State budget discussions continue

A state budget discussions continue in Harrisburg, legislation awaiting final approval in the state Senate would cut Pitt’s general appropriation by 15 percent.

Although the $142.8 million proposal represents the Senate’s goal of reducing some of the 50 percent cut Gov. Tom Corbett proposed for Pitt, Paul Supowitz, vice chancellor for Governmental Relations, cautioned that the budget debate is still in progress.

“The fact is not that clear that this will be the final number,” he said.

Virtual desktops

Technology yields savings

Several virtual computing initiatives are underway at Pitt, with an aim to simplify access to computing resources while cutting costs — both for users and for the University.

Virtual computing is gaining popularity across higher education, with many schools piloting various projects, said Computing Services and Systems Development director Jim Walton.

Pitt has already made several applications through the faculty computing program, which enables faculty to use a number of software packages on or off campus without downloading the programs to their own machines, Walton said, adding that faculty, staff and students will be seeing more virtual computing options in the coming academic year, including virtual servers, virtual computer labs and virtual desktops.

UCSUR’s early adaptor

While many University departments are showing interest, Jim Lefcakis, information technology director for the University Center for Social and Urban Research, said his center was the first to be virtualizing desktops — replacing desktop computers with monitors and small machines called thin (or zero) clients.

A virtual desktop enables a computer user to access the resources available at the office from anyplace with Internet access, while the data remains secure on Pitt’s network.

Any device with connectivity will work — a laptop, iPad or even a smartphone — although it’s more practical if the device is equipped with a keyboard, Lefcakis said.

Several companies offer the software but UCSUR uses VMware, which Lefcakis said has been in the virtualization ware business the longest.

An employee who has to leave the office in the middle of a project can click on the VM client to disconnect the work from the desktop and reconnect it to pick up where he or she left off, using an iPad or other device at home or elsewhere, he explained.

For example, Lefcakis said, a coder from an UCSUR lab who performs data analysis is losing their connection then checking it back in when they have Internet access again, he said.

Users who may need multiple software setups can have several virtual desktops, allowing them to simply log into the configuration that’s needed, rather than needing different desktop machines, he said.

There’s even an option for users who want to continue their work offline — perhaps on an airplane or in a remote area. They can “check out” a desktop before losing their connection then check it back in when they have Internet access again, he said.

The virtual technology will be put to the test during UCSUR’s move this summer. Its current home, the University Place building, is slated for demolition to make way for a new freshman dorm.

Faculty and staff who use the virtual environment should experience no downtime during UCSUR’s move. Instead of having to take users offline, “We’ll have 100 percent availability,” Lefcakis said.

By setting up thin servers in UCSUR’s new offices on Forbes Avenue, employees will be able to “leave work here one day, then go to another place the next day” without interruption.

The Oakland Farmers’ Market returns July 8, with a dozen or so vendors featuring homegrown and homemade local products such as fresh produce, cut flowers, herbs, honey, eggs, fresh-baked bread, vegan and whole-food items, all-natural beef and ethnic delectables.

The market will be held noon-4 p.m. on Fridays through Nov. 18 on Sennott Street between Arwood Street and Meyran Avenue. Free parking is available in the adjacent UPMC lot.

Pittsite among many community partners sponsoring the farmers’ market with the Oakland Business Improvement District. Information on the farmers’ market is available at http://oaklandfarmersmarket.org/*this-years-vendors/*by calling 412-683-6243 ext. 19.

The University also sponsors a Farms to Pitt program, run by Isidore Foods, that enables University employees to subscribe to a weekly delivery of fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products from local farms.

The program, launched in 2007, offers fresh products delivered directly from area farms to designated locations on the Pitts- burgh campus. Subscribers pay a fee in advance then receive farm-fresh products weekly through October. For more information on the Farms to Pitt program, visit www.isidorefoods.com or call 412/400-4721.

—Peter Hart
5 faculty awarded Distinguished Professors

Pitt has honored five faculty members with Distinguished Professors, one as a Distinguished University Professor and four as Distinguished Professors.

The honorees and their titles are:

1. William E. Klonk, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry, from the School of Medicine.
2. Barbara DelRaso, Distinguished Professor of Neuroscience, from the School of Medicine.
3. Robert Perloff, Distinguished Professor of Neurobiology, from the School of Medicine.
4. Richard P. Blum, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Business Administration and of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, University of Pittsburgh.
5. Joseph M. Katz, Graduate School of Business

To mark the occasion of the appointment of the distinguished professors, the following colleagues and friends of the honorees will deliver remarks:

To the editor:

