Chancellor, Board Chair, Advocates Make Case to Senate Panel: Pitt Needs Adequate Funding to Remain Essential Regional Asset

Advocates Lay Out the Details

University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg presented the University’s case for a restoration of adequate state funding during a Sept. 12 Pennsylvania Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on Pitt’s campus. The Chancellor made his remarks (see accompanying article) before a packed audience in Alumni Hall’s Connolly Ballroom.

In just a few months, the University of Pittsburgh will celebrate its 225th birthday. On Feb. 28, 1787, the Pennsylvania legislature breathed life into the institution that would become Pitt by chartering a frontier school then known as the Pittsburgh Academy. But it is another key anniversary, for Pitt and for Pennsylvania, that is even more directly relevant today.

Forty-five years ago, on Aug. 23, 1966, House Bill Number 2—sponsored by Democratic Representative, and later Speaker, K. Leroy Irvis—was signed into law by Republican Governor William Scranton. That bill converted Pitt, which to that point had been a private institution, into a public, state-related university. By then, of course, Pitt had grown from a log-cabin academy into a modern research university and had expanded to include four campuses outside of Pittsburgh—in Johnstown, Bradford, Greensburg, and Titusville.

With demand from a growing college-age population rising dramatically, the state faced the need to provide far higher numbers of reasonably priced university opportunities. It did so by turning to Pitt and Temple, two universities with established reputations and developed physical plants, eliminating the need either to build academic programs or to make the capital investments that “starting from scratch” with new campuses would have required.

The most obvious beneficiaries of Pitt’s new public status were the first wave of “baby boomers,” whose tuition obligations were steeply reduced. But another force also drove this legislation—a desire to invest in institutions that would fuel broader community growth. That goal was described in a 1966 resolution of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh, which declared: “We are all too familiar with the impetus that outstanding educational complexes have given to cultural and economic growth in other sections of the country. These have similar educational resources in Pittsburgh and wish to maintain and expand them.”

The mission of the Pittsburgh State and Temple—the state’s three public research universities—was best described in a state master plan issued in the mid-1980’s, shortly after the creation of the State System of Higher Education. That plan labeled these three universities as the “Commonwealth universities” and described their expected contributions in the following way: “Together, these institutions offer a broad range of educational programs and services and carry special responsibilities for research, advanced graduate instruction, and for education in the professions, including law, medicine, engineering, business, and agriculture. . . . The scope and quality of their programs and their geographic distribution permit them to serve the needs of the state and nation in the fields of undergraduate, graduate, and first professional education, research, and public service.”

That is a daunting mission. But Pitt now has been delivering on it for 45 years, with its record of impact and accomplishment growing dramatically over time. Let me briefly focus on the three key areas that I mentioned, beginning with education.

Education

In the year before Pitt became a state-related university, its student body included 13,962 in-state residents. This past academic year, 26,457 Pennsylvania students were enrolled in our programs. The total number of Pitt degrees awarded since we became a state-related university is 287,000, a measurable and meaningful return on the state’s investment in our University. Demand for admission to Pitt’s programs continues its dramatic climb, as do the records of academic strength presented by enrolled students. This means that we are keeping some of Pennsylvania’s very best students at home, increasing the likelihood that they ultimately will live and work and contribute here. It also means that we are attracting outstanding out-of-state students, who ultimately may choose to become Pennsylvanians.

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Research

Pitt’s impact in research may be even more striking. Since becoming state-related, our faculty have attracted a staggering $10.5 billion in research grants, and the rate of growth has been amazing. In the year that are far lower than those charged by private university peers and has maintained a significant differential between in-state and out-of-state tuition. Put another way, Pitt has delivered on its end of the agreement making it a state-related university.

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Chancellor, Board Chair, Advocates Make Case to Senate Panel
Nordenberg Addresses Crowded Alumni Hall and Speaks About Pitt’s Contributions

Pitt has played a lead role in creating virtually all of the region’s technology-based economic development initiatives. And just since the beginning of the new century, Pitt research has resulted in the issuance of 373 new patents, the execution of 628 new license or option agreements, and the creation of 67 new companies.

