Better Test Scores, Rankings Mark Class of ’11

Academic credentials show continued improvement; total number of applications more than double those of 1995

By John D. Harvith

The number of freshman applicants to the University’s Pittsburgh campus continues to escalate, and the academic credentials of incoming freshmen remain on an upward trajectory, the University announced today.

Freshman applications for the Class of 2011 reached a total of 19,056—861 more than the 18,195 applications received for the freshman class that entered in fall 2006, and nearly 2.5 times the size of the applicant pool in 1995, when 7,825 students applied.

The percentage of students in the fall 2007 entering class graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school classes increased significantly, to 48 percent this fall from 43 percent in 2006, while the number in the top 20 percent increased to 74 percent from 72 percent in 2006.

The mid-50 percent Scholastic Aptitude Test range for incoming freshmen this fall increased by 20 points, to 1170-1330 from 1150-1310 in fall 2006, this increase coming at a time when SAT scores nationally have declined slightly. (The range is based on mathematical and critical reading scores only; a third component, writing, was added to the SAT test in 2005.) This range indicates that 25 percent of the incoming class had scores higher than 1330, and 25 percent had scores lower than 1170.

The SAT range represents a substantial increase from 1995, when the weighted range was 1010-1200. (The College Board recertified its test scores in 1995, and this range reflects the recentered scores, making it comparable to subsequent years.)

For the freshman class numbers 3,419, virtually the same size as last year’s entering class of 3,420, and yet with academic credentials far superior to the 1995 entering class.

“These numbers again reflect the increased recognition by high school seniors that the University of Pittsburgh offers a uniquely rich environment in which to pursue academic excellence,” said James V. Mahaffey, Pitt’s chancellor.

“This isn’t some far-off hypothetical situation,” said U.S. Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr., who introduced the film and moderated a question-and-answer session afterward. “It’s all within the realm of possibility. This is Al Qaeda’s objective, and it could be the objective of some other groups as well.”

Casey’s visit was hosted by Pitt’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA), the GSPIA Student Cabinet, and the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies.

Panelists for the Q&A session included William W. Keller, director of the Ridgway Center and Wesley W. Posvar Chair and Professor of International Affairs in GSPIA; Carie Lemack, co-founder of Families of Sept. 11; and Michael Hurley, a counterterrorism advisor to Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI).

NTI is a nonprofit group, headed by CNN founder Ted Turner and former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, that works with governments and private organizations to stop the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and improve security procedures on existing weapons stockpiles.

Casey was introduced by Pitt Chancellor and former state attorney general and treasurer Casey’s great-uncle Jack Harding, a player of the 1920s and among the University’s most famous athletes.

The chill in the room was caused by the film’s brisk (but thankfully fictional) depiction of a successful terrorist plot to obtain nuclear weapons.

And when a girl sitting near the front of the room began to shiver and rub her arms, it wasn’t just because the air conditioning had unexpectedly turned on. The chill in the room was caused by the frightening plausibility of the filmed scenarios.

GSPIA Hosts Casey for Film Screening, Q&A on Nuclear Terrorism

By Jason Tagger

As the film Last Best Chance ended on Tuesday, the audience in William Pitt Union’s Assembly Room sat in complete silence.

“I was surprised because the (45 minutes) film was poorly received. In fact, it’s well done,” said Herb Hertzenberg of The New Yorker, who introduced the film. “It’s all within the realm of possibility. This is Al Qaeda’s objective, and it could be the objective of some other groups as well.”

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New Service Links Library Patrons to Pa. Collections

By Sharon S. Blake

The University Library System (ULS) has launched a new online service that allows researchers, students, genealogists, and the general public to search digital collections created by Pennsylvania libraries, museums, colleges and universities, and historical societies.

The goal of the Pennsylvania Digital Library (PADL) is to serve as a gateway to documents, photos, e-journals, electronic dissertations, conference proceedings—anything available online in a digital format—created by Pennsylvania libraries and cultural heritage institutions.

The site can be found online at http://padl.pitt.edu.

“Our digital library staff has done a wonderful job of creating a tool that will allow all citizens of Pennsylvania to quickly and easily access books, historical photos, and other material,” said Rush Miller, ULS director and Hillman University Librarian.

PADL harvests the descriptive information about the material held in the numerous digital collections scattered across the Commonwealth. It indexes this descriptive information so it can be searched, free of charge.

Any Pennsylvania organization seeking to register its digital collections with PADL can visit the Web site for instructions.