Upon learning of the demise of our colleague of long term, the inimitable, much loved, and ultimately acclaimed novelist, “Irish Wine,” was set aside 162 times over a wretched 25 years, my mind, drawn to the excruciating rejections endured by the professors, inspired me to forge a list of anecdotes about successful writers who would not take for an answer as they resolutely and indefatigably stayed in the game, among whom the following illustrations stand out: "This Side of Paradise," by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1920), about whom the publisher said, "It seems to us in short that this story does not cultivate with anything?"; “The Diary of Anne Frank” (1947), who was described as “The girl who [doesn’t] have a special perception or feeling which would lift that book above the curiosity level”, “The Spy Who Came in From the Cold” (1963), about whom the publisher said, "It seems to us in short that this story does not cultivate with anything?"; and "In the Snakespit nau-yay-sayers."
That's something new as well. The event "meet the SAC representatives event." do and what we're about. opportunity to know who we are, what we installation ceremony for the newly elected We've started doing that by having an successes of SAC, but also to put our own with senior administration to address the have concerns, I want to hear about them. officers — we don't have a lot of time on administration — myself and the other three you're a relative newcomer to SAC, they're doing the job that they were hired for their children instead of for themselves. because of the educational benefits available a lot of our staff because I'm finding out the salary I earn. of SAC's new standing committee, the staff mentoring program committee, of during her days on the campus police force, Walker helped develop several Under my leadership, SAC will work to give a voice of shared governance to with senior administration to address the. We don't know yet how about it it will play out. I think the University administration is doing a good job, a wonderful job, really. It's too early to tell exactly what will happen to us, we need to have an attitude of let's wait and see. I'm very confident that our senior administration is going to do what's best for the University and that impacts staff as well. Are you looking forward to your term as SAC president? You're very new. I think the executive board this will be my slogan to begin with: "We are going to plan our work and then work our plan." Yes we can, yes we will.
Virtual desktops equal real savings for UCSUR

Virtual labs

First on CSSD’s agenda in the fall term is to offer virtual physical labs for Pitt students, Walton said.

Students will benefit because they will have access to powerful software that would be too expensive to purchase on their own and too dangerous to load onto their personal computers, Walton said. Virtual labs also will give students the option either to sit physically in a Pitt computer lab — which at peak times may have 24 seats available for a seat — or to choose “to visit” the lab virtually from a remote location.

In addition, being convergent, Walton said virtual labs will be cost-effective for the University. While there are no plans to eliminate physical computer labs on campus, offering virtual access means Pitt won’t need to add to the existing facilities. “We will maintain our labs but this will keep us from needing to expand our labs,” Walton said.

Virtual labs also can help cut software costs, enabling Pitt to look at other licensing models rather than needing University-wide licenses for virtual software, she said.

While Pitt offers about 130 software packages for its labs, not all will be available immediately in virtual labs, but Walton said the plan is initially to launch a handful of them and then increase the virtual offerings as finances allow.

Lefcakis said UCSUR is converting some of its labs as well, which, because they will be virtual, even could be “loaned” to other departments in short-term need of computing resources on which to run their projects.

And, if a client wants to enter his or her own lab or a lab that the University analyzes it, “we can spin up a virtual lab” that enables the client or his own or the University’s data entry, yet send it securely.

Virtual desktops

Virtual desktops will be an option for more University employees in the coming academic year, Walton said, noting that CSSD has equipment in place that can be used to support virtual desktop environments.

In addition to enabling people to work remotely, virtual labs and desktops provide security advantages, she said. “We are able to create the environment where the software resides and structure the security around it.”

Users of confidential information would access it in a controlled way — with University firewalls and security infrastructure, security and storage, but when multiplied across multiple machines, financial advantages enter the equation.

She had no estimate of the potential cost savings that could be achieved University-wide.

Virtual servers

Walton noted that virtual servers are another cost-saving area of interest. Virtual servers enable researchers to expand and contract based on need. Because the servers aren’t physical, they can add or subtract peak times as needed.

“She makes sense when you need new servers to look at VMware,” Walton said.

UCSUR is a case in point. Lefcakis said he has been able to cut 30 servers down to six with VMware.

When is real better?

Virtual desktops may not be for everyone, particularly for researchers who need especially powerful computing resources.

“Not everything works in a virtual environment but it’s improving,” Walton said, noting that researchers are being nudged to explore their possibilities to the best of their abilities.

“Virtual desktops may be impractical for some for faculty who need highly specialized desktops,” but “the virtual desktops it has potential to save other resources,” he said.

Another pay freeze looming?

The potential impact a 15 percent cut could have on Pitt employees remains unclear. Fedele told the University Times, “It is not productive to attempt to predict the specific impact of a funding level while the legislative process is still playing out.”

Following cuts of 6 percent from its state appropriation in 2009, the University implemented a salary freeze for FY10.

Pitt’s state appropriation was held flat for FY11, but University trustees last July approved a 3 percent salary pool increase for the current fiscal year.

The University Planning and Budgeting Committee (UPBC) in January 2004, is the most frequently cited research paper on Alzheimer’s imaging, can now be used by the University to study the disease.

Klunk also was a member of the team that invented Pittsburgh Compound B, a radioactive substance that, when coupled with PET imaging, can be injected into an Alzheimer’s patient’s blood in place — without actually loading or copying the data onto their machines, eliminating the danger that could arise should a laptop containing sensitive information be lost or stolen.

