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## A Message from the President

During Convocation, I challenged Penn's newest students to look at the world with a fisheye lens. I asked them to take a wide view, see the periphery, and engage panoramically. I encouraged them to deliberately go about every day at Penn with as broad and inquisitive a view as possible.

As I meet and talk with students—first years through seniors—I am thrilled to find they are doing just that. Penn students are champions in the classroom. They are also explorers and performers, gamers and athletes, and storytellers and startup creators. By stretching beyond their comfort zones, they are challenging their minds to learn in new ways and see the world differently.

There are ample and diverse opportunities and resources at Penn which allow students to follow their passions, serve humanity, and harness the creativity to benefit them during their undergraduate years and beyond.

In this issue of *Penn Parents Magazine*, you will see how some of our students are taking a fisheye lens to their Penn experience. How they are widening their perspectives while they are honing their talents in preparation for futures as highly engaged citizens of the world.

*Liz Magill*

*M. Elizabeth Magill*  
President, University of Pennsylvania



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# SERIOUS FUN

Photos by Tom Stanley

## Students can unlock their creativity at the Education Commons makerspace



**I**n the shadow of Franklin Field, students gather to play. But instead of footballs and field equipment, the makerspace at the Penn Libraries Education Commons—located in the George A. Weiss Pavilion—engages students’ imaginations through activities that inspire creativity and emphasize wellness.

“People tend to think of what’s in a library rather than what a library is,” says Jade Davis, Director of Educational Technology and Learning Management (ETLM) for the Penn Libraries. “But libraries are always designed as an open space of discovery that’s supposed to be on the cutting edge. And play is really about discovery.”



At the makerspace, students can work on crafts with guidance from Christine Kemp and Tex Kang, both Program Coordinators for Technology and Play. From laser-cutting and 3-D printing to jewelry-making, embroidery, toymaking, and robotics, there is something for all tastes and all skill levels.

“We like to say that this is a safe place to fail, which for Penn students can be hard to think about,” says Kemp. “But the process of learning and failing helps improve your understanding and your openness to new learning opportunities.”

“As a library, we believe we should provide accessible resources, as well as programming and services that don’t just teach our students what they are prescribed to learn, but how to approach their learning,” says Kang.

The Education Commons was initially envisioned as a place where student-athletes could convene for study amid their training. Over the years, it has evolved, building up the makerspace and opening its doors to students across the University. “In the beginning, you would just see athletes here; the space was quite empty, besides some furnishings,” says Ahmed Ahmed, C’25. “It has been incredible to witness the space grow into what it is now, a place where you can de-stress and unleash your creativity while making something cool.”

In addition to taking home plushie toys and gifts to share, students take away a sense of community. “Some people who come here have similar interests, whether they’re artistically inclined or simply want to take a break,” says Ahmed. “When you’re doing something outside of your comfort zone, it helps you drop your barriers. You’re more open to learning, and you bond over this shared experience.”

Activities at the makerspace are based around play and wellness, but they can also relate to coursework—sometimes in unexpected ways. “During a wallet-making activity, a group of Nursing students used the time to practice stitch-sewing techniques,” says Kang. “That connection hadn’t even occurred to me.”



When you’re doing something outside of your comfort zone, it helps you drop your barriers. You’re more open to learning, and you bond over this shared experience.

—Ahmed Ahmed, C’25

“Students at Penn have so much on their plate,” adds Kemp. “Helping them take a break and find moments of joy, while building new skills, is part of maintaining a culture of wellness.”

As part of the Penn Libraries, the Education Commons accentuates how play can intersect with learning and the abundant resources across the University, such as creating embroideries of archived medieval manuscripts from the Kislak Center for Special Collections. The ETLM team is also exploring collaboration opportunities with Penn’s numerous student centers, such as the Weingarten Center, the LGBT Center, and the Penn Women’s Center.



Whether they are making holiday gifts, environmental models for group projects, or Halloween masks, the Education Commons makerspace brings people together in the shared spirit of experimentation and imagination. “At their core, libraries are about building communities. They are places full of resources where people can come together, work together, and share their knowledge about different disciplines,” says Kemp. “We want Penn students to know they also can be places for fun, too.”



