Faculty provide more input on strategic plan

T he next issue of the University Times, which will be published Dec. 10, will be the last issue of the fall term. The advertising and calendar deadlines for that issue are Oct. 7.
The last issue of the spring term will be published Jan. 7.

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Goal is more inclusive campus

C hancellors Patrick Gallagher told Senate Council Nov. 11 that the University intends to "move very quickly" on its own budget as soon as the state budget impasse is resolved.

"We don't have a Pitt budget because we don't have a state appropriation," Gallagher said, noting that although Pitt trustees approved tuition increases and capital expenditures (in July 2015 University Times), the nearly five-month-long impasse in Harrisburg has prevented action on pay increases.

"I know that this is having a personal toll on the employees of the University," the chancellor said. "I think in all of our minds this gets more acute as you start to face the holidays. People build in expectations of that and I want you to know this is very much on our minds.

State legislators announced Nov. 10 that they had come to agreement on a broad state budget "framework," raising hope that a budget agreement could soon follow. Gallagher said: "If that happens quickly — by the end of the month, I'm hopeful we could move very quickly to address our budget issue."

He stated: "We're working very hard to try to move very quickly and make sure we try to take care of faculty and staff."

However, hope that a state budget deal would be finalized before Thanksgiving was dimmed. In remarks to the Pennsylvania Press Club on Monday, Gov. Tom Wolf said the Republican majority has been unable to muster the necessary votes to move the framework into a bill.

"We said we would deliver a budget by Thanksgiving," Wolf said. "It's time to deliver. The Republicans need to find their votes on the bipartisan agreement we made. Please, please let's get this done and get this to my desk quickly."

—Kimberly K. Barlow

The event, moderated by Steve Watersfield, associate vice provost for planning, was one of a series of forums in which segments of the campus community are being asked to provide input on specific initiatives to advance the goals of the University’s strategic plan for academic years 2015-2020. This was the second forum held for faculty.

The plan’s five goals are: advancing educational excellence; broadening the University's local and global impact; strengthening communities within the University, in the region and globally; building foundation strength; and embracing diversity and inclusion.

Educational excellence

Chemical engineering faculty member Eric Beckman, co-director of the Mascare Center for Sustainable Innovation, ranged Juan Manfredi, vice provost for undergraduate studies and chair of the Academic Board, both of whom advocated educational excellence, to have his group consider the needs of entrepreneurial students and his group’s focus on providing personalized educational experiences.

"Entrepreneurs aren’t well rounded," said Manfredi, "That’s what makes them interesting. They’re obsessive," said Beckman, co-founders of Coburn Medical Inc., a company formed to commercialize surgical adhesive technology developed here at Pitt.

"Noting that many well-known entrepreneurs are college drop-outs, he said, "Well rounded makes us feel better, but it’s not what they need," adding that entrepreneurial students may see courses they deem important to their interests, but earn De’s in required courses. "They’re very successful and it makes the economy go," Beckman said, adding that such alumni also may become big donors to their alma mater.

Universities can identify entrepreneurial students at an early age, he said, noting that they typically have their first business experience at age 13.

Larry Shanin of industrial engineering advocated for creating a culture that values creativity and flexibility, lamenting that budgeting practices can get in the way of creating courses that span multiple units.

German department chair Randall Halle said that as a member of the Year of Humanities steering committee, he is seeing overwhelming faculty interest in cooperating across the University and a wealth of potential for interaction.

"There really is a reason to be working abilities for us to work creatively," he said, urging the Office of the Provost to foster those efforts. "In a University-level conversation it’s very important that past of the outcome be that the University be able to work better together as a university. And that’s what the provost can bring to this, I think.

"Winischki, chair of the working group on building foundations, said the group is contemplating how to break down silos as part of its strategy of enhancing the University’s ability to partner internally and externally.

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"The tides are running out on issues of social tolerance, on free speech, on the experience of what’s happening in American universities," Gallagher said.

"Emotions are running very high," the chancellor said. "The upside: This is the kind of environment where you can catalyze action or you can take action to stem an issue or create a prominence that’s important," he said, cautioning, "It’s also an environment where it magnifies the potential for misunderstandings and even open conflict.

"There is no institution immune to the chancellor said. "I think we’d be well served to think about it before we’re in the midst of a crisis with heated passions and all the high-temperatures that come with being in direct conflict.

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Allies Network explained at SAC meeting

After reading about the state of Pitt retirement this town council—attended by given by Jay Mahoney, relationship manager in TIAA-CREF’s Pittsburgh office, to a meeting of the Senate benefits and welfare committee and reported in the Oct. 1 University Times—one recently retired professor felt an important fact was missing from the presentation.