Other benefits

Beyond increasing convenience for users, UCSUR’s Lefcakis said virtual machines make life easier for IT staff and cut costs.

“Working on virtual machines requires a shift in mindset,” Walton said. “You’re not longer fixing a computer, you’re fixing a file that replaces a computer,” he said.

But there are many advantages.

Reliability and security remain high because the data remain on Pitt’s network, Lefcakis said. And recovering data or fixing viruses becomes easier because data can be restored by rolling back to an earlier point in time, eliminating what otherwise could be a time-consuming chore and downtime.

Lefcakis said the changes already have saved UCSUR thousands of dollars and enabled it to reduce its hardware budget by 40 percent.

The cost of the initial infrastructure roughly equates to the cost of 10 computers, he estimated, but the investment soon pays off. The thin client boxes cost about $150 and have a lifespan of about 10 years, compared to computers that can cost $1,000 each and need replacing in three-five years, he said.

Once the infrastructure is built, the cost of refreshing labs essentially is eliminated — all the data can be updated in hours rather than days, he said. Rather than reconfiguring each machine, “I do it one time and it propagates to all devices.”

There’s also a green aspect to virtual desktops. They save on electricity and cooling costs because they don’t use as much power, nor do they generate as much heat, Lefcakis said.

Walton agreed that startup costs are high, requiring server equipment to be purchased. “You sacrifice some of the current fiscal year’s budget has not been finalized.

One potential disadvantage of virtual labs is that students may need to travel to physical classrooms, and the benefits realized could be limited.

Walton agreed that startup costs are high, requiring server equipment to be purchased.

The University is showing interest,” she said, adding that many departments are considering them. Due to the investment involved, many are moving to virtual servers when existing physical servers need to be replaced, she said. “It makes sense when you need new servers to look at VMware.”

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戮 lifetime of transplantation work

“O

ur goal in life is really not to avoid death — that’s not possible — but to try to cheat death as much as possible,” said professor of surgery Ron Shapiro, as he celebrated his appointment as a clinical fellow in transplant surgery. Shapiro came to Pitt in 1986 as a clinical fellow in transplant surgery under Thomas E. Starzl. He was recruited to Pitt by Starzl and was chief of surgery when Shapiro was a young faculty member.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the first anti-rejection regimes used azathioprine — a failed cancer drug. “Dr. Simmons and Starzl were the first to try it,” said Shapiro. Shapiro’s group’s work over the past two decades has included reducing and avoiding complications such as infections and lymphoma. Shapiro credited his own mentors for giving him the “ability to think laterally.”

Shapiro said the University’s transplant center was “a huge group effort,” crediting close relations between nephrologists and surgeons, the dedication of pathologists and scientists, team members including nurses and research coordinators, and fellows of the Starzl Institute program. “And at the end of the day, it kind of doesn’t matter how many papers you write or how many talks you give, but what really matters is what you learn and what you do,” said Shapiro.

Shapiro credited his own mentors, including former chief of surgery Richard Simmons, who was recruited to Pitt by Starzl and was chief of surgery when Shapiro was a young faculty member. In addition to being “a great surgeon and a very thoughtful and analytical individual,” Shapiro said, “he was one of the greatest and Starzl formed a formidable team.

Starzl’s list of accomplishments is lengthy but his most interesting aspect is a mentor that he is,” said Shapiro. “He is the mentor of his generation, and I have no doubt that he will be the mentor of his generation.”

Shapiro is the University’s first alumnus director-at-large of the Pitt Transplantation Institute. The University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR) has announced the winners of the 11th annual D. Steven Manners Faculty Development Awards. The awards were established in memory of the center’s assistant director, who died in 2000. UCSUR offers annual awards in two categories: research development grants to support pilot research in the social, behavioral and policy sciences, and infrastructure development awards aimed at enhancing faculty capabilities to carry out interdisciplinary research in the social, behavioral and policy sciences.

This year’s winners are:

- John E. D. Nicholl, assistant professor in the Department of Industrial and Environmental Occupational Health at the Graduate School of Public Health, for the project, “Adapting Geospatial Modeling Methods to Assess Individual-Level Variability in Urban Chronic Stress.”

Clougherty and her co-investigators propose a novel adaptation of spatial modeling methods developed for air pollution epidemiology known as “land-use regression,” or LUR, to predict individual-level stress as a function of community-level stressors. The “stress LUR” models will enable exploration of the proportion of individual-level chronic stress that may be attributable to community stressors, identification of key community stressors most associated with individual stress experience, and — if the models predict individual stress — the extrapolation of chronic stress exposure estimates across large urban cohorts for epidemiological analyses.

- Fengyan Tang, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, for the project, “Retirement Transition, Volunteer Engagement and Physical Health.”