During the eight years of the previous administration, inflation rose by more than 20 percent; overall state spending increased by nearly 40 percent; and state support for basic education increased by more than 60 percent; but support for higher education remained flat. In 2008, the most current year for which data are available, Pennsylvania ranked 46th among the 50 states in terms of per capita spending for higher education. Pennsylvania’s per capita investment of $185.12 stood in stark contrast to the higher levels of funding provided by such neighboring states as Michigan ($258.28), New Jersey ($259.73), Delaware ($278.47), Connecticut ($295.46), West Virginia ($309.87), Maryland ($331.45), and New York ($331.54). To express that range in a somewhat different way, neighboring New York spent nearly 80 percent more per capita on higher education than Pennsylvania did.

These comparatively lower levels of state funding inevitably translate into dollar disadvantages for individual institutions and the people who depend upon them. Looking at state support as a percentage of total budget for institutions typically ranked with Pitt among the country’s top American research universities provides one set of relevant comparisons. Within that group, Berkeley stood at 26 percent, the University of Florida at 32 percent, North Carolina at 22 percent, and Wisconsin at 18 percent. At that time, Pitt was just slightly less than 10 percent, and the only university in that group ranked below it was Michigan at 7 percent. And that was before the drastic cuts that came in the state budget for the current fiscal year. The Governor first proposed that Pitt lose 30 percent of its general appropriation and 100 percent of our academic medical
As Pitt has demonstrated on many occasions, when collective sacrifices are required, we stand ready to do our fair share. But the 22 percent reduction in state support that we endured was dramatically disproportionate in a budget that cut overall state spending by 4 percent.

PAINTING THE PICTURE BY NUMBERS

Chart No. 1 (opposite page) shows the 10-year appropriations history, including this fiscal year’s precipitous drop, in the Commonwealth’s funding of the four state-related universities: Pitt, Penn State, Temple, and Lincoln. While the chart’s bars appear relatively flat (excluding this year), it is important to remember that both the Consumer Price Index Inflation and the state’s overall general fund budget increased significantly over these same 10 years. Charts No. 2 and 3 reflect these disparities.

Even more important, though, is what those numbers say about our sense of direction for this state that we call home. Without question, the numbers represent a retreat from the collective commitment to the education of the next generation of Pennsylvanians that was so visibly on display when Pitt was made a state-related university. They represent a dramatic reduction in support for institutions that are among the Commonwealth’s most significant generators of new ideas and technologies, even as we move further into a highly competitive century in which success will largely be defined by innovation.

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Addressing the committee on Pitt’s role as a provider of high-quality higher education were (from left) Chancellor Nordenberg; Molly Shober (A&S ’13), president of Pitt’s Student Government Board; Graham Holtfuß, Sheehy Family Professor and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professor; and Stephen Tisch (ENG’73, MBA’77), chair of the Pitt Board of Trustees.

Pitt Student Government Board president Molly Shober stands with Sen. Jake Corman, who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee. Shober’s eloquent and enthusiastic advocacy for Pitt during her testimony prompted several senators to ask, only half-jokingly, about her post-graduation employment plans.

This past budget, we were told, was driven by math. Put most simply, there was a huge state budget deficit to close, time was short, and those in charge essentially needed to make cuts wherever they could find the money. But this is a new budget-building year. Hopefully it can be a year in which more careful thought can be given to long-term consequences in charting the paths that we will be traveling together.

Moving Forward

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Stephen R. Tritch (ENG’71, MBA ’77) chair of Pitt’s Board of Trustees and retired Westinghouse chair and CEO, recalled for the committee how Pitt’s presence—both as a source of talent and as a research partner—played a role in Westinghouse remaining in the greater Pittsburgh area once it had outgrown its Monroeville location a few years ago. He also lauded the quality of education he received at the University.