When the professor retired she was surprised to learn that the IRS forces those with Pitt-sponsored TIAA-CREF and Vanguard retirement accounts, as well as non-Pitt IRAs, to take a minimum distribution from their accounts each year and then pay federal taxes on it.

The IRS policy applies to staff and faculty. “I must take that amount out,” the faculty member, who did not wish to be identified, wrote to the University Times. “I can take more but not less. Luckily so far, I’ve met the withdrawal amount, the remaining amount has continued to grow, and since the required withdrawal is more than I need, I am still saving money to invest it.”

“Faculty (and staff) should be advised not to use all of what they take out, especially if they are healthy and have family members who made it past 90,” she added.

TIAA-CREF’s Mahoney agrees. The required minimum distribution, under IRS rule 401(a)(9), is based on the agency’s life expectancy table, he explains. If the average life expectancy for those age 70 ½ is 17 more years, the IRS adds 10 years, equaling 27, and requires a retiree to withdraw to 1/27th, or a little less than 4 percent, of his or her retirement account each year.

This amount can be taken out monthly, quarterly or all at once, but the withdrawals must be made at the end of each calendar year. Otherwise, the IRS imposes a 50 percent tax penalty on the amount the employee should have taken out.

Mahoney says his office checks times when an account is intended to withdraw the minimum and, if it is not withdrawn, automatically sends it to the account holder.

“Many people withdraw more than their minimum distribution and that’s perfectly okay,” Mahoney says. “It affects hundreds of former employees. He adds the caveat: “But if that number is more than you will take in the next year, it’s probably a good thing. It’s only bad if you don’t need the money and you’d rather leave it in place.”

The minimum withdrawal rules, Mahoney says, do not apply to Roth IRAs, which are funded from after-tax money and thus have tax-free withdrawals. Some retirees choose to skip some of their retirement income to Roth a qualified IRA, which will bear the tax burden of any thing left to be inherited.

Some advisors also may not realize, Mahoney says, that if they are employed by the university after age 59 ½, they are not required to take out the minimum distribution until April 1 of the year following the year they terminate employment. People who do not plan to retire until past that age may sometimes take their IRAs and roll them into their Pitt plan so they can delay the required minimum withdrawal.

“We get quite a lot of that,” Mahoney says. “If you’re worried about paying the tax, that’s probably a good thing. It’s only bad if you don’t need the money and you’d rather leave it in place.”

—Marty Levine
A mid somber music and words of hope, the campus community paused for a moment of silence and a show of support for the people of France and for the victims of the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris.

“Hail to Paris,” organized by the University Center for International Studies (UCIS) and the European Studies Center, drew 250 people to the Forbes Quadrangle to express sympathy and to stand in opposition to hate and intolerance.

“We come today to express our support and our solidarity but probably most important, our unwillingness to let fear control us or to fall victim to religious or ethnic stereotype,” said European Studies Center director Ronald Linden in his welcoming remarks at the Nov. 18 event, where honorary consul of France Jean-Dominique Le Garrec and his predecessor Jean-Pierre Collet were honored guests.

Citing the University community’s many ties to France, and France’s position as the first ally of the United States, Linden said, “Our expression of friendship and of emotion and of support to the French people does not diminish, displace or supplant our sympathy and support for others who have suffered under terrorism,” acknowledging other recent terror attacks in Beirut, Baghdad and Jerusalem.

“We are here to say: We do not, and we will not, remain silent,” said UCIS director Ariel Armony, citing the duty of the scholarly community to take a stand against hate, violence, discrimination and intolerance.

“Our worst mistake would be to become used to violence,” and to consider such incidents routine, he said. “It’s an attack on all of humanity. It is our responsibility to stand up against all senseless acts of violence.”

Said Chancellor Patrick Gallagher: “An attack like this, while occurring in a very specific place, is also an attack on all of us. It’s an attack on people who share our values, who did nothing wrong other than stand in the way of an ideology.

“It is very important that we all remember our commitment to the shared values that keep us strong: That freedom and those individual rights combined with tolerance and compassion are what make us truly strong,” the chancellor said.

“The events of Paris remind us of our collective responsibility to speak up and to stand up to all senseless acts of violence around the world. It’s together we really are stronger.”

—Kimberly K. Barlow

Above, from left: Chancellor Patrick Gallagher; Jean-Pierre Collet, former honorary consul of France; Lex Jones of the Office of the Mayor of Pittsburgh; UCIS director Ariel Armony; Provost Patricia Beeson; and European Studies Center director Ronald Linden.