Current cohorts of older adults are engaging productively in increasing amounts of paid work and volunteer activity. This study will use the Health and Retirement Study (1998-2008) panel data to investigate the dynamic process of retirement transitions, associated changes in volunteer engagement during such transitions and relationships to physical health changes among older adults. This study also will examine group differences based on gender, race and social class and contextual effects of birth cohorts and time periods, with a focus on the relationship between productive engagement and physical health change.

-Peter Hart

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-Peter Hart
Pitt is known as an urban university, but students at Falk Laboratory School are working to enhance a small enclave of nature on the sloping hillside that adjoins their school.

In conjunction with the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania’s schoolground habitat enhancement and restoration program (SHERP), Falk students, teachers and families are turning the steep site above University Drive into an outdoor classroom where students not only can learn about science and nature, but also pause to reflect and study in a natural setting.

Eventually we want the space to be used when they need a spot to read a good book or to make observations for journal entries," said Lori Wertz, an intermediate teacher and special projects director who is coordinating the work. Wertz said she has a strong desire to help kids connect with nature. "It was important to me growing up," she said, adding that children tend to have a natural affinity for the outdoors, but are at risk of losing it if it’s not encouraged.

Wertz said teacher training will benefit as well. While School of Education interns assigned to Falk School will gain experience by using the site for outdoor education, she’s hoping eventually to develop workshops to show other new teachers how to incorporate the outdoors into lessons on science or environmental education.

She and other teachers had been wanting to bring SHERP to the Falk School grounds as long as eight years ago, in order to enhance students’ outdoor studies. Teachers initially sought to use the green space adjoining the building, but plans to enlarge the school nixed that idea — the expanded school building now sits atop that space.

"It’s the only green space we have now," Wertz said, "People want to make it work." Students loved the idea, Wertz said, adding that they had a hard time waiting to get started. During the 2008-09 school year, initial planning began. The following year, Audubon naturalists trained teachers and helped students assess the site. Invasive plants were cleared so students could collect data — testing soil, compiling plant inventories and a tree index, and identifying wildlife habitats.

Weekend workdays included Falk family members who cleared trash, removed invasive honeysuckle, grapevine and garlic mustard and cleared a path.

A natural trail emerged beneath the overgrown vines, and a map was created, marking meandering footpaths, major trees and stands of plant life, and identifying areas where seating will be added. Students helped decide on the kinds of plants they wanted to see and the types of animals they hoped to attract.

As for wildlife, some of the youngest students were hoping for lions or tigers, but learned that their woodland is more amenable to other kinds of creatures. The slope already is home to songbirds, rabbits and groundhogs; neighbors have reported that a gray fox frequents the site.

Red-tailed hawks have been seen, and a peregrine — likely from the nearby Cathedral of Learning nest site — often perches in the schoolground’s large oak.

The site is populated mainly with hardwood trees including locust, oak, maple, elm, box elder, black cherry and hawthorn, as well as some white pine and Eastern hemlock. Wildflowers include star of Bethlehem, goldenrod, wild geranium and woodland buttercup.

“What is already here is really just a treasure," Wertz said.

Some new plants and shrubs will be added — SHERP requires they all be native varieties. Wertz said planting will begin in fall. New trees will include viburnum, holly, beech, dogwood, ironwood, red maple, nannyberry, redbud, dogwood and spruce. Raspberry, rhododendron, spicebush, serviceberry and a variety of forest and meadow herbaceous plants also will be added.

Wertz said she is trying to ensure all classrooms — from kindergarten to 8th grade — are involved in some way. Some 36 hours of work/class days were completed for the project in 2010 and 90 hours during the 2011
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Older students learned to level trails or took pride in saving trees and shrubs that were being strangled by vines. Some built benches for trailside seating.

Even the youngest students were given hand tools and small rakes so they could help clear a seating area, she said. The going was slow as raking was balanced with inspecting interesting bugs, but that’s all part of the learning.

The process of clearing the trail offered Falk students some benefits beyond experiencing the natural world. Wertz said early in the project, students were dismayed at the amount of trash they found as they cleared pathways.

One entrance to the slope is easily accessible, situated at the rear of the SC parking lot between the school’s basketball court and several University fraternity houses. While it was never determined exactly who was responsible for the litter, the Falk students wrote letters directed at the Pitt student body — expressing their desire to share the site, but also asking them not to trash their outdoor classroom. The response to the letters and to a subsequent project presentation was unanticipated. Not only has the littering abated, Wertz said, but one fraternity is partnering with Falk as part of an adopt-a-schol program, and several Pitt students are working to obtain the necessary clearances required to work with the children. Others also have expressed an interest in helping with the project.

Exactly who may use the site remains a question. Recognizing the value of a quiet woodland path, Wertz said the inclination is to share it with the University community. "Our students and University students use the site at different times," she noted. "The general rule would be that during school hours the site is for Falk students, afterwards it's okay if University students use it," she said, adding that the policy could be changed based on trial and error.

While a dedication for the nature trail is planned for next spring, Wertz said the project never will be completed.

