

In Principle and Practice: Penn's Focus on Tomorrow

A Strategic Framework for the University of Pennsylvania

November 30, 2023

Preamble

Let the experiment be made. As Benjamin Franklin penned those words, his mind was fired by lightning. He had theorized certain principles concerning the nature of electricity. The time had come to test those principles in practice. He would soon conduct his most famous experiment, flying a kite and a key in order to draw down the lightning. His signature drive distinguished Franklin as one of the leading figures of the Enlightenment—a historical period of profound intellectual and political foment and transformation, encompassing everything from culture and science to politics and education. It is no coincidence that, at this same time, our founder also proposed the idea for Penn.

Conceived in the crucible of intellectual, cultural, and global revolution, this University is unique in its DNA. Our founding ethos is that Franklinian striving to discover, disseminate, and employ knowledge for its sake and also for the benefit of humankind. To draw down the lightning.

In the centuries since, Penn has contributed much to the world. Educational opportunity that transforms lives. Breakthroughs that save countless lives. Deep and rich understanding that improves all of our lives. Among the world's foremost urban research universities, Penn is more strongly positioned than ever in our teaching, research, clinical care, and service, together with our faculty, students, staff, alumni, families, and neighbors. We have all that we need to plan boldly and strive for new heights of excellence in all Penn does. We also have a unique opportunity post-pandemic and in the midst of fraught debates about freedom of expression to invest even more in Penn's greatest strength: our people and community. And we embark on this all at precisely the moment the world needs Penn most.

Profound change once again defines our times. Faith in the promise of democratic self-government has eroded. We must contend with climate change and manage powerful technologies like generative artificial intelligence. We stand on the cusp of revolutionary changes in medicine and health. The gap is wide between those who have a lot and those who have too little. Hate and bigotry persist. And we require leaders—broadly and deeply learned, service-minded, and bearing all the other hallmarks of an excellent education.

Penn is called upon to join in reaffirming and advancing the values that so shaped our founding, predicated on humanity in all we do. Like the moment our founder declared, *Let the experiment be made*, this is Penn's time to stand tall on our principles and put them into practice for the future.

Our Planning Process

To begin planning for this moment, we invited the Penn community to consider two essential questions: (1) What does the world need from Penn? (2) How do we cultivate a community that will rise to that challenge?

With these guideposts in place, we launched the *Tomorrow, Together* process, led by a committee of faculty, students, and staff. The Red and Blue Advisory Committee sought input from across the University and our global alumni, families, and friends. These University citizens, led by Provost John L. Jackson, Jr., took on a considerable task, and they have been unfailingly wise, collaborative, and singularly focused on fulfilling their charge.

Informed by the committee's important work and many other sources, the following strategic framework is responsive to our two guiding questions. *In Principle and Practice: Penn's Focus on Tomorrow* captures what the world needs from Penn and how we will cultivate a community that rises to the challenge.

In Principle and Practice: Penn's Focus on Tomorrow

Penn's principles are the essence of who we are. They are Penn's enduring values and distinctive strengths. They are where we as a campus community stand. Yet, a principle without practice is a kite without a key. Penn's practices are how we will act on our principles with passion and urgency. They are what we aspire to do and become.

Our Principles

The Anchored University

- Our exceptional and diverse people, communities, and campus are our anchor, the foundation of all we do, and they guide and propel Penn.
- Being an excellent Philadelphia neighbor and global citizen is essential to Penn's mission.

The Interwoven University

- The more ideas and people from all backgrounds we bring to the table—and the more interconnected and less siloed our community—the more rigorous, more resourceful, and more effective Penn is.
- Leadership in interdisciplinary excellence distinguishes Penn.

The Inventive University

- Penn is a powerhouse for breakthroughs in all fields.
- Penn addresses great challenges and opportunities.

The Engaged University

- Penn cultivates leaders who serve.
- Penn seeks dialogue and collaboration across differences and divides.

Our Practices

- Accelerate interdisciplinary pursuits
- Lead on great challenges of our time
- Grow opportunity and strengthen community
- Deepen connection with neighbors and the world
- Foster leadership and service

These practices directly support and strengthen Penn's core educational mission. They will help us channel Penn's excellence and its boundless creative energy to meet the needs of our time. We will also be responsive to emerging ideas and agile in the face of constant change. These practices are thus meant to guide, not decide, our future course. We will pursue each as comprehensively as possible, engaging all our schools, centers, and people.

Practices Expanded

Accelerate interdisciplinary pursuits

- Our University is distinctive for forging novel connections that span boundaries, advance knowledge, and improve lives. We will seek exponential growth in Penn's interdisciplinary faculty support; even more inter-school teaching, projects, and programs; and rich opportunities for students and staff to pursue novel collaborations across a wide range of domains.
- The arts and humanities are at the core of the human endeavor, bringing people together through deeper understanding of history, culture, social conditions, and empathy for others. They also foster problem-solving. We will seek new ways to strengthen and integrate them in all fields and amplify opportunities to explore Penn's extraordinary repositories of culture and beauty on campus and beyond.
- Penn is a premier inventive powerhouse. From entrepreneurship to commercialization and technology transfer, Penn has established significant infrastructure to make this campus and city a destination for innovators. We will further accelerate Penn as an epicenter for translating knowledge into action and solutions.

