Producing Colleges and Universities.” With 24 undergraduate alumni currently serving, Penn ranks 15th among medium-sized colleges and universities. Since the creation of the Peace Corps in 1961, 730 alumni have served. Penn is proud of this recognition and of the students and alumni who serve around the world.
In furtherance of the Penn Compact’s principles of engaging globally and integrating knowledge, I traveled to China earlier this month to sign agreements with two leading universities: Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Tsinghua University. With Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Penn will identify student and faculty exchanges, develop plans for research collaborations in regenerative medicine, form a joint Center of Excellence in Medical Imaging and explore a jointly sponsored conference on International Financial Market Regulation. With Tsinghua University, Penn will develop a conference on undergraduate education to discuss best practices and skills development and identify a major research collaboration spearheaded by Penn’s School of Engineering and Applied Science. This is in addition to long and successful collaborations already underway, including the Penn-Tsinghua T.C. Chan Center, a partnership between the Penn School of Design and Tsinghua focused on creating strategies that will lead to high performance buildings and sustainable environments.

We seek sustainable solutions not only with partners in China, but also with colleagues on campus. On January 16, I had the distinct pleasure of moderating the Founder’s Day Symposium on Seeking Sustainability: Penn Confronts the Local and Global Challenge. The SEC-sponsored event was well-attended by students, faculty and administrators – a testament to the community’s interest in the multifaceted issues facing our planet – and I was honored to share the stage with Gary Bernstein, Eugenie L. Birch William W. Braham, Robert Giegengack, and Eric W. Orts. I offer my thanks to the Faculty Senate for another thought-provoking symposium. I also thank the audience for comments and questions that truly integrated knowledge and could have sustained the conversation long into the evening.

The integration of knowledge depends on more than just collaboration; it depends on resources. To that end, I am pleased to note that an anonymous benefactor recently donated the Gotham Book Mart Collection to Penn’s libraries. The collection includes more than 200,000 items, primarily modern and contemporary poetry and literature, but also works on art, architecture, jewelry, music, dance and film. The collection will be used to enhance coursework and inform research, both of which will benefit tremendously from this rich assortment of primary and secondary source material.

Our trustees, alumni, parents, and close friends continue to show great confidence in Penn through their support of Making History: The Campaign for Penn. We have raised $2.27 billion, 65% of our goal of $3.5 billion.