"Maintenance is always going to be there," she said, noting that although Pitt grounds employees may assist after storms or to conduct major pruning, "It's our project to maintain."

Given the speed with which invasive plants take over, until a summer maintenance schedule is established, Wertz said she foresees that the start of each school year will be accompanied by efforts to redefine the trails. "That's part of the learning that goes with it." Along with maintenance, students will monitor the plantings to see which did well and which didn't. "It's going to be a lot of work," she said. "We don't want kids to think of it as an environmental education place, but this is our hillside. We have woods and everything that comes with it."

Wertz said faculty and staff interested in volunteering for trail work or site maintenance should contact her at lwertz@pitt.edu. Donations in support of the project can be made through the Pitt Annual Fund by specifying the Falk School Education Fund/SHERP project. Additional information on the project is available at www.falkschool.pitt.edu.

—Kimberly K. Barlow

Above: The meandering paths offer several views of the Cathedral of Learning.

Left: The rustic pathways of Falk School’s nature trail are well hidden from traffic on University Drive.

Above: A highlight near the trail entrance is a large plane tree, identifiable by its intricately patterned bark.

Below: Lori Wertz, a Falk School teacher and special projects director, takes in the view of Pitt’s lower campus from the Falk School nature trail. Wertz is coordinating the project, undertaken as part of the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania’s schoolground habitat enhancement and restoration program.
Pitt’s East Asian Library is strengthening its position as a resource for scholars of North Korea by expanding its collection of journals, books, textbooks and videos from North Korea. The library recently received its fifth delivery of materials acquired through an agreement with a Chinese university public near the North Korean border.

Pitt’s Chinese collection, established in 1960, was renamed the East Asian Library five years later so it could include materials in Japanese. The Korean language materials, which have been added since 2004, are the most recent expansion of the East Asian Library collection.

Director of the East Asian Library, began developing the collection in 2003. Although Pitt previously had received gifts of Korean language materials, it had not formulated its plan for collecting them systematically prior to that time, she said.

Pitt’s Korean collection ranked No. 19 in North America as of June 2010, with nearly 11,000 volumes and 110 journal titles. The North Korean segment of the collection is being developed mainly to meet the teaching and research needs of faculty and students affiliated with the Asian Studies Center, which provides some funding for acquisitions, Xu said.

“I can see that in the future there could be increasing demands on Korean materials because of the increasing importance of the Korean peninsula and the North Korea-South Korea relations and U.S.-North Korean relations,” she said.

The North Korean titles, and through other contacts in another border town, Dandong.

She also was able to purchase materials indirectly from a North Korean vendor at an international book fair in Beijing in 2009 through a Chinese book vendor. Fearing that the North Koreans would refuse to sell to her if they discovered she was from America, she selected the books, but the vendor who accompanied her made the purchase on her behalf.

“They didn’t ask and we didn’t tell them,” she said.

In addition to the Yanbian connections, she is able to acquire materials through vendors in South Korea and China. With a network of sources established, she said, no longer must travel regularly to the region in search of materials.

Given that many resources are available in digital form, the library aims to collect unique items, Xu said. “Students and faculty are more interested in getting hard-to-find materials and primary sources,” she said. Pitt’s collection has 82 different North Korean journal titles totaling more than 2,000 volumes, as well as some 400 North Korean books.

The publications include pictorial journals that document current events and achievements, arts journals and publications by the nation’s medical science press. Topics include history, archaeology, literature, economics and politics.

The collection also includes a dozen textbooks, including elementary school, high school and college-level texts. There is even a documentary on North Korean taekwondo.

Xuying Zou, a public services librarian in the East Asian Library, said, “We would like to collect as many school textbooks as possible, especially in humanities and social sciences and history—to see their perspective.” Those subjects are difficult to collect, she noted, adding that science and math texts are easier to obtain.

Other highlights include the complete works of the late president Kim Il Sung, documentaries, popular movies including the well-known film “The Flower Girl” and recordings of Korean music ranging from folk songs to karaoke. Korean and English versions of “Arirang”—the anthem that accompanies the elaborate ceremonies performed before sporting events — are included in the collection.

In keeping with tradition, the publications typically pay homage to North Korean leaders in the opening pages—a sign of respect, Zou noted.

Xu said Pitt’s North Korean collection is larger than many other university libraries, adding that its array of North Korean journal titles may be unsurpassed.

“We haven’t done much in promoting the collection but we’re thinking about making presentations in the national conferences,” Xu said, noting that other library directors have been asking about Pitt’s collection.

“We’ve noticed that East Asian libraries here nowadays are paying more attention to North Korean materials.” Xu said, anticipating increased demand for the publications.

“I’m glad I’m among the first to do this.”

—Kimberly K. Barlow

UPJ honored for its volunteer efforts

Pitt-Johnstown has been named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for the second consecutive year.

The honor roll, administered through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is the highest federal recognition that a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement. More than 600 schools and campuses were honored.