Currently, PADL holds materials from Bryn Mawr College, Drexel University, Haverford College, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Penn State University, the State Library of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore College, Thomas Jefferson University, Villanova University, and Pitt.

Ed Galloway, coordinator of the ULS Digital Research Library, said PADL has the potential “to become an important resource for scholars, students, and the general public to easily determine what digital collections exist in Pennsylvania that might meet their research needs.”

PADL was created by the ULS in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee on Collaborative Digitization and is part of the Pitt’s extensive D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program.

D-Scribe can be found online at www.library.pitt.edu/articles/digpubtype/.
Casey Hosts Film, Q&A on Nuclear Terrorism

The University of Pittsburgh maintained its position of ninth among U.S. public universities and advanced from 32nd to 28th place among all U.S. universities in the “Times Higher-QS World University Rankings 2007,” the latest edition of a ranking of the world’s top 200 universities by The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) and Quacquarelli Symonds, a global company that provides educational and career information and networking.

In total, Pitt placed 77th among all universities worldwide in the rankings, up from 88th in 2006.

For the 2007 rankings, Pitt tied in the categories of “public universities,” “all U.S. universities,” and “all universities worldwide” with Purdue University. In those same categories, Pitt placed ahead of the University of Maryland, Vanderbilt University, Case Western Reserve University, Rice University, the University of Virginia, the University of Southern California, Ohio State University, Indiana University, the University of Minnesota, the University of North Carolina, the University of Notre Dame, and Washington University in St. Louis, among others.

The other institutions in the top 10 public U.S. universities ranking besides Pitt and Purdue are the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Michigan, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Washington, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of California at San Diego, and the University of Illinois.

The rankings are based on the opinion of 7,000 active academics and graduate recruiters, alongside quantitative data on research impact, staff and student numbers, and universities’ levels of internationalization. An independent London-based newspaper that reports specifically on higher education issues, THES was formerly a division of News International, publisher of The Times of London.
**Happenings**

**Concerts**

**Exhibitions**

**The Chairs and the Bald Soprano, Studio Theatre, Nov. 28 through Dec. 28**

**Conferences**
- *Nationality Rooms Slate Holiday Open House*, Music, dance, food, crafts highlight Sunday program

**By Patricia Lamonda White**

Folk singers and dancers will fill the Colonnades’ Commons Room with song and gaiety on Sunday during the annual Nationality Rooms Holiday Open House.

Events will continue from noon to 4 p.m. with various Nationality Rooms committees to offer ethnic foods and crafts for purchase.

Each year, the 26 rooms that encircle the Cathedral of Learning are adorned with decorations to reflect their ethnic heritages, such as including decorations such as Lithuanian geometric straw ornaments, Polish paper cutouts, German gingerbread cookies, a French crêpe, and a hand-carved Austrian scene.

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For the open house and during holiday tours, guides in native costume adapt their daily presentations to include descriptions of holiday traditions celebrated throughout the world.

In addition, open house attendees will be able to view traditional performances and demonstrations by the Pittsburgh Chinese and Ren Chinese women’s groups, Grecian Odyssey Dancers, Nata’s Bhasa School, Young Filipino Americans of Pittsburgh, Scandinavian folk dancers of Pittsburgh, as well as dancers from Irish, Ukrainian, and Latin American groups.

An intricate bobbin lace weaving demonstration will be held in the Cathedral’s Crogan Schenley Room.

Participants and sponsors include Pitt’s African Heritage, Austrian, Chinese, Czechoslovakian, Finnish, German, Greek, Indian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Swedish, Syrian–Lebanon, Ukrainian, Yugoslav, Latin American, Phillipine, Swiss, Thai, Turkish, and Welsh groups, along with Quo Vadis and the Pitt Women’s International Club and Women’s Association.

The Nationality Rooms are gifts to the University from Pittsburgh’s ethnic groups. Built between 1968 and 2004, each room is designed in an architectural style appropriate to the country for which it is named.

The holiday tours run through Jan. 18. The rooms are closed Dec. 24, 25, and 26, 2007, and Jan. 1, 2008. Admission is $3 for adults and $1 for children ages eight to 18. Children under eight are admitted free. For the complete tour schedule, visit www.pitt.edu/~natrooms/pages/holiday_info.html.
New research at the University of Pittsburgh suggests that pollution in the region’s rivers continues to present a health threat to residents who use the local water supply and eat fish caught here.

What’s more, buying fish at the supermarket might not be any safer. One study found that fish caught in Lake Erie and sold commercially in Pittsburgh contained levels of arsenic and selenium almost twice as high as those from the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, and levels of mercury two-to-four times higher.