“… I want to stress, as the Chancellor has, that the University never expected to be exempt from the sacrifices that all must share in these difficult economic times,” Tritch added. “However, we also did not expect to be targeted for such a disproportionate share of the Commonwealth’s budget-cutting responsibilities. Looking back at my own circumstances as a college student, I am left with the fear that we seem to be abandoning the next generation of students with high potential who come from families of modest means. And looking back on my experiences as the CEO of an important business that is heavily dependent on well-educated human talent to drive the progress of its business, I worry that we seem to be retreating from support of the very institutions that will help fuel our collective success in the 21st-century economy.

“I know that the members of this committee have been strong supporters of Pennsylvania’s other research universities. I can only hope that you will make the restoration of their appropriations to more reasonable levels of funding a high priority as you begin building the Commonwealth’s budget for the next fiscal year and for many years to come,” Tritch said.

Joining Tritch in addressing the committee about Pitt’s role as a provider of high-quality higher education were Molly Steiber, president of Pitt’s Student Government Board; and Graham Hartfull, Eberly Family Professor, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professor, and former chair of the School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Biological Sciences. A second panel, which discussed Pitt’s roles as one of the nation’s leading research universities and a driver of regional economic development, included Dennis Yablonsky, CEO of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development; Jared Cohon; and D. Lassing Taylor, director of the University’s Drug Discovery Institute and the Allegheny Foundation Professor in the School of Medicine. (Tritch is chair of Pitt’s Board of Trustees and the retired chair and CEO of Westinghouse.)

“… I want to stress, as the Chancellor has, that the University never expected to be exempt from the sacrifices that all must share in these difficult economic times. However, we also did not expect to be targeted for such a disproportionate share of the Commonwealth’s budget-cutting responsibilities.”—Stephen Tritch

For the full statement of each of the six panelists, please go to www.progress.pitt.edu/.
PITT ARTS Program Offers Five ‘Pitt Nights’

By Sharon S. Blake

PITT ARTS—the University of Pittsburgh program that connects the Pitt community to the city’s cultural life through deeply discounted event tickets—has scheduled five Pitt Nights for this academic year.

These outings—open to Pitt faculty, staff, and students—include optional free transportation, a dessert reception, and a chance to meet some of each arts event’s key performers. As long as a member of the Pitt community is purchasing the tickets and attending the event, he or she may bring a non-Pitt guest.

The 2011-12 schedule follows.

**Pitt Night with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra**

5:30 p.m., Jan. 28, Pittsburgh Public Theater, O'Reilly Theater, 621 Penn Ave., Downtown

A rosy glow of enchanted love follows the young talents to emerge in Cajun or Creole music. A fiddler, vocalist, accordionist and songwriter, Watson revives old Creole fiddling styles, injected with a healthy dose of his own personality. Tickets start at $17.

**Pitt Night with Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre**

7:30 p.m. Feb. 8, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Porch Bar, 601 Wood St., Downtown

Cedric Watson is one of the most noted young talents to emerge in Cajun or Creole music. A fiddler, vocalist, accordionist and songwriter, Watson revives old Creole fiddling styles, injected with a healthy dose of his own personality. Tickets start at $17.

**Pitt Night with the University of Pittsburgh’s Asian Studies Center**

7:30 p.m. Feb. 8, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Porch Bar, 601 Wood St., Downtown

Hiroyuki Good, Japanese bibliographer, Pitt East Asian Library, “An Update on Japanese Studies Resources at the University of Pittsburgh”.

**Pitt Night with the Pittsburgh Public Theater**

7:30 p.m., Mar. 17, 8 p.m., Bellefield Hall Auditorium, 555 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh

Hiroyuki Good, Japanese bibliographer, Pitt East Asian Library, “An Update on Japanese Studies Resources at the University of Pittsburgh”.

**Pitt Night with the University of Pittsburgh’s Asian Studies Center**

7:30 p.m. Mar. 17, 8 p.m., Bellefield Hall Auditorium, 555 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh

Hiroyuki Good, Japanese bibliographer, Pitt East Asian Library, “An Update on Japanese Studies Resources at the University of Pittsburgh.”