During the 2009-10 academic year, the period for which the campus is being recognized, Pitt-Johnstown students, faculty and staff performed more than 12,800 hours of service, impacting the lives of some 5,000 individuals. Among the major service projects on the campus were:

• Pitt-Johnstown @ Your Service, where UPJ faculty, staff and students support community organizations with time, talent and expertise to address areas of importance to Pitt-Johnstown and the community, including health promotion, veteran outreach and education.

• The Pitt-Johnstown RealWorld Active program, the centerpiece of cocurricular and student development initiatives, which offers students the opportunity to develop customized personal and professional development plans to become agents of positive change in communities. Overall, 560 Pitt-Johnstown students, 18 percent of the student body, were engaged in service-oriented work as part of the program. Projects included serving meals, providing staffing assistance at community events, tutoring K-12 students, participating in community cleanup programs and promoting conservation.

• Pitt-Johnstown Habitat for Humanity alternative spring break, where last year 111 faculty, staff and students traveled to Florida and Georgia and spent more than 4,400 hours constructing four homes.
**Leaky genes — speed evolution**

Small genetic mutations that add up over time could create an evolutionary advantage that leads to the rapid development of new traits, say researchers from the University of Pittsburgh and University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The team reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) that slight changes in segments of DNA known as transcriptional enhancers—which determine the when, where and how much in gene production—can cause dormant genetic imperfections. These alterations awaken specific genes to low-level activity, or “leakiness,” in developing tissue different from the genes’ typical location. Just a few subsequent mutations built on that stirring can result in a new function for an old gene.

Co-author Mark Rebeiz, a faculty member in biological sciences, and his colleagues observed how a certain unwitting gene found itself in the unique optimal environment of fruit flies.

They found that tiny alterations in the transcriptional enhancers of a species’ ancestor caused the gene to take root in these neurons for the first time. A couple of million years later and the gene became a permanent fixture in the fly’s brain cells.

The work expands on research during the past 30 years that demonstrates how new genes made from scratch are rare in animals, Rebeiz said. Instead, the diversity of living things is thought to stem from existing genes being up in new locations. In a famous example, researchers at the University of Basel in Switzerland reported in Science in 1995 that a gene known as PAX6, a “master control” gene for the formation of eyes and other features in flies, mice and humans, could cause the growth of additional eyes on the legs and antennae of fruit flies.

With their report in PNAS, Rebeiz and his co-authors offer the first explanation of what makes these genes go astray in the first place — and they identified the deviant DNA as the culprit.

The researchers found that the gene Nephrin-1 present in the optical neurons of the fruit fly species Drosophila santomea emerged in that location about 400,000 years ago—a blip in evolutionary terms — in the last common ancestor of flies shared with its relative D. yakuba. The mutation began with a transcriptional enhancer for the gene, which caused Nephrin-1 to show up in different neurons than usual. From there, Rebeiz said, the development of D. santomea’s distinctive body plan plays out with the clarity of a film as four mutations in subsequent generations intensify the errant enhancer’s impact until Nephrin-1’s presence in optical neurons become an exclusive feature of D. santomea. On the other hand, ensuing genetic alterations in D. yakuba actually extinguished this new expression and restored that fly’s Nephrin-1 to its original location.

“It has been long appreciated that nature doesn’t make anything that comes from scratch, but the mystery has remained of how genes that have been performing the same job for hundreds of millions of years are suddenly expressed in new places,” Rebeiz said. “Our work shows that even slight mutations in a transcriptional enhancer can cause leaky gene activity, which can initiate a short route to the development of new traits.”

**RFID system reads implants**

Radio-frequency technology developed at Pitt is used as the basis of a new electronic “tag” system designed to track and monitor orthopaedic implants. The noninvasive system, known as Ortho-Tag, features a wireless chip attached to the implant and a handheld receiver that together would let physicians view the critical information about artificial limbs and prosthetics directly on the patient’s skin, the probe connected to the implant and the procedure uploaded to it prior to an operation and sensors within the chip would gauge the pressure on the implant, the chemical balance and temperature of the tissue and the presence of harmful organisms.

“The information would be read by a handheld probe developed in the laboratory of Pitt electrical and computer engineering faculty member Marlin Mickle,” Rebeiz said. “It has been long appreciated that nature doesn’t make anything that comes from scratch, but the mystery has remained of how genes that have been performing the same job for hundreds of millions of years are suddenly expressed in new places,” Rebeiz said. “Our work shows that even slight mutations in a transcriptional enhancer can cause leaky gene activity, which can initiate a short route to the development of new traits.”

The study, published in the June issue of Health Affairs, used the Models of Infectious Disease Agent Study (MIDAS) project principal investigator for the Center of Excellence. Lee is the applied modeling project principal investigator for the Models of Infectious Disease Agent Study (MIDAS) National Center of Excellence. Lee and his co-authors developed the flu vaccination model while working with the Department of Health and Human Services during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. The team studied how the course of the pandemic might have been affected by vaccinating residents of various counties at different rates and times.

