Phil Williams Named Posvar Chair, Director of Matthew B. Ridgway Center For International Security Studies

By Amanda Leff Ritchie

Phil Williams, Pitt professor of public and international affairs, has been named the holder of the Wesley W. Posvar Chair in International Security Studies within Pitt's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA). He is also the new director of the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies, which is part of both GSPIA and Pitt's University Center for International Studies (UCIS).

"Phil Williams will do an outstanding job as Posvar Chair and Ridgway Center director," said John T.S. Keeler, dean of GSPIA. "His stature as one of the world's leading experts on transnational organized crime will attract a steady flow of scholars and officials to the center. In addition, as one of GSPIA's most inspiring and popular teachers, he will be able to engage our students in Ridgway activities."

Williams, who previously served as the Ridgway Center director from 1992 through 2001, has published extensively in the field of international security, including the books Crisis Management (Wiley, 1976), The Senate and U.S. Troops in Europe (St. Martin's Press, 1986), and, with Mike Bowker, Superpower Detente: A Reappraisal (Sage Publications Ltd., 1987). During the last 16 years, his research has focused primarily on transnational organized crime and he has written articles on various aspects of this subject in the journals Survival, Washington Quarterly, The Bulletin on Narcotics, Crime Law and Social Change, and International Peacekeeping, and in Scientific American. In addition, Williams was founding editor of the journal Transnational Organized Crime and has edited several publications on combating organized crime and the trafficking of women.

Williams has been a consultant to both the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and U.S. government agencies and has given congressional testimony on organized crime. He was a joint author for a United Nations study on offshore financial centers and money laundering. Most recently, he has focused on alliances among criminal organizations, as well as on terrorist finances, drugs, and violence in Mexico, and complexity theory and intelligence analysis.

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The City of Pittsburgh’s Unfair Share Tax

This is the print version of Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg’s Nov. 11, 2009, report to the Senate Council that relate to the city’s proposed “tuition tax.”

Four months and eleven days into the new fiscal year, we still are waiting for the Commonwealth’s budget, including our appropriation, to be finalized. To some extent, we are being held hostage to disagreements over particular provisions in gaming legislation now under consideration. We also are the victims of an unusually contentious climate in the Capitol. Almost every day, I get messages that some small steps in a positive direction have been taken in Harrisburg. Those messages are a cause for some hope, but we still do not have an appropriation, and even as the state is failing to give, the city is attempting to take away.

All of you, I am sure, have read of the mayor’s plan, announced on Monday [Nov. 9, 2009], to impose a tuition tax on all students attending institutions of higher learning in the City of Pittsburgh. As you also know, the education and health services sector has become an increasingly important part of the regional economy measured in virtually every way, but especially in terms of job growth. We now are the region’s largest employment sector and are the only sector that has added jobs each and every year since 1995.

If the mayor’s plan was to become law, we also would be the nation’s only higher education sector subject to such taxation. Particularly given the very positive national and international attention that Pittsburgh has received for the remarkable development of its “new knowledge economy,” the self-defeating nature of this approach, which would place one of the region’s key economic engines at a clear competitive disadvantage, is even more striking.

As calculated today, the amount of this tuition tax would range from $27 for a CCAC student to more than $400 for a CMU student, with the typical Pitt charge falling somewhere in between. That itself is a burden, and it is critical to remember that this is just today’s calculation. One week ago, the city administration was advocating for a tax tied to a percentage calculation that included not only tuition but also room and board charges and other fees, which would have produced an even higher number. And, if the city is allowed to collect 1 percent today, there is nothing that stands in the way of it collecting a higher percentage in the future.

Also, because the imposition of this tax is tied to the vague concept of the “privilege” of engaging in some activity within the borders of the City of Pittsburgh, there is almost no limit to what might become the target of future tax efforts. Even in the last few days, the mayor was considering, to give one other concrete example, the imposition of a tax on the privilege of receiving medical treatment in the city.

