

From Excellence to Eminence

An Interview with Amy Gutmann,
President, University of Pennsylvania



Amy Gutmann

EDITORS' NOTE Amy Gutmann became the eighth President of the University of Pennsylvania on July 1, 2004. Prior to her appointment as Penn's President, Gutmann served as Provost at Princeton University, where she was also the Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Politics and Founding Director of the University Center for Human Values. Gutmann serves on the boards of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Vanguard Group, the National Constitution Center, and the Schuylkill River Development Corporation. She also serves on the FBI's National Security Higher Education Advisory Board. She graduated magna cum laude from Harvard-Radcliffe College and earned a master's degree in political science from the London School of Economics and a doctorate in political science from Harvard University.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Founded by Benjamin Franklin, the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is a private Ivy League university located in Philadelphia. Penn (www.upenn.edu) was America's first university and is the fourth-oldest institution of higher education in the United States. Penn is noted for its schools of business, law, and medicine, each of which was the first in North America, and also developed the nation's first liberal arts curriculum. About 4,500 professors serve nearly 10,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate and professional students. Penn is widely recognized as one of the world's leading research universities and consistently

ranks among the top 10 universities in the annual U.S. News & World Report survey.

How does Penn's interdisciplinary approach to education, scholarship, and research differentiate Penn in the marketplace?

We need the tools of multiple disciplines to understand challenging issues, whether it's revolutionizing medicine to fight global epidemics, promoting political participation and personal freedoms, or revitalizing cities. We need these tools to come to terms with problems and figure out solutions. At Penn, we have research teams that cross the boundaries of different disciplines. We integrate knowledge perhaps better than any other university in the world because the physical proximity of our arts and sciences, medical, law, business, engineering, and seven other schools on one beautiful, compact campus fosters innovative collaborations in teaching and research. By crossing disciplinary boundaries, we are able to make good on our founder Ben Franklin's vision of putting knowledge into practice for the good of humankind.

Does that tie into the Penn Compact and its principles?

The Penn Compact is our vision to move Penn from excellence to eminence, so it has three pillars. The first is increasing access, and we have committed ourselves to making a Penn education affordable to all outstanding students by increasing financial aid. The second pillar is integrating knowledge, which I touched on earlier, so we are working to recruit eminent faculty whose teaching and research crosses traditional boundaries. Finally, we will engage locally and globally with communities in Philadelphia and across the world to advance democratic values and strengthen ties with our global neighbors.

How critical is research to a university?

Research is absolutely critical and brings vibrancy to our educational mission by allowing professors to bring the latest and most current knowledge into their classrooms. It also drives our ability to serve as an economic and creative engine for society. For example, three researchers at Penn recently made a major gene therapy breakthrough that has enabled three blind adults to see again. This discovery is in an early stage, but it has the potential for being truly transformational. This example illustrates how we translate research into life-enhancing possibilities.

Are you focused on being involved in and giving back to the community?

Local engagement is a core principle of the Penn Compact. Last year, Penn received a Presidential Award for General Community Service from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which recognized the depth and breadth of our academically based community service courses. A quarter of our students – including those at our Fox Leadership Program and our Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships – are enrolled in service-learning courses in which faculty and students make a difference at home, around the country, and beyond this country's borders. In addition, thousands of Penn students participate in hundreds of service programs through Civic House, our student-led community service and advocacy hub.

Is community service a critical part of preparing future leaders?

Everything we do educationally is designed to prepare our students for leadership. We are committed to access because students need to be educated in a community as diverse as the ones they will lead and serve. We strive to blend together the ideas of disciplines to empower students to ask and answer difficult questions. We teach our students how to make a difference right here at home and encourage them to become leaders before they graduate. When they're being recruited by employers, they gravitate toward companies that give back to their communities. We're very keen on the idea that a great research university has to prepare students to make a positive difference in the world as soon as they graduate.

What made you feel this opportunity was the right fit for you?

My lifelong research was on the role of higher education in democracies, so serving as president at Penn was an opportunity for me to put my research and teaching into practice at a university widely known both for its academic strength and for its role in the community. The Penn community has rallied behind the Compact, we've recruited the most talented students and faculty in the world, we're contributing almost \$10 billion in total economic activity to Pennsylvania, and we have a reputation for making a difference around the world. Plus, our fund-raising campaign is doing enormously well, which allows us to continue on the path to eminence. ●