I look forward to our discussion at this Council meeting of the draft Self-Study Report on undergraduate education. As many of you know, the draft Report is the first stage of our decennial reaccreditation process by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). It draws on the outstanding work of seven working groups – composed of faculty, staff, and students – who last year examined seven key aspects of undergraduate education at Penn: Access and Equity, Assessment of Student Learning, Finance and Administration, Global Engagement, Integrating Knowledge, Local Engagement, and Undergraduate Research.

The groups focused, in particular, on addressing the two questions at the heart of the MSCHE’s review: How are the institutional and strategic goals of the University (the Penn Compact, in Penn’s case) reflected in undergraduate education? And is undergraduate education at Penn effective, meaningfully assessed, and achieving its academic and financial goals? The working groups not only examined data but also aimed to define key educational goals, develop a strategy for articulating those goals, and then address measurement questions in the context of that wider mission.

The draft Report offers a series of key findings about Penn’s strengths and successes in undergraduate education, as well as six major recommendations for advancing undergraduate education in the years ahead. In addition to being circulated to Council in advance of our meeting, it is also available to all members of the Penn community at http://provost.upenn.edu/initiatives/reaccreditation, along with an online form to send comments and suggestions by December 20. In January, the final Report will be submitted to the MSCHE, followed in March by a visit from our external review team of distinguished leaders and specialists from peer universities, chaired by President John DiGioia of Georgetown University.

I hope that students and faculty will take the opportunity to submit nominations for our university-wide teaching awards: the Lindback Awards for standing faculty members and the Provost’s Awards for non-standing faculty and for PhD teaching and mentoring. These awards, given every spring, are an important way of recognizing the extraordinary teaching and mentoring that make Penn such a vibrant intellectual environment. Students and faculty can submit nominations until December 9, and departments can submit nominations until December 16 at: http://provost.upenn.edu/education/teaching-at-penn/teaching-awards.

I wish everyone a wonderful end to the semester and a joyous holiday season, and I look forward to working together in the year ahead.

Vincent Price
Provost