Below: Attendees lined up to add their messages to a book that will be delivered to the French embassy in Washington, D.C. The Pitt “Hail to Paris” book will be available for signing in the UCIS offices, 4400 Posvar Hall, until midday today, Nov. 25.

Below right: Merging the musical traditions of east and west, the University gamelan ensemble and Paul Miller of Duquesne University performed a threnody for viola and gamelan by American composer Lou Harrison.
There are very few vio-
lence, or attempted rape in their 
suicide.

students we care for, students we 
context of exposure to violence 
address at the Nov. 10 event in 
staff from nearby universities 
sessions focused on alcohol 
prevention, education, response 
we think the way in which we 
think about these issues "in the 
that so many students — the 
We currently have one in five 
experienced violence in the 
One in six young men has 
before age 18; one in seven has 
severe intimate partner 
Most female victims of 
raped experience their first 
their adolescent and young 
Campus sexual assault: 
The role of alcohol

Students study, but find that 
many of campus sexual assault 
Health center-based 

health providers will say: 

settings, "Young people who’ve 
repeated sayings on bystander intervention, 

Kimberly K. Barlow 

Kimberly K. Barlow
Faculty provide more input on strategic plan

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his group is seeking ways to promote these interactions. “How do you move people into areas of interesting, developing relationships and then moving forward?”

Beckman brought up the issue of how faculty are judged for promotion and tenure in light of the strategic plan’s stated strategy to “identify and engage in strategic research opportunities where we can have significant impact on society.”

The notion sounds good, he said, but promotion and tenure concerns would wipe out most of those opportunities.

Redfern said senior administrators are trying to figure out how to resolve the issue. “This is a discussion that comes up at the highest levels in this and every other university in this country, about aligning the promotion and tenure criteria with what we’re trying to accomplish now in the University.”

The University of South California is succeeding in pursuing strategic opportunities, Shuman said. “They do it by having strategic opportunities, Shuman noted that students’ desire to retain their University ties often is based on the experience they had — primarily in their department — while they were here.

In the end if people are going to think kindly about the University, it’s about the education they got,” he said.

The key, then, is to change the culture and become more supportive in the academic units, relative to looking at future alumni, he said.

Foundational strength

In the area of building foundational strength, Beckman urged that the University find ways to move faster. “We are really slow,” he said. “Everyone worries about mistakes. What about emphasizing speed?” he said, citing several examples from his own experience.

Shuman added that risk aversion is also problematic. “We’re strategically challenged in this area,” Soksa said, stressing the value of enhancing the work of faculty in ways that will help students develop their skills and their engagement in the community.

“We’re still a public university and are looked at for that kind of a role,” he said.

Diversity and inclusion

Soska advocated for partnering with community efforts to enhance the region’s diversity and inclusion. The goal of attracting and retaining diverse students, faculty and staff can suffer if the region isn’t viewed as diverse and inclusive as well, he said.

In response to several faculty who expressed the need for some new ideas for enhancing faculty diversity, Pamela Connolly, associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion and chair of the foundational strength working group, offered training for search committees to help them focus on defining what they want in a candidate.

Details on the University’s strategic plan and contact information for members of the working groups are posted at impact.pitt.edu.

—Kimberly K. Barlow
Regenerative medicine and its applied biotechnologies are changing the role of subjects in human research, raising numerous moral and policy questions that must be addressed.

In a recent talk on campus, ethicist Nancy M.P. King said, “Most of what’s going on in regenerative medicine is first-in-human or early phase research. And what that means for the research subjects is starting to change because of the nature of regenerative medicine research.”

Regenerative medicine is a complex type of research that aims to understand the basic mechanisms of how biological systems repair and develop, she said.

“There’s a lot of discussion of the Belmont principles and early-phase research, which focus on things other than being able to reduce the risks of harm to research subjects,” said King, co-director of Pitt’s Wake Forest Center for Bioethics, Health and Society and graduate program in bioethics and research management at the Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy at the Wake Forest School of Medicine, Wake Forest School of Medicine.

Her Nov. 12, 2018, “Ethics in Regenerative Medicine: What’s Old, What’s New, What’s Blue Sky?” was part of the annual Nordenberg Lecture in Law, Medicine, Ethics and the Humanities. It was sponsored by Pitt’s School of Law and Center for Ethics and Policy Research. King said she was asked to speak because of her work in the field of regenerative medicine.

She discussed the three “leads to lots of good-faith judgment calls,” she said. “This is what (informed consent) is about — what’s it doing to our research and how are we making sure that people are getting the information that they need to make that decision.”

She said the potential versus the harm of a therapy is often missed when conducting research.