**Pitt Night with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra**

Pitt Night with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Triple Beethoven, 8 p.m. Sept. 30, Heinz Hall, 600 Penn Ave., Downtown

The all-female, Grammy-nominated Eroica Trio makes its BNY Mellon Grand Classics debut performing Beethoven’s seldom-programmed Triple Concerto for violin, cello, and piano with the Pittsburgh Symphony and music director Manfred Honeck. Then Honeck and the Orchestra play the 7th Symphony.

**Pitt Night with the University of Pittsburgh’s Asian Studies Center**

7:30 p.m. Apr. 29, 8 p.m., Bellefield Hall Auditorium, 555 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh

Hiroyuki Good, Japanese bibliographer, Pitt East Asian Library, “An Update on Japanese Studies Resources at the University of Pittsburgh.”
The signature spiral arms of the Milky Way galaxy were likely formed by an epic collision between the Milky Way and the Sagittarius Dwarf galaxy, according to a University of Pittsburgh researcher and his collaborators whose findings were published last week in the prestigious British journal Nature.

The results of supercomputer simulations by Christopher W. Purcell, postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Physics and Astronomy in Pitt’s School of Arts and Sciences, and colleagues were reported in a paper titled “The Sagittarius Impact as an Architect of Spirality and Outer Rings in the Milky Way.”

This paper is the first to identify Sagittarius as the architect of spiral structure in our Milky Way: “It presents a new and somewhat unexpected way of thinking about why the galaxy we live in looks the way it does,” says Purcell. “Cosmologically speaking, it demonstrates the idea that relatively small impacts like this can have a dramatic impact on the structure of galaxies throughout the universe,” he adds.

This idea had been assumed theoretically, but never demonstrated.

Purcell’s collaborators include University of California High-Performance AstroComputing Center (UC-HIPACC)-affiliates James S. Bullock, Erik J. Tollerud, and Miguel Rocha, all at the University of California at Irvine. The fifth coauthor is Sukanya Chakrabarti at Florida Atlantic University.

In the field of cosmology, supercomputer simulations are the only laboratories for scientific experimentation. With supercomputers, astronomers can recreate a small-scale simulation or model of distant, violent events that occurred over billions of years and observe that model in sped-up time in order to make predictions that can be tested by actual observations of the universe.

Purcell’s findings are based on supercomputer simulations he conducted for his PhD at the University of California, Irvine, and in the lab of Pitt professor of physics and astronomy Andrew Zentner.

Interestingly, Purcell’s simulations revealed that even more important than the stars of the Sagittarius Dwarf was its halo of invisible “dark matter”—equal in mass to all the stars in the Milky Way.

Visible matter makes up less than five percent of the universe, while nearly a quarter of the universe is made of transparent dark matter. Its existence is felt only through its gravitational influence. It is now known that every galaxy, including the Sagittarius Dwarf (precollision) and our own Milky Way, resides at the center of a giant halo of dark matter several times larger in radius and many times greater in mass.

“When all the dark matter smashed into the Milky Way, 80 to 90 percent of it was stripped off,” Purcell says. That first impact—more than two billion years ago—produced instabilities that were quickly amplified, eventually forming the spiral arms and ring structures in the outskirts of our own galaxy.

In his dissertation, Purcell focused on the question: What effects have the repeated collisions with the Sagittarius Dwarf had on the Milky Way?

Throughout the past few decades, conventional wisdom has been that the Milky Way was relatively unperturbed for the past several million years. Whatever spiral structure exists, these arms were just a result of the Milky Way disc evolving in isolation.

Since the Sagittarius Dwarf was discovered, astronomers have tried to match up debris from that galaxy to what they saw in the universe. In 2003, infrared telescopes and supercomputers that traced the orbital motions of its stars has revealed that the Milky Way was relatively unperturbed for the past several million years. Whatever spiral structure exists, these arms were just a result of the Milky Way disc evolving in isolation.