# LEVELING UP



UPGRADE helps Penn students learn the ins and outs of video game design

Video games are fun, but making them requires a lot of work. Fortunately, the students of UPGRADE (the University of Pennsylvania Game Research and Development Environment) are up to the challenge.

Kevin Ma, ENG'25, a junior Digital Media Design (DMD) major and the president of UPGRADE, was very interested in video games in high school, and they spurred his own desire to create.

**"I was always coming up with new ideas for the games I was playing and thinking about how I would have made them."**

—Kevin Ma, ENG'25

UPGRADE provides students the opportunity to do just that, giving them the ideal setting to apply and learn skills befitting their passion for pixels. About a third of the club members are students in the DMD program at Penn Engineering, but a wide array of majors are represented, including students from the Wharton School and the College of Arts and Sciences.

As a registered Penn club, UPGRADE is able to reserve space on campus and take advantage of potential funding sources as they work each academic year toward their goal of designing and creating a new video game, then bringing it to market. Many students work as programmers, but writing, art, sound design, and business are essential parts of video game design and development.

In 2021, students worked together to create *Bionic Traveller*, an open-world game published onto Steam. Last year, the group published their Minigame Collection, and this year they will continue to work in teams to make mini games.



"There are a lot of benefits when you're working in small groups," Kevin says. "Everyone gets to contribute while still producing a realistic product."

In addition to working on their games, UPGRADE organizes visiting speaker events with industry professionals and alumni who can share insights about career paths in game design. The group also holds game jams—akin to hackathons, but where participants create games instead of software—and socials. Plus, the club plans a trip to PAX, a major video game conference, each year.

Kevin is proud of UPGRADE's growth and accomplishments over the past few years, and he is eager to see what the group will achieve next.

"UPGRADE will continue to explore greater heights," he says, "both in game development and engagement with the game industry."



## The Places You'll Go

All photos courtesy of Ryan Torres

Many Wharton students plan to climb the corporate ladder. But for Ryan Torres, W'25, exciting experiences like cycling up the Ojos del Salado volcano in Chile and swimming from Alcatraz Island to San Francisco's main harbor are bolstering his undergraduate experience. "I have a deeply ingrained sense of curiosity and adventure: through my ultra-endurance expeditions I get to see the world, find myself in tough situations, and work my way out of them," says Ryan.

he says. "This invigorating environment has motivated me to have the courage to set goals and turn them into reality."

Thanks to his global experiences, Ryan was inspired to expand his academic interests, including a second major in history. "In a world as globalized as ours, having a taste of how other cultures and societies work is key," says Ryan. "Visiting countries, not merely running through 'must-see' lists, but meeting people and seeing how things are done have taught me lessons that transcend business."

Going above and beyond business is part of Ryan's journey now and later. "My goal after Penn is to have established a solid foundation of knowledge I can build on for the rest of my life. At the end of the day, it's not about getting that degree, job, or position. It's about the thrill of getting there."

**"This invigorating environment has encouraged me to have the courage to set goals and turn them into reality."**

—Ryan Torres, W'25



Ryan is a full-time student from Barcelona, Spain. He's also an endurance athlete and world traveler. Most recently, he spent the summer traveling through Southeast Asia, which he paid for with his earnings from working as a teaching assistant at Penn.

Ryan has parlayed his adventures into ideas and deep connections with his peers and professors.

"In my first two weeks at Penn, I met people who were building a career in music or creating their documentaries,"



# TIME-HONORED TRADITIONS

From the Class Tree Planting to the Econ Scream and Hey Day, nothing brings Penn students together like a shared tradition.

Penn traditions are a unique opportunity for students to build camaraderie and forge enduring friendships through once-in-a-lifetime shared experiences. Read on to learn more about how students can build community and engage in a positively Penn experience throughout their academic journey.

## PENN TRADITIONS: *Building Our Community*

**Penn Traditions** is the first comprehensive student engagement and philanthropy program in the country. Their mission is simple: to create a strong Penn community for life.

