

Implementing a 21st Century Undergraduate Education

October 19, 1994

Undergraduate education has been the subject of recurring discussion at Penn for the past quarter century. Plans, proposals, white papers, and reports have been produced, published and debated, and much has been achieved. The result is that Penn today offers a first-rate undergraduate education. Penn is more competitive and more highly-regarded as an undergraduate school than ever before.

However, as good as Penn is, it can be better—it can and should lead the way in undergraduate education for the 21st century. We believe that the moment is right to move forward aggressively to realize that potential. The time has come to develop a model for a 21st century undergraduate education and to implement an educational experience that builds on a vision of Penn's distinctive collegiate identity.

Today, we are beginning an intensive period of planning for the future of the undergraduate experience at Penn. We say "experience," because all aspects of student life will be evaluated. The goal is to create a greater seamlessness across academic life, housing, advising, and extracurricular activities. This is the moment for a thoughtful and substantive analysis of the position and performance of undergraduate programs in the context of a changing environment around us, as new forms of teaching and learning are rapidly developing, and the world is fundamentally altered.

The effort will be based on the following principles. Most of these principles will be familiar; a few may be new and striking. Each of these principles will have real consequences for the structure and content of the undergraduate experience at Penn.

Principles of a 21st Century Undergraduate Education at Penn

- *Institutionally Distinctive:* The undergraduate experience at Penn should reflect Penn's distinctive institutional characteristics, particularly, its long tradition of educating students in theory as well as practice, both within and across disciplines and schools. It should take strategic advantage of Penn's compactness of campus and scale, and provide Penn undergraduates with a significant opportunity to take courses in both the arts and sciences and the professional disciplines, while achieving focus and excellence through our school-based strengths and school faculty leadership. It should also reflect the research strengths and the commitment of Penn's faculty to undergraduate education, Penn's diversity and urban location, its estimable institutional origins and values, and the necessity of absolute honesty and integrity in intellectual discourse.
- *Faculty Centered:* The undergraduate experience at Penn is created and sustained by Penn's faculty. It is a collective responsibility of the entire University faculty, in which every faculty member should participate in some way. Penn's faculty should be recognized and rewarded for their engagement with students, and the design of undergraduate academic programs and academic support services should support and promote the centrality of faculty-student interaction in the Penn undergraduate experience.
- *Intellectually Engaged:* The undergraduate experience at Penn should demand of both students and faculty an intense, open-ended engagement with each other and with ideas, both in and outside the classroom.
- *Research Oriented:* Penn's faculty is a research faculty, and Penn's undergraduate academic programs should profoundly reflect that fact. Teaching should be regarded as the refinement and transmittal of the ideas and knowledge developed in research and should be itself a major contributor to faculty research. Penn students should have direct experience of the processes and products of scholarly research throughout their undergraduate years at Penn.
- *Residentially Integrated:* The undergraduate academic program at Penn should define one or more academic communities of students, faculty and staff based in and supported by a residential system through which students receive some of their academic program and most of their extracurricular services. Student activities, including co-curricular ac-

tivities and the various kinds of counseling and advising provided to students, should be integrated into these academic communities. Residential living should be organized to support and enhance the academic programs.

- *Interdisciplinary:* The undergraduate experience at Penn should provide students with opportunities for creative and fluid interaction across a wide variety of disciplines, reflecting the breadth of the University's resources and faculties and the interdisciplinary character of contemporary research and scholarship. Undergraduate students should be able to draw upon the faculty and resources of the University's schools in support of their academic program without undue obstacles or bureaucratic barriers.
- *Broad and International:* The undergraduate experience at Penn should be as global and inclusive as the world of academic scholarship and research. It should reflect no permanent orthodoxy. It should introduce students to the competition and conflict of ideas in different intellectual traditions and cultures. It should provide students with a sophisticated understanding of science and technology. It should prepare students to live in a diverse community at Penn and beyond. In particular, it should prepare students for significant participation in the international arena.

These are the principles enunciated or suggested by the many previous studies and reports on undergraduate education at Penn. We propose to move to:

- *design a model* for the undergraduate experience in accord with these principles,
- *develop the academic and related programs* needed to implement the model, and finally, to
- *implement the programs.*

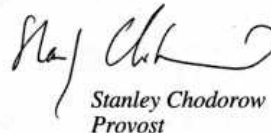
We are committed to completing this process in just three years. The first class will be admitted under the new undergraduate program in the fall of 1997 and will graduate as Penn's first 21st century class in the year 2001.

There will be participation by faculty and students, particularly, by the faculties and students of the four undergraduate schools, in the development of Penn's 21st century undergraduate experience. The development and implementation process will be led by the existing Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education (consisting of the Provost, the deans of the four undergraduate schools, their associate deans for undergraduate education, the acting Vice Provost for University Life, and the chair of the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education). Additional participants will include the chair of the Faculty Senate Committee on Students and Educational Policy, a trustee representative, a student representative from each school, and a faculty member from a professional school that does not have an undergraduate program.

As the model for the undergraduate experience of the 21st century at Penn is designed and programs are developed, we will also articulate the resources necessary to accomplish this undertaking. We will identify existing internal resources which can be applied, and we will seek additional funds to assure the complete implementation of the programs.

We are, therefore, especially pleased to announce that, as a result of an unrestricted outside trust, established by the late John W. Merriam (Wharton '31), we have already designated over \$8 million as a down payment on the new Penn undergraduate experience of the 21st century. Some of these funds are already in hand, and we are today making \$1 million immediately available to let us get to work right away. These resources, and others we will seek and designate over the next three years, are made as a clear sign of the University's commitment to this major institutional priority.


Judith Rodin
President


Stanley Chodorow
Provost