Welcome to the final weeks of the fall semester. I hope your Thanksgiving holiday was restful and reinvigorating. As we gear up for the culmination of classes and the charitable good works which mark this festive time of year, the Penn community has much to be thankful for. Despite Hurricane Sandy, we received Early Decision applications in record numbers. Penn faculty continue to earn outstanding honors, community engagement is at an all-time high, and student voter turnout for the recent election was excellent.

Dean of Admissions Eric Furda and his team reported 4,780 Early Decision applications for the Class of 2017, a 5.6 percent increase over last year’s count. Penn joined several peer institutions in extending the deadline from November 1 to November 6 to accommodate disruptions caused by Hurricane Sandy. Record ED applicant count is a robust indicator of expanding awareness and enthusiasm for Penn among prospective students. The overall quality and diversity of the ED pool is strong, an excellent sign as we strive to build the most accomplished and diverse classes to be found anywhere.

Six Penn professors were recently elected to the prestigious Institute of Medicine, one of our nation’s highest honors in biomedicine. The new Penn IOM members represent four Schools and several critically important areas of biomedical research:

- Dr. Gustavo D. Aguirre, professor of medical genetics and ophthalmology in the School of Veterinary Medicine.
- Dr. Shelley L. Berger, Daniel S. Och University Professor in the department of cell and developmental biology and department of genetics in the Perelman School, and in the department of biology in SAS. Dr. Berger is also director of the Epigenetics Program at the Perelman School.
- Dr. Nancy M. Bonini, Florence R.C. Murray Professor of Biology in SAS.
- Dr. Carl H. June, Richard W. Vague Professor of Immunotherapy in the Perelman School, as well as the director of translational research at the Abramson Family Cancer Research Institute.
- Dr. Mitchell D. Schnall, Eugene P. Pendergrass Professor of Radiology and chair of the radiology department at the Perelman School.
- Dr. Kevin G.M. Volpp, professor of medicine at the Perelman School, professor of health care management at the Wharton School, founding director of the Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics at the Leonard Davis Institute, as well as co-director of the Penn Medicine Center for Innovation.
Penn marked the 20th anniversary of the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships with an international conference this month. Keynote speaker Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, set the tone for the conference, entitled *The Role of Higher Education-Community-School Partnerships in Creating Democratic Communities Locally, Nationally, and Globally*. We were delighted to host this significant gathering of community partnership proponents and strategists. I congratulate the Netter Center and Director Ira Harkavy on the success of the conference, and on the Center’s 20th anniversary. Penn remains committed to building strong community ties and local engagement, and the work of the Netter Center is as important as ever before. We look forward to all the wonderful progress that the next 20 years will bring for Penn, the Netter Center, and West Philadelphia.

I am proud of the outstanding levels of civic engagement Penn students demonstrated during this presidential election season. In particular, I congratulate the Penn Leads the Vote students who worked so hard and with such heart this past Election Day and in the weeks prior. I also thank the Fox Leadership Program for supporting our students as they engaged thoughtfully and passionately with the issues, and successfully navigated all the challenges and rewards of the voting process. We now know that nationwide student voter turnout arguably tipped the balance, with nearly 50 percent of Americans under age 30 casting their votes—almost one-fifth of the electorate in this year’s election. I am personally gratified to know that Penn students continue to lead the rise in young voter participation.

Finally, I congratulate the Penn football team for pulling out that last-minute win over Cornell, which earned the Quakers the title of 2012 Ivy League Champions. We are all thrilled to see the championship trophy return to its rightful place.

As we successfully conclude the semester and embrace the holiday season, these are just a small number of the many ways Penn continues to inspire and make a difference. Thank you for your service to the University Council, and I wish you all the very best in the last few weeks of classes. Here’s to a wonderful holiday season and a bright new year of Penn eminence.