Hertha Torre Gallego, C'24, is the group's current chair. "Traditions are such a rich and vibrant part of life at Penn," she says. "By supporting traditions that have been in place for decades and establishing new ones along the way, students can contribute to the unique identity and spirit at Penn and also find opportunities for memories and connections."

**Engagement Ambassadors:** Students create and build community through University-wide programming and collaborations with campus partners.

**Class Ambassadors:** Class Ambassadors work with reunion classes to help them plan for all aspects of Alumni Weekend. Students can connect and network with alumni while celebrating the Red & Blue.

**Philanthropy Ambassadors:** Students can experience philanthropy in action through events and alumni panels and by managing the Alumni Engagement Fund, which provides resources to student organizations that are actively engaging alumni.

**It's a special student who wants to participate in alumni engagement at Penn. They know that our alumni network is vast. They want to engage with that global community even before they graduate.**

—Aman Goyal,  
Director of Penn Traditions



### NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION EVENTS

- ★ Incoming first-year students take a **class photo** on Franklin Field at an event held in partnership with Penn Athletics.
- ★ **Student Performing Arts Night** (SPAN) brings together more than 50 student groups and hundreds of Penn performers for a showcase ahead of fall audition season.
- ★ As a way to put down permanent roots at Penn, each first-year class votes on their **class tree** and later plants it with support from the Morris Arboretum & Gardens.



### ACADEMIC CALENDAR EVENTS

- ★ Hundreds of students—mostly first-years—participate in the **Econ Scream**, a collective shout to release stress at midnight on the eve of the first Econ 001 midterm.
- ★ **Spring Fling** is an end-of-year celebration—now over 50 years old—that turns campus into a carnival.



### TRANSITION EVENTS

- ★ **U-Night**, the most recent Penn tradition, was created by the Class of 2021 so that sophomores could celebrate the halfway point of their Penn experience. Students flash lanterns during a call-and-response event before they are officially deemed juniors.
- ★ Following a tradition that dates to 1916, rising juniors celebrate **Hey Day** by donning red shirts, mahogany walking canes, and skimmer hats before marching down Locust Walk where Penn's President officially proclaims them seniors. During a companion event called the Final Toast, seniors begin to reflect on what it means to become a member of the Penn alumni community.
- ★ **Feb Club** is a memorable month of senior-only events designed to help students make the most of their final semester.
- ★ At the **First Toast**, seniors can raise a glass to their class and celebrate the start of Feb Club.



# Opportunity COSTS

## The Career Services Summer Funding Program enables students to take on future-defining opportunities

Achieving a summer internship can be a big deal—but also a big expense. Many internships are unpaid or provide small stipends. That means costs such as moving to a new city, securing housing, and shouldering new living expenses can be prohibitive factors for students from modest financial backgrounds.

The Career Services Summer Funding Program was created to alleviate the financial burden that can sometimes accompany a path-defining internship. Here, three students share how Summer Funding Grants helped them to expand their horizons.



**Guilherme  
de Macêdo  
Feitosa**  
C'24

*Coming from a low-income background* and being the first in my family to pursue higher education, I've always wanted to attach social impact to my professional life. I accepted an internship at AB InBev, and I was given the task of taking care of operations of the whole portfolio of premium draft beers in Brazil. It was challenging, but surprisingly never scary. To my surprise, more than getting to know the insides of the biggest brewery in the world, I found comfort and a sense of belonging.

I was blown away that social consciousness was present in every part of this global corporation. From their sustainability-oriented growth strategy to their DEI-focused recruiting process, I understood that there is indeed space for change in established companies, and that the more of a market share they have, the more they must be aware of their influence and, hence, their capacity to change lives.



**Wanjin  
(Vivi) Li**  
ENG'25

*Thanks to Penn's Career Services Summer Funding*, I was able to spend the summer after my first year in Philly, diving deep into my first research experience with the Miskin Lab in the Singh Center for Nanotechnology.

My job, in this grand course of nanorobotics research, is to streamline the process that researchers can use to program a predetermined LED-light sequence into the light source that can then actuate the nanorobots. Such a process, if successfully implemented, can be a huge time-saver for researchers to study and improve the actuation of these robots. It may seem like a small change, but it has the potential to help shape the future of nanorobotics. With this invaluable research experience, I am more excited than ever to apply the knowledge I learned and the skills I acquired to future opportunities that come my way.