“The path from the bench to the bedside is not always smooth,” she said. “That’s why there’s a lot of hesitation about whether what’s going to happen in their participation.”

“Early-phase research is at this very liminal point between being exploratory and being a therapy that you may have to go back to the lab. It’s important to realize that.”

She said weighing the potential versus the harm of a therapy is often missed when conducting the research.

“The advances new biotechnologies make possible are promising, but the knowledge gains that are needed to move them forward can be slow and steady.”

She added that the potential versus the harm of a therapy is often missed when conducting the research.

“Your human subjects are your responsibility, not just your concern,” she said. “They’re your ethical responsibility, not just your ethical concern.”

She added that the potential versus the harm of a therapy is often missed when conducting the research.

The recent release of the 2016 Best Global Universities rankings, Pitt is No. 47 in the world and No. 42 in an expanded view which takes into account world rankings in all four of the fields: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Engineering.

Pitt is No. 47 in the expanded U.S. News Best Global Universities rankings, down from No. 42 in 2015.

The recently released 2016 Best Global Universities includes 250 schools in 57 countries, up from the 500 institutions in 49 countries that were rated in last year’s inaugural listing.

Of the ranked schools, 181 are in the United States. China is second, with 96 largest followed by China is second, with 96 largest followed by the United Kingdom.

Harvard topped the list in both years.

In the 2016 listing, eight of the top 10 schools are in the United States.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which was followed by the University of California-Berkeley, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge, California Institute of Technology, UCLA, Columbia and the University of Chicago.

Schools are ranked based on a dozen indicators: Weighted at 12.5 percent each are global research performance, which includes the number of books and conferences. Normalized citation impact, percentage of research expenditures that are from the government, and the percentage of researchers who work in a very productive way with people who fund it and oversee it.

“All of this is changing so fast it’s hard to keep up with, so we all have to just keep talking about it,” she said.

—Kimberly K. Barlow

**Reversibility**

The question of reversibility comes up in regenerative medicine, even though it’s not a new question. The long-term benefit a body has worried about reversibility for a long time but it may be especially acute in regenerative medicine interventions: If something doesn’t work you expect it to go away.

A new normal?

As much as it may sound like science fiction, regenerative medicine might redefine what’s normal when it comes to health.

If a periodic injection of healthy cells can boost kidney function, why not dialysis or an organ transplant, we are moving toward a time where people simply get a booster shot to improve their kidney, heart, pancreas or lung function? Regenerative medicine puts those possibilities on the table,” King said.

And might the love of technology drive out other fixes? “Should we quit worrying about what’s the best thing to do if people more tolerate of heat and drought?” King asked rhetorically. “Nothing’s more blue-sky than new technology seems more double quick to figure out, faster than the public health or policy problems. The advances new biotechnologies make possible are promising, and much more blue-sky for most patients. Subjects may move faster to move, she said, “Innovation exploits patients by promising speed that really is not possible,” King said.

She said now, real effective replenishing, regrowing, replacing — like regenerative medicine is supposed to do — is pretty much blue-sky for most patients. Subjects may move faster to move, she said, “Innovation exploits patients by promising speed that really is not possible,” King said.

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Goal is more civil, inclusive campus

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vital importance to many in our community. The reason is that for the first time in my life, I have become aware of the consequences of intolerance on a daily level and so for many people, it’s the first time they’ve really remembered this is happening to them personally. They live with it. But if we are a community that’s built on compassion for others, that means it’s got to be important to us too.”

Gallagher said the University already has strategies in place, in particular making diversity and inclusion a prominent part of its strategic plan, to address the positions of senior vice chancellor for engagement (held by Kathy Humphrey, who also is chief of staff and secretary of the Board of Trustees), and associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion (held by Panels Connolly, who took on the new role earlier this year).

“While I think we’ve done a lot, I think we need to get the job done. A significant effort involves two important things: One is deliberately expanding the range of opportunities available to communities of color to ensure the University can meet the needs of these communities on this topic,” he said.

The University is one of many people on this campus who care about this and are thoughtful about what is being done and they are working as many as possible,” Gallagher said, asking for input from faculty, staff and students.

The chancellor suggested focusing on the Pitt Promise, a commitment to civil society that students are asked to make. “How do we put those principles into practice and what does it mean if somebody’s really outside of the norms of the community expectations that we’re trying to create?”

“What does that mean? What are the examples? Because that’s exactly where everybody’s struggling.”

Gallagher said, “I think it’s really important that our approach has to seek to maximize understanding and open dialogue. I also want to point out that there is a very real tension built into this problem that is actually a difficult one. It’s one you can see from so many of the universities in the newspapers stories they’re dealing with. How do you balance an individual right that includes freedom of expression — even when that expresses ugly or hateful — with our civil right to be in a society free from discrimination, hatred or harassment?”

