Penn, as an academic community, has a particular responsibility to foster a culture of self-examination, self-assessment, and public dialogue. This year, we will publish four reports that aim, individually and collectively, to advance this kind of self-reflection, while also offering insights into our strengths and most important areas for improvement. In the student realm, President Gutmann and I look forward to the report of the Commission on Student Safety, Alcohol, and Campus Life, whose findings will help guide policies on student life in the years ahead. In the faculty realm, the tri-annual Progress Report on Minority Equity among Penn’s faculty, along with the upcoming update and progress report on the Action Plan for Faculty Diversity and Excellence, will assess our initiatives to recruit, retain, and improve the climate for minority faculty at Penn and provide a road map to sustain these efforts in the future.

For all members of the Penn community, we are now finalizing the Self-Study Report that represents the first stage of our decennial reaccreditation process by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). As many of you know, MSCHE reaccreditation occurs in three stages: a self-study, which closely examines one aspect of campus life in relation to MSCHE expectations; a review and campus visit from an external team of distinguished leaders and specialists from peer universities, which provides its own report; and then MSCHE’s decision on reaccreditation. We selected undergraduate education as the focus of this reaccreditation to complement the focus on graduate education of our previous reaccreditation in 2004, which generated valuable enhancements to graduate student life at Penn.

Over the past year, seven working groups – composed of faculty, students, and staff – examined undergraduate education at Penn in the following areas: Access and Equity, Assessment of Student Learning, Finance and Administration, Global Engagement, Integrating Knowledge, Local Engagement, and Undergraduate Research. This year, we have assembled their outstanding work into a comprehensive draft report, which will be widely shared with the Penn community before the final draft is submitted to Middle States in January. After this report is first reviewed by trustees, deans, and other senior University leaders, we will begin an extended period of public discussion in the week of November 11. This period will include a public discussion of the report at the December 4 Council meeting, and I look forward to hearing your perspectives both there and throughout this important campus-wide process.

I hope that everyone has been enjoying a productive and stimulating semester.

Vincent Price
Provost