The simulations also revealed that the collision set up instabilities—fluctuations in density of stars—in the flat disk of the rotating Milky Way. Our galaxy rotates faster toward its center than toward its edges, so these instabilities were stretched and sheared, leading to the formation of spiral arms.

The simulations also revealed that the impact gave rise to ring-like structures found at the edges of our galaxy. The second impact affected the Milky Way less, giving rise to only milder, less dense spiral-forming waves, because the Sagittarius Dwarf had by then lost most of its dark matter mass. Without the dark matter to hold the dwarf galaxy together, its visible stars began to be pulled apart by the Milky Way’s huge gravitational field and tidal forces.

The dominant cosmology in astrophysics is one that’s very violent on small scales. Galaxies like the Milky Way are constantly being bombarded by these small dwarf galaxies. It had not been appreciated prior to our work just how dramatic those impacts could be on the stellar disc itself,” says Purcell.

“We expected to find some more subtle signatures of an impact like this—a flare in the outer disc, like bell-bottom jeans. We expected to see some mild morphological changes to the Milky Way. But we did not expect to see a spiral structure begin to emerge as a result of these impacts. That was something we didn’t foresee.”

Indeed, Purcell and collaborators delayed publication for several months while they made sure they understood why they were seeing these results. “We had to convince ourselves that we weren’t crazy,” he jokes.

Today, long streamers of stars from the dismembered dwarf galaxy arch over and around the Milky Way, and “right now, billions and billions of dark matter particles from the Sagittarius Dwarf are raining down onto the Earth,” said Purcell.

“Meantime, the Sun itself is revolving around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy, in a complex and still-evolving system of multiple spiral arms.”

We’re just a few million years short of a third impact, Purcell says. But how can the researchers tell?

“We can tell when we look toward the center of the Milky Way,” says Purcell. “Immediately on the opposite side of us, we can see this blob of stars crashing into the southern face of the disc from beneath. We can measure the velocities of these stars. We know that the dwarf galaxy is just about to smash the disc—in only another 10 million years.”

The University of California High-Performance AstroComputing Center (UC-HIPACC), based at the University of California at Santa Cruz, is a consortium of all the University of California campuses, three Department of Energy laboratories (Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, and Los Alamos National Laboratory), and NASA Ames Research Center.
Happenings


Lectures/ Seminars/ Readings

“Disparities in Healthcare for Minorities: Institutional or Personal?” Jeannette South-Paul, Andrew W. Mellon Professor and chair of Pitt’s Department of Family Medicine, noon Sept 19, Pitt School of Social Work Conference Center, 20th floor, Cathedral of Learning, Pitt Center on Race and Social Problems’ Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC Fall 2011 Speaker Series, 412-624-7382.


“How Can We Be Moral When We Are So Irrational?” Nili-Eric Sahlin, Center for Philosophy of Science Visiting Fellow, professor of philosophy at Lund University, The Netherlands, 12:05 p.m. Sept 20, Pitt Center for Philosophy of Science’s Lunchtime Talks, 8717 Cathedral of Learning, 412-624-1052, www.pitt.edu/picit.

“Genes, Genomes, and the Future of Medicine,” Richard P. Lifton, chair, Department of Genetics, Yale University School of Medicine, noon Sept 22, Scalf Hall Auditorium, 6, Pitt Senior Vice Chancellor’s Laureate Lecture Series, 412-383-7382, www.health.pitt.edu.

Concerts


Vance Gilbert, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Sept 23

University Art Gallery, On a Lucky Day a Surprising Balance of Forms and Spaces Will Appear, through October 21

Miscellaneous

“Library of the Early Mind: A Grown-up Look at the Art of Children’s Literature,” Edward J. Delany, 2010), documentary screened by Pitt’s School of Information Sciences, 6 p.m. Sept 22, Carnegie Museum of Art Theater, 4400 Forbes Ave, free and open to the public, reservations required at kis@pitt.edu.


Wicked, Benedum Center, through October 2

University Art Gallery, On a Lucky Day a Surprising Balance of Forms and Spaces Will Appear, through October 21

The performance is free, but tickets should be reserved at kis@pitt.edu.