The tension between freedom and responsibility is built into the fabric of our society and institutions, including Pitt, he said.

“Since the Pitt Promise, you see that deliberately spelled out as we ask Pitt students to promise us that they will embrace the concept of a civil community; that they commit themselves to the promotion of knowledge and personal integrity; that they respect the sanctity of the learning environment; and they respect support for diversity by respecting the rights of those who differ from us. This is not contradictory to the development of a caring community where compassion for others and respect for all are valued,” the chancellor added.

“This tension that everyone’s struggling with is, in my view, a necessary but difficult aspect of our civil culture,” he said. “The fact that you see so many very smart universities struggling with this means that these six, I think, are among the smartest universities in the world. We’re not a backwater.”

In asking the Senate to take on the issue, Gallagher said, “While the administration has a role, it should not be overlooked as the source of the answer. I don’t think that’s realistic and I think this is an all-hands-on-deck kind of issue. I think this touches faculty and how they teach and create a learning environment. Certainly it includes the staff and it certainly includes the students,” he said.

Citing Pitt’s model of shared governance, Gallagher said, “I think we have to look at the Senate Council and the ways we can engage the entire University community around this issue.”

“Another area is the Senate, which has chosen to focus its spring plenary session on academic freedom, broaden the focus to include discussions on supporting open expression in a climate that embraces diversity.”

“We don’t just have individual rights of expression. We have to live together and work together and we have to respect each other. And that’s really important.”

Gallagher asked the Senate to work with Humphrey and Council to develop a strategy and schedule to support expanded engagement and dialogue on the issue. “I don’t think this is going to be a short-term thing, either, so I would approach it with the idea that this is a sustainable effort.”

Gallagher said as well that the Senate put periodic progress updates on its agenda.

President Frank Wilson indicated that his campus tours have included discussions on this topic. “The Chancellor and I are thinking about the same thing in the same way. And so I’m not going to repeat that.”

Wilson’s written report states, in part: “We see emerging controversies involving student protests over racist incidents and the hasty closure of official affairs in response to them, followed by the resignation of public university officials under pressure from those protests. At the same time demonstrations erupt with demands that faculty at an elite private institution be removed from their positions, ostensibly for e-mail warnings about offensive Halloween costumes, but more substantively about the differences in and necessary treatment of minority students in that university’s structure and culture.”

“Here at Pitt we are not without our own tensions, issues and controversies. That is normal and necessary if as a leading public university we accept our charge to fully engage the big social issues facing us all. These are also smaller, but critically important, organizational issues that we face at our own University. We should not be reluctant to fully engage them.”

Wilson told Council: “We have the luxury right now to be able to be the kind of institution that looks at these bigger problems not while we’re under the pressure of some incident or public scrutiny in these emotional ways, but we have an opportunity to look at things much more deeply.”

“If we’re lucky and we don’t have our own incidents, we might be able to be a model for other places on how you should think about what a public university in particular should be doing to think about these big problems and maybe come up with some helpful answers. Not that we’re going to solve anything — these are too big for any of us — but we could play a role that way.”

“And I think that is something we share. I have no doubts at this point that we’re all at the same saddle and we’re going to do our best to move this forward.”

In response to the chancellor’s request, planning began via a Nov. 18 teleconference that included Wilson, Humphrey, Connelly; Navneet Harni, president of Pitt’s Student Government Board, Joseph Kozak, president of the Graduate and Professional Student Government, and Rich Colwell, Staff Association Council president.

Following the initial discussion, Connelly told the University Times that the group is seeking to “determine where we are, where we want to be and how to get there.”

The steering committee will meet Nov. 30 to hear how work already underway under the strategic planning working group on diversity and inclusion might figure into the next steps, she said.

—Kimberly K. Kulwicki

Annual drives begin

Community Relations begins its annual winter essentials and holiday gift drives this week.

The winter essentials drive, which runs until Dec. 12, is collecting new hats, gloves, scarves and socks. Donated items will be distributed to those in need, including attendees at the Christmas Day at Pitt celebration. Items can be dropped off at the following campus buildings: Alumni; Benedum; Cathedral of Learning; Craig; Eichelbar; Hillman Library; Morris; O’Hara Student Center; Park Place; Peterson; Public Safety, Scalea; Thackara; Thomas Boulevard; Pwer; University Store on Fifth; and William Pitt Union.

