

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of University Council
From: Amy Gutmann, President
Date: September 16, 2020
Subject: Report to the University Council

Welcome to the 281st year of the University of Pennsylvania and a very warm welcome back to University Council. Though we cannot meet in person as we all so deeply wish we could, your engagement and leadership are more essential now than ever before. Thank you for your dedication, resourcefulness, and service to our University community.

From safely navigating this pandemic to confronting racial injustice, the Penn family has answered the call to action magnificently. Penn faculty, students, and staff have kept our educational mission strong while learning, teaching, and working remotely. Our doctors, nurses, and first responders have cared for and kept safe our community, city, and region. Penn research currently underway holds great promise for treating COVID-19 patients. And from public advocacy to data-driven policy proposals, Penn leaders across the University have stepped up to help meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities, saving countless lives far beyond our hospitals.

At the same time, so many Penn people have stood up, spoken out, and marched for an end to systemic racial injustice. The largest mass movement for racial justice in generations comes amid the pandemic, sparked by the horrific killing of George Floyd—following that of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others. The pandemic itself exacts a disproportionate toll from Black, Hispanic, Native, and low-income Americans, who are being hospitalized and dying at a staggering two to five times the rate of their peers. In confronting and combating these historic wrongs, the action Penn takes—such as the White Coats for Blacks Lives demonstration that filled Franklin Field this summer—reaffirms my hope and Penn pride.

Even in these unusual and challenging times, our most beloved Penn traditions shine brightly. Provost Pritchett and I were thrilled to kick off the academic year and officially welcome the great Class of 2024 and new transfers in a virtual Convocation ceremony conducted on August 31. I salute Dean Eric Furda and his Admissions team for yet another fantastic Class. Hats off as well to the wonderful student leaders and performing groups who contributed music and messages; they helped make this Convocation even more meaningful and memorable.

The new academic year also brings new leaders into the Penn family. The Provost and I encourage you all to join us in officially welcoming the new dean of the Wharton School, Dr. Erika James. A passionate and visible champion of the power of business and business education to do good in the world, she joins the #1 business school in the world at a time when Wharton learning and expertise are needed most.

Penn's power to transform lives extends across all 12 of our Schools and every corner of our University. Just one recent example comes from our renowned Abramson Cancer Center (ACC), which officially received the designation of "exceptional" from the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the third time the ACC has earned the NCI's highest rating. What makes this recognition all the more impressive and special is that Dr. Bob Vonderheide, the ACC's director, and his extraordinary Penn Medicine team earned it through a virtual evaluation process in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help guide and empower our collective action, we have dedicated this academic year as the Year of Civic Engagement. With a historic election just ahead, Penn students especially possess enormous power and responsibility to get out the vote. I salute the Penn students and student-run organizations that are actively registering voters and encouraging all citizens to engage through the ballot box. Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV) has been working hard all summer incorporating a new virtual approach to voter registration. Between now and November 3, they will be recruiting volunteers for voter outreach and education activities. PLTV will also provide up-to-the-minute information concerning mail-in/absentee voting and in-person voting across the U.S. If you have not done so already, I urge you to make sure you are ready to participate by visiting <http://www.pennvotes.org/>.

Finally, I call on all seniors to consider competing for this year's President's Engagement Prize and President's Innovation Prize. Unmatched in size and scope anywhere in higher education, these Prizes provide a graduating Penn senior or team of graduating seniors with up to \$100,000 and a generous living stipend to undertake transformative projects that make a real difference in the world. You can visit the Prizes' websites to learn more.

These are trying times, but with mission-driven grit and our community united, the Penn family is more than up to the challenge. Welcome to another year of good works and outstanding achievement. I look forward to all we will accomplish together.

PROVOST'S STATUS REPORT

University Council

September 2020

I join President Gutmann in thanking all of you for your work in sustaining our educational mission in this unprecedented year. The Provost's Office continues to do everything we can to support our students and faculty. For undergraduate students, we are offering the option to take any or all courses pass/fail this semester, created a virtual "shopping period" on Canvas, are holding [Zoom open houses](#) at all of our cultural resource centers, and launched the dynamic [Penn Clubs](#) platform and virtual Student Activities Fair. For graduate students, we are providing [Technology Grants](#) for graduate and professional students who require new technology to make academic progress in the online environment, [Health Insurance and Dental Insurance Grants](#) for PhD students paying for their own insurance, and [Family Grants and Dependent Insurance Grants](#) for PhD students with children and/or spouses.

For faculty members, we established a [Research Recovery Program](#) to mitigate financial impacts of the pandemic, provide bridge funding between external grants, and support biomedical research on topics related to disparities in health care or carried out by faculty members affected by COVID-19; created COVID-19 [Childcare Grants](#); published a [Faculty Guide](#), with extensive guidance for teaching, mentoring, hiring, and promotion during the pandemic; and extended the probationary period by one year for all assistant professors and associate professors without tenure in the tenure, clinician-educator, and research tracks (provided your review has not already begun, you are not in your mandatory or terminal year, and you have not already received an extension related to COVID-19).

