This month, we mark the start of one of Penn’s most valuable cycles of self-examination: our decennial reaccreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. This process occurs in two stages. First, an internal self-study focuses on one aspect of education at Penn, which in this cycle will be undergraduate education. Then, in 2014, an external team of leaders from major universities visits Penn and issues a detailed report that evaluates Penn’s compliance with national standards and offers recommendations for the future. Both phases are significant opportunities to learn more about what we are doing well, what we could do better, and how we relate to the best practices of our peers. Vice Provost Andy Binns will provide more details and answer questions about this process at our upcoming Council meeting, and we look forward to working with many of you as it moves forward.

I encourage all of you to visit the new Education Commons at Franklin Field, which opens next Wednesday, March 28, with an open house from 2-5 PM. Located on the mezzanine level of the Weiss Pavilion, the Commons will be a magnet for informal study spaces, new mobile technologies, and cutting-edge wired environments that will help students study and learn together. We are indebted to Vice Provost Carton Rogers, Director of the Penn Libraries; Marjorie Hassen, Director of Public Services; and their entire team, especially in the Weigle Information Commons of Van Pelt Library, who have made this dynamic new space a reality for the Penn community and have done so much to bring together new ways of teaching and learning with new forms of advanced technology.

Our twelve Schools are working hard on their individual plans under the Action Plan for Faculty Diversity and Excellence that President Gutmann and I issued last June. As part of this endeavor, we have just issued a call for applications for the first Predoctoral Fellowships for Excellence Through Diversity. This program is designed to provide mentorship and access to Penn’s resources for doctoral students in the humanities or social sciences, enrolled at universities other than Penn, as they complete their dissertations. It will support scholars, from a wide range of backgrounds, who can contribute to the diversity of Penn and the higher education community. The application deadline is April 15, and those who are interested will find more information at: http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/volumes/v58/n24/diversity.html. Along the same lines, I hope that everyone has had an opportunity to visit the University’s new website about diversity at Penn, which provides a comprehensive overview of the programs, events, and resources that make Penn such a vibrant community: http://diversity.upenn.edu/.

I look forward to working together as we head into this second half of the semester.

Vincent Price
Provost