This year an online donation option also is available. Visit the drive’s Amazon Wish List (www.amazon.com/gp/grocery/wishlist/ t?n=UTYP0ecrdIAPTMH477T5T) to select items to donate. Pitt’s holiday gift drive, which runs through Dec. 15, provides a gift to each child attending Christmas Day at Pitt. Drop off donations at the Office of Community and Governmental Relations, 700 Alumni Hall or call 4-7755 to arrange a departmental pickup.

The drive is targeting specific age groups for donations this year, due to an increase in teenagers attending the dinner last year. Email corg@pitt.edu to request the number of labels needed for the gift drive in your department, and Community Relations will send them over in the right age-group mix.

Joyful classrooms.

Mornings begin with hugs and smiles as our Junior-School children arrive — setting the tone for a day infused with joy. Our classrooms are alive with active learning and inquiry as students explore pre-algebra concepts, the science of bridge-building and writing workshop.

Because our students look forward to school each day, they become engaged and curious learners — prepared to shine brighter in all that they do.

Junior School Open House December 3. RSVP online at www.ShadySideAcademy.org/VisitUs
A federal initiative to accelerate research into pediatric diseases and conditions will fund an effort led by the School of Dental Medicine, Graduate School of Public Health, and the entire genome of nearly 1,300 people to learn more about the causes of cleft lips and palate and look for treatments.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under the direction of Dr. Andrew Slavitt, will fund the project to sequence the whole genome of 430 children with clefts and their parents. According to NIH, this is among the largest whole-genome sequencing efforts to examine an oral condition that it has ever initiated.

Said project director and principal investigator Mary L. Marazita, faculty member and vice chairman of the Department of Oral Biology and director of the Center for Craniofacial and Developmental Genetics, “This sequencing will provide a wealth of data that will be made available, for free, to the public, providing the basis for years of research into causes, prevention and treatment of cleft lip and palate.”

Cleft lip and palate are among the most common birth defects, affecting about 1 in 700 babies. It occurs when a baby’s lip or mouth doesn’t form properly during pregnancy, leaving a gap that can make it hard for the child to eat or breathe. In many cases, the cause is believed to be due at least in part to genetics, but other factors, such as smoking during pregnancy, also can contribute to the chance of a child with cleft lip or palate.

Said principal investigator Eleanore Feingold, faculty member and director of the genetics and genomics of the senior associate dean at the public health school: “In addition to looking for causes, we might lead us to treatments, we’re also looking for answers for parents about why it has happened and want to know if any future children are at risk. This project will lead us to better cleft lip/palate counseling so we can tell parents if their family is predisposed to cleft lips and palates or if it’s a genetic aberration that is highly unlikely to happen again.”

Marazita has studied cleft lip and palate since the 1980s, building a database of almost 6,000 families with the condition. The research team will mine that database for appropriate “tripos” — families with children with cleft lip or palate — who will have their whole genomes sequenced to look for genetic mutations that caused the child’s cleft.

This will allow researchers to determine if the cleft is similar to a variant passed along by one of the parents or if it arose spontaneously.

Pitt will provide DNA samples for 430 trios to the McDonnell Genome Institute at Washington University in St. Louis for sequencing. In about three months, the samples will come back to Pitt for analysis and will be shared through a centralized data repository.

Additional co-investigators from Pittsburgh include Seth Weinberg, Alexandre Vieira and Manika Govil of dental medicine and John Shaffer of pathology.

Lower pregnancy weight reduces risk of 6-month cleft

Achieving a healthy weight before becoming pregnant and gaining an appropriate amount of weight during pregnancy significantly reduce the risk of the woman dying in his or her first year of life, according to new research from Pitt’s public health school.

The findings, published in Obesity, highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to obesity reduction among women of reproductive age that includes weight counseling before conception and during pregnancy.

Said lead author Lisa Bodnar, faculty member in the Depart- ment of Epidemiology, “Our study shows that three women start pregnancy at an unhealthy weight, and more than 20% of those women will gain too much or too little weight during pregnancy. While more research has to be conducted, we are hopeful that this study can be used to start a dialogue between physicians and patients. The importance of not only gaining a healthy amount of weight while pregnant but also maintaining excess weight before they become pregnant is a potential way to improve maternal outcomes.

Every year, approximately 24,000 infants die in their first year of life in the United States. The U.S. rate of 6.1 deaths per 1,000 live births ranks 26th in the world, despite a 20 percent decline in the U.S. infant mortality rate from 1990 to 2010.