Three separate Pitt studies were presented to the American Public Health Association during its annual meeting Nov. 7 in Washington, D.C.

The principal investigator of all three was Conrad Volz, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health in Pitt’s Graduate School of Public Health.

Experts consider the studies significant because fish are thought to be reliable indicators of unsafe water. Fish consume fat-soluble chemicals from the water in which they swim and concentrate the toxins within their own bodies.

In the first study, researchers reported that extracts taken from channel catfish caught in the Allegheny and Monongahela caused breast cancer cells to multiply. The fish were caught in areas where sanitary sewers often overflow during rainstorms, releasing raw, untreated sewage directly into rivers.

The study suggests the fish are absorbing chemicals that mimic the actions of the female hormone estrogen, and that those chemicals are making their way into the local water supply, Volz said.

Researchers think the chemicals are accumulating in the fish because “vast quantities” of human waste containing pharmaceutical byproducts are running into local rivers from untreated sewage, Volz said.

About 16 billion gallons of raw sewage reach Pittsburgh rivers each year, he said, “with major implications for public health.”

In the study, Volz and colleagues found that exposing extracts of catfish to human breast cancer cells caused them to multiply, if those cells were rated as receptive to estrogen. Cells that were rated nonresponsive to estrogen did not change.

Extracts of fish caught in areas heavily polluted by industrial and municipal wastes resulted in the greatest amount of cell growth, Volz said.

The next step in the research is to identify the specific chemicals and their sources in both local water and fish, he said.

“These findings have significant public health implications, since we drink water from the rivers where the fish were caught,” Volz said.

Coauthors of the study include Pitt researchers Yan Liu, Christopher Price, Mary Ehm, Devra Davis, Maryann Donovan, and Patricia Eagon.

In the second study, Volz and his colleagues reported that white bass caught on the Canadian side of Lake Erie contained significantly higher levels of mercury, arsenic, and selenium than fish caught near active and former steel mills in Pittsburgh.

Researchers asked local anglers to catch 45 white bass at two locations near Pittsburgh; the researchers then compared them to 10 white bass purchased at local markets.

According to study results, mercury levels in store-bought fish were 2.2 to 4.8 times higher, while arsenic levels were 1.7 times higher and selenium levels were 1.9 times higher.

“We were surprised by our results since we had hypothesized that levels of contaminants in fish would be higher in specimens caught near once heavily polluted sites,” Volz said. “These results indicate to us that the general public should be told about the risks.

According to Volz, the results may indicate that sediments in Lake Erie are still being contaminated by coal-fired power plants.

“Burning coal in power plants produces toxic byproducts such as mercury, arsenic, and selenium that can contaminate rivers both directly and indirectly through air pollution and water runoff. In their report, Volz and his colleagues recommend a more rigorous testing program for commercial freshwater fish, “with particular attention to fish entering the U.S. from other countries,” he said.

Coauthors of this study include Nancy Sussman, Devra Davis, Maryann Donovan, Jeannie Zborowski, and Yan Liu, all of the University of Pittsburgh.

Additional support came from Sean Brady of Venture Outdoors and fishing instructor Karen Gainey.

In the third study, researchers concluded that emissions from coal-fired power plants travel far upstream, contaminating water supplies many miles away. The study found higher levels of mercury than the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends, along with elevated levels of selenium in channel catfish caught both around Pittsburgh and near Kittanning, Armstrong County.

Fish caught near Pittsburgh had 3.1 times more mercury than recommended. Surprisingly, fish caught near Kittanning were significantly worse, containing 19 times more mercury than recommended by the EPA.

Fish caught near Kittanning also had higher levels of selenium than those caught in Pittsburgh.

The risk of developing neurological disorders from eating catfish with the levels of mercury found near Kittanning are five-to-eight times higher than those considered “acceptable” by the EPA, Volz said.

He said anglers should be “concerned” about eating fish caught in areas close to coal-fired power plants, and that the general public should be told about the risks.

All of the studies were funded by grants from the Highmark Foundation, the DSF Charitable Trust, and the Heinz Endowments.

Coauthors of the third study include Yan Liu, Nancy Sussman, Tiffany Green, Jim Peterson, Charles Christen, Maryann Donovan, Devra Davis, Patricia Eagon, Kelly McMahon, and Ravi Sharma, all of the University of Pittsburgh; along with Sean Brady of Venture Outdoors; local angler Paul Caruso; and Myron Arnowitt of Clean Water Action.