Two tellingly differing perspectives on the city’s authority to collect a tuition tax without legislative authorization were offered in an article in Wednesday [Nov. 11] morning’s edition of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. The chair of the Senate Education Committee stated clearly that such a tax could not be imposed without legislative approval. He then went on to say, “When the times already are tough for students and families, why would we add to this expense and why would Pittsburgh put itself at an economic disadvantage, particularly to tax an enterprise (higher education) that is actually working in their city?”

A Unified, Resounding “NO”

Eight local college and university presidents held a Nov. 10 news conference Downtown to voice their opposition to the mayor of Pittsburgh’s proposed 1 percent tax on the tuition of undergraduates attending institutions of higher learning in the City of Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education (PCHE) organized the conference and participants vowed to fight the proposed tax. “We cannot afford to have extra burdens placed upon our students,” said Pitt Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg (above). Behind Nordenberg, from left, are Candace Intorcio, La Roche College president; Mary Hines, Carlow University president and PCHE chair; and Paul Hennigan, Point Park University president.
The City of Pittsburgh’s Unfair Share Tax

The executive director of the House Finance Committee offered a different opinion. He stated that the city probably did not need state approval and noted that the Local Tax Enabling Act’s nickname was “the tax anything act.” If he is correct in his interpretation, that is the type of over-reaching legislation that every citizen should fear.

The member institutions of the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education have consulted with both tax counsel and a litigation counsel and are confident that the proposed tax cannot withstand legal challenge. Among other things, this means that the foundation upon which the city’s budget is being built is not sound. That is unfortunate for everyone who cares about the city.

Essentially, let me offer you a few additional thoughts. The mayor has labeled this a “Fair Share” tax. Viewed from a range of perspectives, though, this proposal is fundamentally unfair.

(1) The only real hole that needs to be filled in this budget is the one tied to the city’s large unfunded pension obligation. That problem is the product of generations of financial mutton-tenderness from city leaders. It hardly seems fair to now place the burden of dealing with that long-developing problem on the shoulders of the current generation of students.

(2) In presenting this tax, the mayor used a number of examples tied to the income and property taxes he pays and that certain council members pay and that ordinary citizens pay and suggests that students pay no such taxes in support of whatever services they may consume. However, fairness requires the acknowledgment that any student who lives and works in the city pays income taxes to the city and that any student who lives off-campus also pays property taxes—most of the time directly, through rent payments that support the taxes that landlords pay directly. In Pitt’s case, only one-quarter of our student body—roughly 25,000 out of 28,000—live on campus, and the city has long urged us to grow that number.

Other arguments advanced in support of this proposed tax also fail to fairly acknowledge the important service contributions made by our colleges and universities. At Pitt, for example, we maintain the third-largest police department in Allegheny County, and more than 80 percent of the citations issued and arrests made by that department are not University-related but, instead, are a product of the role we play in keeping the Oakland neighborhood safe for everyone. And since the proposal also provides for student-funded support of the public libraries, it seems only fair to acknowledge that Pitt maintains a collection larger than that of the Carnegie Libraries and that our collections are largely open to the public. Both community policing and University libraries, then, might be viewed as services paid for by Pitt students and provided to the city without any reimbursement being made.

(4) Returning to broader issues, this proposal can be viewed as unfair to anyone who is seeking cost-effectiveness in city government because it spurred the need for a closer look at the expense side of budget creation. The proposal also can be viewed as unfair to anyone who cares about Pittsburgh’s future because it places one of the region’s most important economic engines and employment sectors at a clear competitive disadvantage.

A thoughtful editorial in last Tuesday’s [Nov. 10] Pitt News closed with the following thought—if you didn’t vote, don’t complain about the tax—because you could have prevented it.” As one who never misses the chance to vote, I am sympathetic to that sentiment. On the other hand, “tuition tax” is not law yet. Instead, it is only a proposal—which means that there are continuing opportunities for interested persons, in addition to the institutions of the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education, to have an impact on an important law-making process that is still unfolding.