Bodnar and her colleagues examined records from more than 1 million births that occurred between 2001 and 2008 in the Swanson School of Engineering’s Electric Power Systems Lab and faculty member in electrical and computer engineering, established the DC-AMPS program (Direct Current Architecture for Modern Power Systems) and has been working to bring DC technology to the electric grid. "We are interested in local and regional companies, the City of Pittsburgh and community partners, "Reed said. "We have another Hillman grant, totaling $2.5 million, that will fund the initial success of the DC-AMPS program, to bring a DC power system to Pitt and/ or Pittsburgh to advance potential treatments and new life-changing therapies will be developed."

"Our scientific teams have been working on this for well over a decade, and it offers a better match between energy transmission and utilization in many applications," Reed said. "I’ve been working on this for well over a decade, and it offers a better match between energy transmission and utilization in many applications."

To achieve these ends, Reed and his colleagues are investigating technological challenges. Reed says that his team will work to develop better electronic converters control systems like the aforementioned box on a laptop’s power cord), better integration technologies for the power generated by DC microgrids, and possibly new electronic devices compatible with DC power.

Network diagnosis, repair improved

A proposed automated system will allow users to provide network administrators with information about faulty connections, greatly speeding network diagnosis and repair. This system, to be called TestRig 2.0, is the result of a $430,000 grant from the National Science Foundation.

Reed and members of his lab, including network engineer Sara Parisi, noted. The same is the case for gatherings between doctors, medical appliances, cell phones and other consumer devices and office and home equipment, including data centers and new forms of lighting.

"Very few items today require three-phase alternating current. The use and development of AC power electronics, which includes more DC resources such as solar photovoltaics, as well as electric vehicle charging and battery storage systems, also makes the transition to DC more sensible and viable for future power needs."

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The University Times Research Notes column reports research-related findings to Pitt researchers and on findings arising from University research.

We welcome submissions from all areas of the University research community. Please submit via email to: utimes@pitt.edu, by fax to 412/624-4579 or by mailing mail to 308 Bellefield Hall.

For submission guidelines, visit specuweb.pitt. edu/page/id=6807.

Pitt researchers aim at rare diseases

Pitt has a new research collaboration with global biopharma- ceutical company Shire designed to advance potential treatments for rare diseases, where sizable unmet medical needs exist.

According to patient advocacy organization Global Genes, rare diseases affect more than 30 million people worldwide — 3 times the number affected by allcancers combined and approximately the same number who suffer from the global epidemic of diabetes. Scientific advances in treating thousands of rare diseases, often having origins in genetic mutations, have not occurred from one generation to the next.

These rare diseases usually are extremely painful, sometimes suffering and very often result in death early in life. While each individual disease generally affects fewer than several hundred thou- sand people, collectively these rare diseases account for a massive global burden of undervalued patients.

Said Dietrich Stephan, who is leading the collaboration for Pitt and is chair of public health’s Department of Global Health, "Our scientific teams have been among the most prolific in deter- mining the fundamental causes of rare diseases over the past decades."

"Based on these new insights into the core pathogenesis of rare diseases, we have, in many cases, developed new preclinical models of disease, which in turn fuels new drug development — the essential ingredients for moving from bench to bed partnership in the rare disease area.

"Given the scale of resources and level of expertise in this partnership, I am hopeful many new life-changing therapies will be developed," Stephan said.

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The Mid-Atlantic chapter of Medical Library Association has honored two Health Sciences Library System reference librarians:
- Andrea Ketchum was awarded the 2015 Award for Professional Excellence by a Health Sciences Librarian.
- Melissa Rutajic was awarded the 2015 Marguerite G. A. Service Recognition Award, which recognizes exemplary service to the chapter during the past year.

The Society for Analytical Chemistry of Pittsburgh honored Sanford Ascher, distinguished professor of chemistry, for his contributions to the field.

Marc Connitt, a scientist in Lerner Research Institute at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, was named a 2015 Rising Star by the American Chemical Society.

Anh-Phuoc Le, assistant professor of psychology, was awarded a National Science Foundation CAREER award.

The School of Nursing held its annual Nurses of Caring Gala Nov. 7 to celebrate outstanding members of the nursing profession. Included among the honorees was nursing school faculty member Betty J. Braxton of the Department of Health Promotion and Development.

Braxton brings more than 20 years of professional practice to the classroom, as well as her experience of nearly continuous advanced education. After graduating with a BSN, she went on to earn certification in nurse midwifery, then a master's and a PhD in nursing, followed by a post-doctoral research position.

The People of the Times column features recent news on faculty and staff, including awards and other honors, accomplishments and administrative appointments. We welcome submissions from all areas of the University. Send information via email to: utimes@pitt.edu, by fax at 412-624-4579 or by campus mail to 398 Bellefield Hall.