**Alexa  
Addison**  
C'24

*This summer, I was blessed* with the opportunity to work for the New York Legal Assistance Group, which provides free legal assistance, financial counseling, policy advocacy, and impact litigation to individuals or families experiencing poverty. As an undergraduate, very few legal internships allow you to do hands-on work where you speak with actual clients.

This was by far the most rewarding position I have ever had. Working in the Domestic Violence Unit, many of the intake calls were heavy and hard to hear, but everyone I spoke with was incredibly grateful to have been listened to. Because of the vast types of people who would reach out to us with little to no resources, this experience was eye-opening, rewarding, challenging, and humbling. I am so thankful to have been able to participate in the internship program and build relationships with other interns, paralegals, and supervisors. I have gained valuable communication, interpersonal, and professional skills that I will continue to use throughout my career. 🇺🇸

## Deadlines & Eligibility:

**Deadlines:** Though summer may seem far away, it's not too early for students to start making plans. Applications for summer funding grants will open in February 2024, with rolling deadlines throughout the spring semester.

**Eligibility:** Students who receive financial aid from Penn, have a family income of \$65,500-\$140,000, and have secured a summer internship, service program, or research position can apply for awards of up to \$4,500 to help cover the costs of a potentially life-changing opportunity.

*\*Students who are highly aided should apply for support through the Highly Aided Summer Funding Program.*

Learn more at:  
[pennpri.de/  
summer-funding](https://pennpri.de/summer-funding)





# Hikaru 'Karu' Kozuma, GEd'15

## Meet the Leaders

**KARU KOZUMA is Penn's new Vice Provost for University Life.** The division he leads supports and nurtures Penn's diverse student communities by providing academic and career programming, campus and community engagement, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. A national leader in this field, Kozuma brings to the role more than 25 years' experience in student affairs. At Penn, he has served as Executive Director of College Houses and Academic Services, Associate Vice Provost for University Life, and Executive Director of the Office of Student Affairs.

**Q | How did your previous positions at Penn prepare you for taking on the role of Vice Provost for University Life?**

**A |** Two ways. First, those positions gave me insights into the undergraduate student experience at Penn. And second, they gave me connections with key offices and partners on campus. With this baseline, I have a strong foundation on which to build.

**Q | What excites you most about this position and the opportunity to work with students?**

**A |** Getting to know Penn students. That means getting to know not just who they are, but who they are meant to be. It's such an honor to be part of their growth and development.

**Q | What should Penn families know about how University Life strengthens and supports the Penn undergraduate experience?**

**A |** We care deeply about students and are committed to understanding their full experience. What are their goals? What is important to them? What motivates them? This informs how we work with students and support them.

**Q | What are your goals for the department?**

**A |** My goal is to do more to connect University Life with other student services, including College Houses, Wellness, Residential Services, Business Services, and more, so we can continue to improve the student experience for Penn undergraduates.

**Q | What else would you like to share with family members?**

**A |** We know that your children are the most important things in your lives. We are committed to being there for our students and for our Penn families as much as we can. Working with Penn students is a true calling for me and for my team members. 🍷



Learn more about University Life: [universitylife.upenn.edu](http://universitylife.upenn.edu)

# INSPIRED & INSPIRING

**Penn Nursing student Megan Laubacher draws from her own experiences to help pediatric patients.**



**F**or Megan Laubacher, Nu'24, nurses have played an incredibly important role in her life. She was born with a congenital heart defect and spent most of the first few months of her life in Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. When she was 13 years old, she came to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) for surgery to have a stent placed. Before the procedure, Megan walked through Penn's campus with her parents. When she saw the School of Nursing, she knew that was where she wanted to study.

Now, as a Penn Nursing student, Megan does research in cardiology at CHOP and is also a nurse extern there, working with patients dealing with similar illnesses to her own.

"I love to make connections with patients," she says. "I've been in their shoes, and my own experience has given me insight into how to provide the very best care."

