

The Integration of Knowledge

An Interview with Dr. Amy Gutmann, President, University of Pennsylvania

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her appointment as President of the University of Pennsylvania in July of 2004, Amy 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. In addition, she serves on the boards of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Vanguard Group, the National Constitution Center, and the Schuylkill River Development Corporation.



Amy Gutmann

She also serves on the FBI's National Security Higher Education Advisory Board. Gutmann graduated magna cum laude from Harvard-Radcliffe College and earned a master's degree in political science from the London School of Economics, as well as a doctorate in political science from Harvard University.

INSTITUTION BRIEF The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is a private Ivy League university located in Philadelphia. Penn (www.upenn.edu) was America's first university, founded by Benjamin Franklin, and is the fourth-oldest institution of higher education in the United States. It 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 much of an impact did the economic downturn have on the University of Pennsylvania?

We have fared extremely well in the downturn, but only because we had a key strategic focus going into it and a solidly balanced budget. We have made cuts on things that are not of the highest strategic priority in order to do two things: to drive forward our most important initiatives, such as our building plans for the Penn campus, which make a huge difference to Philadelphia and Penn alike; and to avoid significant layoffs. We have, in fact, been able to continue to hire people to drive our mission forward and stimulate the local economy.

Penn focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to education, scholarship, and research. How critical is that to the culture of Penn, and can you give an overview of that as a differentiator?

Our interdisciplinary focus is absolutely critical to our competitive -- and comparative -- advantage as a university. We're among several universities that are considered academic powerhouses, but among those, we are the most interdisciplinary. I call it the integration of knowledge. The

reason it's so important is that every major problem in the world requires a large tool box of solutions. Traditionally, that tool box contained disciplines that were separated. But in today's complex world, you cannot use the tools of only one discipline to adequately solve significant problems. Take our country's health care problem. It includes extending coverage to uncovered populations and controlling costs. In order to wrap our minds and our public policies around this problem: we need economics, and we need a firm understanding of medicine, sociology, nursing, and so much more. Penn has become masterful at bringing together experts who are working on interdisciplinary teams and are educating our students while also coming up with solutions to very complex problems. This has made us the best at something that the world needs more than ever before.

So the role is much broader than what takes place within the confines of the education on campus?

Absolutely. Our distinctive focus as a university is to pursue knowledge for the sake of contributing to the problem-solving that the world needs. We begin locally with some of the issues in our own neighborhood and we extend as far as our partnerships with places in China, India, and Africa. It's not the classic vision of an ivory tower; it is the classic vision of our founder Benjamin Franklin, who held that a university should teach all things useful and ornamental in order to prepare young people to be good citizens of their country and the world.

When you originally assumed this role, a key part of your discussion and positioning was around The Penn Compact. Can you give an overview of that, and has it remained a key focus?

The Penn Compact is our strategic vision to move Penn from excellence to eminence through three key goals: to increase access; to integrate knowledge across disciplines; and to implement knowledge in our engagement locally and globally. Increasing access has guided us to the creation of the best financial aid policy that Penn has ever had, comparable to the very best universities in the world. Any student with financial need as a dependent undergraduate here will get a financial aid package that will meet his or her full need with no loans.

Integrating knowledge is the key to addressing important issues of the world, and by following that principle, we are able to give a world-class education to our students. Engaging locally and globally allows Penn to contribute a tremendous amount to the city of Philadelphia, the United States, and the world. We don't believe that we as a university, or any university, has a right to exist. We must prove ourselves deserving of the support we get by showing how much difference a Penn education can make in the world in which we live.

You are also heavily engaged in the responsibility of the university and its people to the community. How critical is a program like Penn Connects to the culture of Penn, and how do you instill that within the university?

I'm very proud that we at Penn are good neighbors to our local community and the city as a whole. I'm also proud that because of the work we've done, we were recently presented with the Presidential Award for General Community Service by the Corporation for National and Community Service, which recognizes the depth and breadth of our community service courses. We also were recognized as "number one" in a good neighbor ranking among all colleges and universities in the country because of the work our faculty and students do to make West Philadelphia flourish. Our community engagement ranges from tutoring in local schools to running community health clinics and free dental clinics.

Penn Connects, our campus plan, is another way in which we are engaging locally. Under the plan we have broken ground to create, over the next two years, a beautiful, 24-acre park we are calling Penn Park, which will provide sustainable recreational and green space, not only for the university but for all of Philadelphia. Our community ties make Penn stronger, and they make Philadelphia more vibrant. Being a productive community leader has always been a key part of the culture at Penn. ●