Race by David Mamet, described as an incendiary story about perceptions and realities, and the subtle shades between being a victim and being victimized, through Oct 2, Sept 21, 1212 Smallman St, Strip District, 412-454-6000, www.heinzhistorycenter.org.

Pitt PhD Dissertation Defenses

Mary L. Groner, School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Biological Sciences, 9 a.m. Sept 19, “Effects of Multiple Stressors on the Dynamics of a Fungal Pathogen Associated With Global Amphibian Declines,” A221 Langley Hall.

David A. Bell, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, 2 p.m. Sept 19, “The Linkage Between Organizational Behavior and Donor Capital Volatility: The Case of Microfinance Capital Flow in Sierra Leone,” 3200 Posvar Hall.


Pitt’s Center for Latin American Studies to Present “The Americas—In Concert” Oct 1

Grammy-winning Latin pianist Octavio Brunetti and his band, the Octavio Brunetti Quintet, will be bringing tango to Pittsburgh as part of the fourth annual “The Americas—In Concert.”

The Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) in Pitt’s University Center for International Studies will present the free public concert at 7:30 p.m. Oct 1 in the Richard Rauh Theater in the Hillman Center for Performing Arts at the Shady Side Academy Senior School, 423 Fox Chapel Rd.

Created by tango pianist and arranger Brunetti, the Octavio Brunetti Quintet combines traditional Argentine tango with the style of the Tango Nuevo. The quintet has performed in some of Argentina’s best-known venues, including the famous Teatro Colon and Teatro San Martin in Buenos Aires and Teatro San Martin in Cordoba.

“The Americas—In Concert” is a series of annual concerts sponsored by Med Health Services and Pittsburgh Cardiovascular Institute in collaboration with CLAS to promote the development of local and national professional musicians while exposing Pittsburgh’s audiences to the musical works of the Americas.

The performance is free, but tickets should be reserved by visiting www.pcoartstickets.org/events/buy/909/40/tid:2584.

For more information, visit www.ucis.pitt.edu/clas/events/americas.html or contact CLAS at 412-648-7394.

—By Audrey M. Marks
Daily Dose of Common Antibiotic Makes Acute COPD Episodes Less Frequent, Study Says

By Anita Srikameswaran

A multicenter team that includes researchers from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine has found that patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) had fewer episodes of acute worsening of their lung disease and a better quality of life if they took a daily dose of a commonly used antibiotic. The findings were reported in Aug. 25 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

Even patients who are treated with standard bronchodilator and steroid inhalers to control COPD symptoms commonly have one or more flare-ups of the disease each year, which means more doctor and hospital visits, lost work days, and reduced lung function, explained Frank Sciurba, a professor of medicine in Pitt’s School of Medicine and a leader of the local arm of the study.

The study was conducted by the COPD Clinical Research Network and led by Richard K. Albert of the University of Colorado Denver Health Sciences Center. More than 1,100 COPD patients from 17 sites in 12 academic centers participated in the trial. About half of the participants were randomly assigned to take the macrolide antibiotic azithromycin every day for a year, while the rest took a placebo daily for the same time period. The Pitt arm enrolled 91 participants.

The median time to first COPD exacerbation was 266 days in the azithromycin group and 174 days in the placebo group. Also, exacerbations occurred 27 percent less frequently in the azithromycin group. There was a slightly greater likelihood of hearing problems in the azithromycin group, which is a known risk of prolonged use of the antibiotic, and the presence of antibiotic-resistant organisms was detected in some patients, although the infection rate was not higher.

More research needs to be done to assess the safety of using azithromycin in COPD patients for longer than a year, and it's not clear what impact that might have on antibiotic resistance, said trial co-investigator John Reilly, a professor of medicine in Pitt’s School of Medicine.

According to National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, COPD affects more than 12 million people in the United States and is now the third-leading cause of death in the United States. There currently is no cure, though a combination of drugs and lifestyle changes can help manage the symptoms.