Computer simulation modeling suggested that equitable vaccination could reduce an epidemic’s severity because poorer counties tend to have high-density populations and more people considered higher risk — such as children and the elderly — would result in more interactions. This leads to increased transmission of the influenza and greater risk for poorer outcomes.

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh are recruiting people ages 18 to 55 for a medication research study. We are seeking people who feel depressed and drink alcohol. Participants will receive an evaluation that includes study medication for 8 weeks at no cost.

For more details, call 412-246-5198. All calls are confidential.
Even with the best intentions, inadequate infrastructure, geographical or socioeconomic barriers or cultural differences can lead to inequitable access to vaccines. This research has shown that poorer people may have less access to medical care, including vaccination, than wealthier people. The study was supported by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences and the Vaccine Modeling Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Pitt co-authors included Shawn T. Brown and John J. Grefenstette of biostatistics; Rachel R. Bailey, Margaret Ann Potter of sociology; and Shanta M. Zimmer of medical sciences and the Vaccine Modeling Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Profs receive early career funding
Garudee Dutt, a faculty member in physics and astronomy, received a five-year, $750,000 grant from the Department of Energy’s early career research program. Dutt was chosen among 65 promising researchers nationwide from a field of 1,150 applicants. Selection was based on peer review by outside scientific experts.

Dutt is working to develop a magnetic field imaging technique with nanoscale resolution that will allow for non-invasive, non-destructive probing of a variety of important physical phenomena such as quantum tunneling in single-molecule magnets and quantum bits encoded into spin states of quantum dots. Diamond single-spin magnetic sensors are a highly promising platform for high magnetic field sensitivity, nanometer spatial resolution and the detection of minute environmental or harsh environmental conditions required to study many biological systems.

Dutt’s proposed work will take a multifaceted approach toward improving the accuracy, sensitivity and robustness of this platform through investigations into quantum control and precision quantum metrology coupled with innovative design, sophisticated nanofabrication and advanced measurement techniques.

Neurons slow to mature
New neurons take more than six months to mature in adult monkeys and that time is likely even longer in humans, according to researchers from the School of Medicine, Penn State and the University of Illinois.

Their findings, reported online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, challenge the notion that the brain takes for neurogenesis is the reason for immature and哪怕是 immature in shape, in a rodent, all of the cells would have matured by this time. Only one-third of the monkey granule cells had markers of maturity up to 28 weeks after BrdU injections. That means the majority of new granule cells will not reach maturity until more than six months have passed, the researchers said, because the human brain is larger than the monkey brain and takes longer to develop, maturation of adult cells likely would take even longer.

The study was funded by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, the Spastic Paralytic and Allied Diseases of the Central Nervous System Foundation and the Retirement Research Foundation.

Public health research grant announced
The Public Health Adaptive Systems Initiative (PHASYS) at the Graduate School of Public Health (GSPP) recently announced the selection of a new faculty member in the Department of Biostatistics and a research fellow in the Pittsburgh Molecular Library and Information Screening Center, at the 2011 PHASYS pilot study grant recipient.

Brown’s study is “The Geospatial Area and Information Analyzer (GAIA), a Visualization Tool for Understanding Emergency Preparedness Through Geospatial Analysis.” Brown’s group has been exploring how a Geospatial Area and Information Analyzer to create information-based visualizations for different phases of a disaster pilot study, an interactive, web-based application of a preparedness dataset was funded by the Pittsburgh Molecular Library and Information Screening Center and the Retirement Research Foundation.

Under a five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PHASYS, located in the Center for Public Health Practice at GSPP, conducts research to develop, test and apply criteria and metrics for measuring the effectiveness of preparedness and emergency response to hazards with public health consequences.

PHASYS annually seeks applicants for pilot studies that expand the research capability of GSPP in the field of public health systems research, with a strong focus on preparedness.

Sociology project funded
The Department of Sociology recently announced that faculty member Waverly Duck has been awarded a grant from the National Institute of Justice to support a project titled, “Anti-social Behavior: The Nature, Antecedents, and Consequences of Criminal Victimizations in High-Risk Neighborhoods.”

Requirements: MD or PhD in biomedical informatics or related discipline and demonstrated research experience in biomedical informatics research, preferably with a clinical informatics focus.

Must have research skills applicable to developing a research portfolio in clinical research focused on genomics.

Send CV to Charles Dizard, Dept. of Biomedical Informatics, 200 Meyran, M-183, Fgh, PA 15260 or to dizard@upmc.edu

The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Division of Plastic Surgery, is seeking a research faculty member to direct a translational research program focused on innovative reconstructive therapies.

Candidates would hold a PhD, MD, or MD/PhD, and have significant experience in pre-clinical and clinical research. Candidates should also have strong regulatory experience and a working knowledge of federal and industry research contracts. Academic rank will be commensurate with experience and background. This Executive Director position is a unique opportunity to move the frontiers of clinical research.