Lead on great challenges of our time

- *Climate:* Every person at Penn and all that we do has some nexus to the existential challenge of climate change. We must, in an all-in University effort, do more. From leading energy science and policy across disciplines, to shedding light on the disproportionate effects of climate change on the most vulnerable communities, to designing and caring for the built environment, Penn will seek additional ways to support and recruit the best minds; fuel initiatives that advance understanding and promise solutions; and adopt institutional best practices for the sake of our future and our planet.

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- **Health:** The pandemic cast in sharp relief the urgency of Penn's groundbreaking work in life sciences and health across schools and disciplines. To help ensure a healthier, safer global future, Penn will do even more to advance our health efforts. We will further cement both Penn and the region as an epicenter for groundbreaking research and teaching, translational discovery, and policy expertise in life science, public health, and addressing inequalities borne of the social determinants of health.
- **Data:** From big data to large language model-powered AI, technological advances offer the chance to unlock new understanding across a dizzying number of domains and at the same time may dramatically outpace society's ability to assess and plan for the promises and consequences. We will lead in data-driven research, teaching, and applications while cultivating leading expertise on how society can develop and deploy powerful technologies beneficially and justly.
- **Democracy, trust, and truth:** Penn is a broadly recognized leader in driving conversations about and promoting democratic values and institutions as well as the truth-seeking approach foundational to all universities. We will build on signature homegrown strengths and exceptionally broad-ranging expertise to uphold and champion this quintessential function of Penn and higher education broadly. This feels more challenging than ever right now. And even more necessary.

Grow opportunity and strengthen community

- It is essential that Penn recruits and supports diverse and exceptional students, faculty, and staff with the widest range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. We will seek to ensure that all are part of a common enterprise. We will, together, overcome hate in all its forms, and we will strengthen the bonds of our community. We will strive to ensure that everyone at Penn is supported so that each individual has what they need to meaningfully contribute and to thrive. We will also continue Penn's historic commitment to building opportunity and expanding affordability.
- Our campus planning should ensure design and function that serves its community for generations to come. We will pursue campus development that is state-of-the-art, sustainable, and thoughtfully improved to foster the interactions, experiences, and relationships that knit communities together.

Deepen connection with neighbors and the world

- We strive to be an excellent neighbor to Philadelphia and the region. Penn will pursue all that a collaborative urban institution and caring neighbor can do in this new era for cities everywhere. As one university, we will more centrally convene and coordinate all the work we do in meaningful partnership with our West Philadel-

phia neighbors, the city, and the region. We will leverage our academic expertise to shed light on, and seek solutions to, pressing urban challenges.

- We also strive to be a model global citizen. At a time when the tectonic plates of the international community are shifting rapidly, what is a leading American university's role in the world? We will build on existing partnerships around the world and further invest in research, teaching, and learning on campus to help define what it means to be a global university, contributing solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

Foster leadership and service

- The world needs leaders now more than ever—discerning leaders who have knowledge, vision, creativity, and, above all, a commitment to making a difference for others and for the planet. Penn has long prepared students to be leaders. For the future, we will build on existing resources and initiate new ways of cultivating service-minded leadership among our students, and also our faculty and staff.
- Producing and transmitting knowledge to the next generation, and ensuring that our students derive the utmost from their time here, is the core of the Penn experience. We will continually seek to advance state-of-the-art and innovative instruction as well as enhance student learning and living to best deliver on our mission of preparing future generations to think critically and lead effectively.
- We will expand on existing opportunities and seek new means for convening, communicating, and collaborating across divisions and divides, especially when it is hardest to do.

Forward to Penn's Fourth Century

Great universities are like great cities. They never press pause on their own reinvention. *In Principle and Practice* enshrines Penn's defining strengths and values. It maps how we will act on our principles with passion and urgency. It is our kite and key to draw down the lightning. *In Principle and Practice* is also a living framework, intended to aim our efforts strategically while remaining open to reinvention as the world requires.

The next phase will be implementation. Soon and in the months ahead, we will engage faculty, students, staff, alumni, and others. Together, we will advance the principles and practices in this framework. We will partner with faculty, staff, and students to inform next steps. We will also explore the use of seed grant funding to further engage the Penn community and accelerate creative thinking and programming. Some steps we take to implement *In Principle and Practice* will come soon. Some actions, more ambitious still, will take time to plan fully and enact to lasting, maximum effect.

In Principle and Practice, as one University, we will continue to position Penn for excellence in all we do for years to come—to our fourth century and beyond. Let's get started.