I encourage all of you to learn more about and participate in our campus-wide [Year of Civic Engagement](#). This initiative, which began for our first-year students in New Student Orientation, reaffirms for all of us, this year more than ever, the importance of engaging and energizing our communities. Civic engagement has been at the heart of Penn's mission since our founding in Philadelphia in the 18th century. It is central not only to our life on campus and in the city but also to our core values, which we encourage all of you to embody in your own local communities. This year and every year, our civic engagement programs will be led by our dynamic [Netter Center](#) for Community Partnerships, [Civic House](#) and Civic Scholars Program, [Fox Leadership Program](#), and, most recently, the new [Paideia Program](#) for citizenship and civic dialogue.

Finally, I am delighted to begin the year by welcoming three members of my leadership team in the Provost's Office. In July, Laura Perna, GSE Centennial Professor of Education and former Chair of the Faculty Senate, took office as our new Vice Provost for Faculty, and Beth Winkelstein, Eduardo D. Glandt President's Distinguished Professor of Bioengineering, who had served since 2015 as Vice Provost for Education, was appointed as Deputy Provost. They have been invaluable leaders of our initiatives for students and faculty, especially in preparing for the complex challenges of this semester. In August, we welcomed Mamta Accapadi to Penn as the new Vice Provost for University Life. Our community is already benefitting from her tireless commitment to our students, as well as her deep experience in programs that further inclusion and social justice.

I look forward to working together in the year ahead.

Wendell Pritchett
Provost



**Status Report – Penn Professional Staff Assembly
September 9, 2020**

*The theme for the PPSA is **Connect @ Penn**.* The board has decided to use this as a continuing theme for the years to come.

- PPSA held its annual elections in May.
 - We have a new Chair-Elect, Patrick Walsh. (Welcome, Patrick!)
 - Four new board members were elected, along with two new one-year board members to replace employees who have left Penn.
 - And seventeen representatives have been appointed to sit on the University Council Committees.
 - The speakers were Williams Director Julian Siggers and Deputy Director Steve Tinney. Julian has left Penn to lead the Field Museum in Chicago. A national search for a new director is underway.
- PPSA hosted its annual event *Penn Libraries: Lightning Talks* on July 22, 2020. The event was very successful, held virtually (of course) for the first time. Very popular event, this was the fourth year.
- The PPSA Board met virtually on August 10, 2020 to hold our 2020-2021 planning retreat. We discussed plans for the year and met the new board members.
- We were unable to continue last summer’s “first annual” initiative: PPSA Alumni Event for current and past PPSA Board Members and Committee Members. We look forward to hosting this event next summer.
- This year marks the sixth year of the PPSA Connection program, a networking program that provides monthly random matching for staff members to connect with colleagues across campus. This is one of our most popular programs as there is continued demand by Penn employees to connect across schools and centers.
- PPSA will be continuing its member-led book club initiative. Over the summer, members read:
 - June – Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens
 - July – The Library Book by Susan Orlean
 - August – A Man Called Ove by Fredrick Backman
 - Our next meeting on Sept 23 will be Atonement by Ian McEwan
- On September 17, 2020, PPSA is holding a virtual voter registration event, details being finalized now.
- The Employee Resource Fair is normally held in October, co-hosted by the PPSA and the WPPSA. We are considering how best to hold this event in the current circumstances.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Forrest
Chair

Nadir Sharif
Past Chair

Patrick Walsh
Chair-Elect



Weekly Paid Professional Staff Assembly

Status Report
September 9, 2020

- WPPSA held annual elections in May. Mariel Featherstone was elected Chair. Four new Board members were also elected and representatives have been appointed for all the University Council Committees.
- The Board members met on July 31 to discuss program planning for the year.
- The focus of WPPSA this year will be understanding how to support ourselves in order to support each other and the Penn community.
- Our main goals this year center on self care as employees, learning and understanding the resources that Penn provides to staff, and building stronger connections with each other and the Penn community.
- The first staff meeting will be held on September 24, 12pm. Rebecca Block, Associate Director, Human Resources, Provost Centers, will be the guest speaker. The topic will focus on tools and tips for working at Penn during these challenging times.
- WPPSA is currently working with PPSA in the planning of a virtual Employee Resource Fair to be held in October.
- WPPSA hopes to continue working with Mr. Jack Heuer, Vice President of Human Resources, in the planning of Voices of Staff. This is a program where 3-4 staff members meet with Mr. Heuer to create dialogue and voice their concerns.

Mariel Diana Featherstone
Chair, Weekly Paid Professional Staff Assembly