If interested, please forward C.V. to Ms. Kimberly A. Elkins at: elkinska@upmc.edu

University of Pittsburgh
School of Social Work dean emeritus David E. Efferson, who led the school to national prominence during his 29-year tenure, died of apparent cardiac arrest June 20, 2011. He was 76.

Efferson served as dean from 1972 until 1996, making him the longest-serving dean at Pitt and the longest-serving dean in the history of social work when he retired.

Under his leadership, the School of Social Work expanded significantly and received national attention. Its enrollment more than tripled and its ranking among graduate social work programs nationally.

Efferson provided leadership to the Center for Mental Health Services Research, an interdisciplinary initiative between social work and the Department of Psychiatry and one of seven National Institute of Mental Health centers of its type in the United States.

Needham developed the child welfare education leadership program, which provides educational opportunities for public child welfare personnel.

In 2008, Pitt established the David E. Efferson Endowed Chair in the School of Social Work.

Efferson began his deanship when Pitt’s School of Social Work was a program of 200 students with few faculty members. He is credited with building a baccalaureate program in the school’s master’s program and developing a diversity program for students and faculty. He successfully raised 25 percent of the School of Social Work’s students and 25 percent of its faculty from underrepresented populations.

“Dave Efferson and I began a program together as a dean of less than a quarter of a century ago,” said Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg, who was then chairman of the Department of Chemistry. “He was an accomplished academic leader at that time, so I naturally turned to him for guidance. He remained a special source of advice, encouragement and support through all those years that followed.”

Proverb emeritus James V. Berliner said Efferson “absolutely dedicated to advancing all the good that a school of social work can do to alleviate human suffering. He was a marvelous and good man who loved people and brought true and healing warmth into each room he entered.”

Larry E. Davis, who succeeded Efferson as dean of the School of Social Work, said, “Because of Dave’s efforts, our school has the best reputation in the country that is responsive to the changing needs of our time. He was a real hero and truly a man who worked for the greater good of all of us. After 10 years as dean, I continued to rely on him regularly for counsel, which he was always happy to provide.”

Efferson also served in leadership capacities in local, national and international nonprofit organizations. Most recently, he served as vice chair of the Urban Redev- lopment Authority of Pittsburgh, on the board of trustees for the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh and of directors of the YMCA of Pittsburgh, and as a member of YNGC, focused on recruiting recent graduates to the YMCA.

In addition, Efferson served as a member of the Pittsburgh Founda- tion for Education, a corporate committee and its Lemington Home advisory board.

Efferson also had served as chair of the boards of NEED (Negro Education Emergency Drive), the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh. He was a member of the board of directors for both the Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work.

He also served as a trustee of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, of the National Center for Social Policy and Practice. In addi- tion, he had been a member of the Pennsylvania State Planning Board and the Commonwealth’s Juvenile Reform Board.


Bentley was a scientist, went on to become a professor, and was a chemist with a very clear sense of what is now the Department of Life Sciences.

Bentley chaired Pitt’s bio- chemistry department 1972-76 and served as associate dean of the Department of Life Sciences.

He retired from the University in 1992 but continued to work until 1996, according to faculty records.

Colleague Lewis Jacobson said he met Bentley when Jacobson joined the University’s biophys- ics department. They became departmental colleagues when the University combined the departments of biochemistry, biology and biophysics in 1977 to form what is now the Department of Biological Sciences.

“He was a believer in under- stated wit,” Jacobson said. “Defi- nitely a British philosopher, which is akin to the droll London humor of the ’80s.”

In addition to his expert in science, Bentley was a historian of science with a very clear sense of what is now the Department of Biological Sciences.

Bentley exhibited meticulous attention to detail, often starting class by pointing out even the smallest of errors in diagrams in the text, she said. So observant was he that he once penned a letter to the editors of the journal Biomedical Education to note that the depiction of an amino acid formula on a 1975 Iranian postage stamp could imply that the amino acid formulas (which can be stereochemically, L or D) were all of one type. “Is it possible that the Iranian chemists or medical students who brought this to us had not seen any of the amino acids printed on something?”

Popp and Bentley remained close over the years. Their fami- lies often spent holiday weekends together and the professor became a grandfather figure to her two daughters.

“His passing is a real loss for the Pitt community and for me personally,” she said. “If you have ever spent time with Dr. Efferson in his lab, you will remember how much he enjoyed the students — how friendly and personable he was.”

Bentley was an avid hiker, camper and backpacker who traveled with his family to many destinations across the United Kingdom, Europe and North America. Their trips included backpacking in Otter Creek, Wyo.; visits to Crown Island, Ont.; to the Tetons, and Yosemite.

Bentley is survived by two sons, Colin and Peter. A memorial is set for 3 p.m. July 9 at the Radisson Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The family suggests memorial donations to the Alison Bentley Science Scholarship Fund, which benefits a first-year undergraduate student in the biological sciences major who has demon- strated an interest in biology and who also was a faculty member in biological sciences, died in 1989.
Teach Different.

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