Pitt continues to be deeply committed to the city and makes many important contributions both to Pittsburgh’s economic strength and to its social vibrancy. Just this fall, in fact, the University was the country’s top-ranked public university in the Survey of Our Cities survey, assessing the impact of America’s “best neighbor universities” on their urban communities. We fully intend to continue contributing through our “demonstrated and documented long-standing cooperative efforts” to advance a broad range of important community initiatives. We also must continue to resist the imposition of the “tuition tax,” which is not authorized by existing law, is incompatible with 250 years of American legal tradition, and would undermine much of the very work that holds such promise for Pittsburgh as it moves further into the 21st century.
Selected Prints Exhibition From the Barry Rosensteel Japanese Prints Collection, Hillman Library, through December 19

Hillman Library, Selected Prints Exhibition From the Barry Rosensteel Japanese Prints Collection, through Dec. 19, Special Collections Department, third floor. Historical Exhibition of African American Progress at Pitt, ongoing, ground floor, 412-648-7710, 412-648-4190.


"Because It Was No, Because It Was Me: The Good Friends," Alexander Nehamas, the Edmund N. Carpenter II Chair in Humanities, Princeton University’s Department of Philosophy, 244 Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh. University Center of Excellence in Education Studies, www.ucce.pitt.edu.


Laura Bush, former First Lady, 8 p.m. Nov. 23, Heinz Hall, 600 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh. Public Health Forum of The Americas—In 7:30 p.m.

Jeffrey M. Rohay, Graduate School of Public Health’s Department of Biostatistics, “Statistical Assessment of Medication Adherence Data: A Technique to Analyze the I-Shapes of Data,” 7:30 p.m. Nov. 18, 308 Parran Hall.

Allison Longenberger, Graduate School of Public Health’s Department of Epidemiology, “Inference in Cross-Sectional Data: Comparison across the OCT Technology Generation and Models,” 3 p.m. Nov. 23, 2nd-floor conference room, 201 Lothrop St., Oakland.

Elizee Kenon, School of Public Health’s Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, “Public Health 2.0: An Analysis of Social Support Groups for Type 2 Diabetes on Web 2.0 Sites,” 2:30 p.m. Nov. 23, 2nd-floor conference room, Parran Hall.


Michael P. Hezel, School of Medicine’s Molecular Pharmacology Graduate Program, “LGMD-1C: Role of Caveolin-3 in Muscular Dystrophy,” Molecular Pharmacology Graduate Program, 10 a.m.


"Angels in the Dust," (2007), Louise Hogarth, documentary screening, 6 p.m. Nov. 15, Alisur Club, Global Health for a Healthy Student Association, Student Center for Global Health, tao@pitt.edu.

"Los Angeles no creen en Dios," (2007), Antonio Enguinno, film screening, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 19, 4153 Porker Hall, Global Health for a Healthy Student Association, Student Center for Global Health, tao@pitt.edu.

Critic Glesheen, Graduate School of Public Health’s Department of Epidemiology, “Exposure to Pre- and Postnatal Depression and Anxiety Symptom Trajectories: Effect on Adolescent Psychiatric Outcomes,” 2:30 p.m. Nov. 26, 160A Heinz Hall.

Down Secker, School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, “Engendered Genre: The Contemporary Russian Buddy Film,” 10 a.m. Nov. 23, 1218 Calumet of Learning.

Ji-Eun Shin, School of Medicine’s Cellular and Molecular Pathology Graduate Program, “Role of Focal Adhesion Protein Megillin in the Regulation of Cell Survival and Cell Cycle,” 2 p.m. Nov. 23, S123 Starzl Biomedical Science Tower.

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Concerts


Classic Mystery Tour-Music of the Beatles!, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 16, Byham Theater, 1016 Second St., Downtown, Cohen & Grigsby Trust Presents, 412-258-2700, info@augristhuiscenter.org.


Lectures/Seminars/Readings


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Exhibitions
Jazz!!!


PHOTOS BY JIM BURKE/CIDDE

PUBLICATION NOTICE: The next edition of Pitt Chronicle will be published Nov. 30. Items for publication in the newspaper’s Happenings calendar (see page 3) should be received at least two weeks before the event date. Happenings items should include the following information: title of the event, name and title of speaker(s), date, time, location, sponsor(s), and a phone number and Web site for additional information. Items may be e-mailed to chron@pitt.edu, faxed to 412-624-4895, or sent by campus mail to 422 Craig Hall. For more information, call 412-624-1033 or e-mail robinet@pitt.edu.