What inspires Megan most is the impact she can have, even as a student. She knows exactly what an impromptu dance party can mean to a child who needs to have their blood drawn—she vividly remembers the nurses who treated her and supported her when she was young.

In addition to her own studies and research, Megan is the president of Student Nurses at Penn (SNAP), helping to support and inspire the next generation of Penn Nurses. The group provides peer advising, develops programming for Nursing students, and collaborates with other organizations around campus.

**I LOVE TO MAKE CONNECTIONS WITH PATIENTS. I'VE BEEN IN THEIR SHOES, AND MY OWN EXPERIENCE HAS GIVEN ME INSIGHT INTO HOW TO PROVIDE THE VERY BEST CARE.**



MEGAN LAUBACHER, NU'24

Megan was accepted into the submatriculation program at the Nursing School and hopes to work for a year or two at CHOP before returning to Penn for her master's degree. She hopes to give her patients the same comfort and support that her nurses gave her all those years ago.

"The experience has been full circle for me," she says. 🍷

# ENTREPENNEURSHIP

Aspiring student entrepreneurs find the support they need to grow their businesses at Venture Lab in Penn's Tangen Hall.

**A great roommate is key to a successful college experience. But how does a student find the perfect match? Could a new tool inspired by popular dating apps be the solution?**



**T**hat's the concept behind Bunked!, one of many undergraduate start-ups at Penn. Created by college students, for college students, the Bunked! app provides a 21st-century take on finding a compatible roommate, with personalized profiles and a swipeable design.

Behind the project is a diverse, all-female team: Cheryl Bai, W'25; Isha Reddy, W'25; Tanmayee Talla, C'25, W'25; and team leader Sriya Koganti, W'25.

As Sriya explains, "We turned to resources right here at Penn for help translating our idea into a business." The team found just what they needed at Tangen Hall, the center for entrepreneurship on campus. Open to students from all Penn schools, Tangen Hall is the largest hub of its kind on any college campus.

The Bunked! team applied to the Venture Initiation Program (VIP), a joint incubator-accelerator for students interested in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. Over 500 students strong, the VIP program features teams focused on topics ranging from innovative soil testing to the manufacture of RGB cables.

Sriya and her fellow team members harnessed the many resources offered by the VIP program, starting with on-demand courses on entrepreneurship topics.

They shared their concept with fellow students and investors at Pitch Night. And the aspiring entrepreneurs appreciated the peer-to-peer support offered by their fellow student founders. "It offered a good reality check on the challenges of building a business," Sriya explains.

The Bunked! team is now working on the beta version of their app, which will be used for testing, market research, and improvements. They plan to pitch their product to outside investors this school year, with the hope of launching the app in December, in time for Early Decision students.

A Business Analytics major, Sriya didn't come to Wharton expecting to start her own business. "But once I heard about Tangen Hall and everything Venture Lab has to offer, it made sense to tap into those resources."



Learn more at:  
[venturelab.upenn.edu](https://venturelab.upenn.edu)

## PENN PARENTS COUNCIL

The Penn Parents Council is a leadership group of dedicated parents who serve as ambassadors to the Penn parent community. Through their philanthropic commitment to The Penn Fund and their unique insight in committee work, members help further Penn's mission, strengthen their fellow parents' connection to the University, and enrich the undergraduate experience for every student.

To learn more, contact Tara Davies, Executive Director, Parent Outreach and Development, at [daviest@upenn.edu](mailto:daviest@upenn.edu) or 215-746-4646.

## Unlimited Opportunity

The start of another academic year brings renewed hope and determination from undergraduate students across the University. By investing in their experience today, you can help shape the leaders and innovators of tomorrow. Your gift to The Penn Fund will enable us to bolster scholarships, expand student support networks, and develop innovative teaching and learning programs that foster intellectual growth and personal development. Join our incredible group of donors from throughout the Quaker community and demonstrate that access to life-changing higher education is paramount among your philanthropic priorities.

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## We are thrilled to invite Penn families back to campus for Family Weekend!

We have an array of events and activities to celebrate everything that makes Penn and our community special. Register today and join us—and your students—on campus from **October 27 to 29, 2023**.

Sign up at [pennpri.de/familyweekend](http://pennpri.de/familyweekend)