MEMORANDUM

To: Members of University Council
From: Amy Gutmann, President
Date: October 1, 2014
Subject: Report to the University Council

Welcome to another exciting and edifying year at Penn, and welcome back to University Council. We ushered in the 275th year of the University of Pennsylvania with Convocation held outside, in front of College Hall, for the first time in four years. I officially welcomed the Class of 2018, the most selective and accomplished Class in Penn’s history. They are a great testament to the efforts of Dean Furda and his team.

The new academic year also brings new members to Penn’s leadership team. Provost Price and I are excited to welcome Geoffrey Garrett as dean of the Wharton School; John Jackson, Jr., as dean of Social Policy & Practice; Antonia Villarruel as dean of the School of Nursing; and M. Grace Calhoun as Penn’s new director of recreation and intercollegiate athletics. In addition, Presidential Professor Wendell Pritchett has graciously agreed to serve as interim dean of the Law School.

Meanwhile, we have undertaken two new dean searches: one for our Law School and one for our School of Engineering and Applied Science. We have formed committees for each, charging them to consult widely to produce a diverse list of eminent candidates. The Law dean search committee is chaired by Annenberg School Dean Michael Delli Carpini, and the SEAS dean committee is chaired by SAS Dean Steven Fluharty.

In August, we announced the President’s Engagement Prizes, awards that each year will highlight and support extraordinary efforts by graduating Penn seniors to better local, national, and global communities. Up to three Engagement Prizes will be competitively awarded to seniors to provide support during the first year after they graduate, and will include a generous living allowance and up to $100,000 in project expenses. Nobody else we know of offers prizes of this magnitude for student projects focused exclusively on local, national, and global engagement. They are unique in scale and maximally ambitious by design. Applications for the inaugural prizes are due October 31, and the winners will be announced in March 2015. CURF is hosting information sessions throughout the month, and I encourage any senior with a compelling project idea to learn more. You can find additional information about the prizes and information session schedule here: http://www.upenn.edu/curf/fellowships/presidents-engagement-prizes

Mark your calendars for October 31, when I invite you to join the Penn community at our South Bank location for an exciting series of events celebrating innovation at Penn. The festivities will include a series of quick presentations by several of Penn’s innovative faculty as well as a ceremonial groundbreaking for Penn’s new Pennovation Center, wrapped around our 2014 David and Lyn Silfen University Forum with featured guest Water Isaacson, author of the forthcoming book, The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution. He’s the ideal guest to help us explore the lineage of Pennovation, from Benjamin Franklin to ENIAC, to the countless creative discoveries that connect every member of the Penn community in productive ways to our society and world.
I want to conclude my report with well-deserved praise for our superb faculty, who continue to garner prestigious honors and awards. To cite just one prominent example: Danielle Bassett, the Skirkanich Assistant Professor of Innovation in SEAS’ departments of Bioengineering and Electrical and Systems Engineering, has been named a 2014 MacArthur Fellow. The fellowship, often referred to as a “genius grant,” is in support and recognition of Professor Bassett’s work to reveal the nature of the complex connections that make us who we are. Bassett’s scholarship integrates knowledge from fields as varied as neuroscience, mathematics, genetics, computer science, behavioral economics, and the fine arts to give us new insight into our brains and behavior. Her work epitomizes Penn’s distinctive focus on integrating knowledge across disciplines for practical as well as theoretical purposes, and we are all the more proud that the MacArthur Foundation has recognized her path-breaking work in this way.

Thank you all for your service to University Council and to the Penn community. I join you in looking forward to a wonderful and productive year ahead.