MEMORANDUM

To:   Members of University Council

From:   Amy Gutmann, President

Date:   October 28, 2009

Subject:  Report to the University Council

Penn is off to an excellent start this semester. Since the first University Council meeting of the academic year, we have celebrated projects that are making our campus more vibrant than ever. We have been recognized as a great neighbor to our West Philadelphia community, and we have been hailed as a leader in sustainability.

Since 2004, we have spent nearly $200 million to upgrade and renovate our on-campus housing. Earlier this month, members of the campus community gathered in the lobby of W.E.B. Du Bois College House to celebrate major renovations that were completed this summer to reinvigorate the living spaces and common areas in the house. Philadelphia artist and Penn alumni James Dupree was on hand to discuss his beautiful mixed media pieces, which are on exhibit in the Amistad Gallery.

Our School of Social Policy also recently completed major improvements. The Caster Building now features an entrance directly on to Locust Walk, a remodeled lobby, and a new art installation. The Centennial Wall, designed by local artist and Penn alumna Karen Singer, renders the original School of Social Work building in mosaic tile and commemorates 100 years of social work education at Penn.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center will officially open in early November and the building’s designer – Tokyo architect Fumihiko Maki – will deliver the annual Leonore Annenberg Lecture in Public Service and Global Understanding. Later in the month, luminaries from Penn, Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania will celebrate the opening of the Roberts Proton Therapy Center, the newest addition to our School of Medicine and the home of the most advanced cancer care in the world.

Our connections to the West Philadelphia Community are also flourishing. The Survey of Best College and University Civic Partnerships recently recognized Penn with a first place award for “Best Neighbor” among national colleges and universities. In particular, our university-assisted school model, our service learning curriculum, and Penn Connects, our campus expansion plan, were commended.
Penn students from each of our schools are engaging local institutions to support civic life through our Civic Scholars Program, Fox Leadership Program, and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. Last year, more than 1,500 students were involved in 59 Academically Based Community Service courses across 21 departments and 8 schools. For example, the West Philadelphia Community History Project built an online heritage museum for community members – a great resource for our local teachers and their students.

In addition, our efforts to increase sustainability on campus have once again led to our designation by the Sustainable Endowments Institute as an “Overall College Sustainability Leader.” This year, we received an “A-” on the College Sustainability Report Card – the highest mark awarded to any college or university. By following the guidelines set forth in our new Climate Action Plan, we will further minimize waste, reduce energy consumption, and build greener buildings – steps that may lead to our very first “A.”

It is a great time to be at Penn. Our campus is becoming more beautiful and more vibrant. We are engaging our community in meaningful ways, and we are also reducing our environmental impact. Our leadership in these areas does more than benefit our University and our neighborhood; it sets a great example for colleges and universities around the world.