I am pleased to report on our progress on numerous fronts in the past academic year and the exciting initiatives and advancements that we anticipate in the coming academic year.

We begin the year by welcoming Marilyn Jordan Taylor, the new Dean of the School of Design, who takes office on October 1. Dean Taylor’s wealth of experience and wisdom will be a great asset for the Penn and Philadelphia communities in the years ahead. At the School of Dental Medicine, we express our appreciation to Prof. Thomas Sollecito for his service as Interim Dean and to Prof. Marjorie Jeffcoat, who stepped down this summer after five productive years as Dean. We will conduct an extensive national search for SDM’s new Dean, with the expert guidance of a consultative committee headed by Dean Arthur Rubenstein of the School of Medicine.

We welcome Eric Furda, our new Dean of Admissions, and his highly experienced Vice Deans – Quenby Jackson Mott, Director of Undergraduate Admissions; and David Phillips, Director of Information and Management Systems – who will spearhead numerous technological enhancements to Penn’s admissions process. A member of Penn’s Class of 1987 and a former regional director of admissions at Penn, Eric returns home after a 17-year sojourn at Columbia University.

We proudly welcome the Class of 2012, the most diverse and global class in Penn’s history, and thank former Interim Dean Eric Kaplan, who has now returned to his position as Associate University Secretary, for his tremendous work in admitting this class during a year of unpredictable changes in national college admissions.

We greet a familiar face as University Chaplain: Rev. Charles Howard, proud member of Penn’s Class of 2000, who previously served with such insight, compassion, and strength as Interim Chaplain and Associate Chaplain. And we welcome back Ajay Nair, formerly director of the Pan-Asian American Community House, who brings his impressive skills and deep knowledge of Penn to his new position as Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs.

Among our outstanding new faculty this term, we extend a special welcome to two new Penn Integrates Knowledge Professors, John Gearhart and Robert Ghrist. Prof. Gearhart, a worldwide pioneer in stem cell research, heads the Institute for Regenerative Medicine, which will greatly advance Penn’s global leadership in this critical arena. Prof. Ghrist brings remarkable strengths in applied mathematics, topology, and robotics – all fields at the cutting edge of mathematics and engineering. His ability to bring together these areas exemplifies the goals of the PIK program to attract world-leading scholars whose work inventively crosses the boundaries of traditional academic disciplines.
In the coming year, both students and faculty will benefit from several new initiatives designed to improve their experience at Penn. Stipend levels for PhD students have increased across the board. All PhD students will have access to longer childbirth leaves, and fathers and adoptive parents will share the same time-off provisions as other students eligible for childbirth leaves. Dissertation committee meetings, committee and exam feedback, and expectations regarding time-to-degree have been standardized to even the playing field for all graduate students, while retaining the flexibility of departments and graduate groups to tailor their own programs. Together, these changes will help graduate students to focus on their research full-time and launch their careers in a timely fashion.

For undergraduates, the coming year will see a significant expansion of the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships. Harriet Joseph, Associate Director of CURF since 2002, was appointed Director in April. Under her leadership, CURF is hiring a full-time Associate Director to expand its research resources and services, has already hired a full-time Assistant Director to enhance communications, and will launch a new website that greatly improves the accessibility and usability of the Center’s resources. The undergraduate deans will also be conducting a comprehensive review of the University Scholar and Ben Franklin Scholar programs, to ensure that they continue to meet the contemporary needs of the Penn community.

I trust that many of you have visited the spectacular new Student Health Services facility at 3535 Market Street. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Dr. Evelyn Wiener, Director of SHS, who worked so hard, in conceiving this state-of-the-art student health facility, to incorporate what we have learned about the needs and wants of Penn students in their health service.

For faculty, we will initiate two important new programs to enhance mentoring and leadership. The Fellows Program, inaugurated in Spring 2009, will help eight promising mid-career faculty members, nominated by their Schools, develop their leadership potential through mentoring programs and opportunities to interact with campus leaders and build cross-campus networks. For newly appointed department chairs and associate deans, we will offer a series of workshops designed to develop leadership skills and foster community across schools.

Global initiatives continue to expand at Penn. This semester will see particular growth in two campus programs: Distinguished International Scholars and Writers Without Borders. Distinguished International Scholars, which brings leading global scholars to campus, for visits of at least 2 weeks during which they participate directly in undergraduate courses, will host eleven outstanding visitors this academic year. These colleagues hail from China, Europe, Mexico, New Zealand, and South America, and they work in such diverse areas as Mexican and Argentinean politics, the economics of health care, gene regulation in cancer, cognitive neuropsychology, and patterns of childbirth in Europe.
The Kelly Writers House will be mounting the new Provost’s International Writers Series, “Writers Without Borders,” with visits this term from leading writers and political activists from China, Lebanon, New Zealand, Pakistan, and South Africa.

We extend our congratulations to Prof. Emerita Fay Ajzenberg-Selove on her National Medal of Science; to Prof. Michael Leja on his Guggenheim Fellowship; to our new members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Institute of Medicine, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and other prestigious professional organizations; and to all the Penn students, faculty, and staff who have done so much to turn the ideals of the Penn Compact into a tangible reality for our community at home and abroad.

I look forward to a successful and rewarding year.