For submission guidelines, visit www.utimes.pitt.edu/page_id=6807.

The National Science Foundation has awarded a CAREER award to the Department of Chemistry's Robert J. Hargreaves, a professor of chemistry, for his research on the chemistry of water.

The University of Pittsburgh is a public research university located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is one of the oldest and largest universities in the United States, founded in 1787. The university is a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU), which is a group of research-intensive universities that engage in advanced teaching and research.

The University's mission is to advance knowledge through teaching, research, and service to the community. It offers a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs, including liberal arts, science, engineering, medicine, law, dentistry, and veterinary medicine.

The University is committed to providing a diverse and inclusive environment for all students, faculty, and staff. It is committed to excellence in teaching and research, and to providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen fields.

The University's campus is located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, and it is one of the largest employers in the city. It is also a major contributor to the local economy, providing millions of dollars in research funding and payroll to the region.

The University of Pittsburgh is recognized as a leader in research and education, and it is a national and international leader in many areas of study, including medicine, law, dentistry, and veterinary medicine.

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Brain implant technology advanced

With the potential to allow quadriplegics to flex their limbs, to reverse damage caused by Parkinson's disease and to map the outcome to those of mice that were exposed to it. Wagner found that it does.

Waxman adds that a study published in the journal "Cell" and will serve as principal investigator of in Activation of the Caspase-1, an enzyme activated after ischemia, trauma and other environmental conditions. While the researchers injured muscle in 10 times the arsenic level compared to an impaired healing response in a person who has been chronically exposed to arsenic.

Ambrose, a physical therapist, noted that some patients have a harder time muscle recovery from surgery or injury. "For a rehabilitation perspective, it could be important to pay more attention to these environmental factors that may be influencing the ability of these cells to regenerate," she said. "It would be wonderful if we could identify physicians who may be predisposed to a diminished healing capacity and then intervene accordingly so they are able to better recover from injuries."
CALENDAR CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

CRISP Seminar
"Biologicals in the Workplace: A New Kind of textDecoration("),
Tanya Hernandez, Ph.D., Pontifical, 2017
2 CL, noon (www.crisp.uic.edu)
Hispanic Lecture
Hugo Azcoitia, 344 CL, 2-4 pm
Geology/Planetary Science Colloquium
Craig Eckart, 1714 Room, 4 pm
(www.geology.pitt.edu/colloquium)
Hispanic Seminar
"Casa Sita Culture: Caucausian?" 8 pm
(www.lib.pitt.edu/colloquium)
Defenses
Public Health/Epidemiology
Public Health/Molecular & Microbiology
"L60s Regulation of Adaptive Responses in Vincin Chloride," Vanzania, Noon, 205, 200:10
Health & Rehabilitation Sciences/Physical Therapy
"Human Social Muscle Microscopic Changes With Ageing & Rescue in Spermatozoa," Giezen, 150:10, 10:10
Andrew Behonick, 4, 7003 Peters, 3 pm
AM/History
"Partners of an Empire That Was: Tunisia, Movie-Gang & the Formation of Post-Imperial Identity in Austria & Hungary, 1914-44," Andrew Behonick, 4, 7003 Peters, 3 pm
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"Health & Rehabilitation Sciences/Physical Therapy
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Andrew Behonick, 4, 7003 Peters, 3 pm

Wednesday 9
Clinical Oncology/Hematology
Grand Rounds
"Neutropenic/Gastrointestinal Therapy: Delaying or Discontinuing Effi- cacy?" Ronald Strauss, U of M; Hadassah Conf. Ctr. et al. UPMC Cancer Center, 2nd fl., 8 am
(Franklin@upmc.edu)
Faculty/Staff Development Workshop
"Research Contract Administration," Kelly Downey, 1121 UCB; "Managing Up," Matthew Lauer, 342 Cop, 9 am
(www.phhp.pitt.edu/training-development/faculty-staff)
HIE Awards Ceremony
5604 Peters, 11 am-12:30 pm
(reg@pitt.edu)
Holiday: Open House/PITP Shop, Magrath & Stella's, Oakland/Baker & U Street on 5th, 11 am-3 pm
SAC Mtg.
105 Benedum, 600
Pathology Seminar
"Transcriptional Control of Bladder Tumor Progression," David DeGraff, Hershey Medical Ctr.
11st Scaife, 10:15 am (scasman@upmc.edu)
Senior Council Mtg.
2700 Peters, 3 pm
HSLS Workshop
"Community Violence: Caregiver Mor- tality: dHNP, COSMIC & Meas.," Assadour Chaitochyan, Nick Liberiastian, 2nd fl., 2 pm (scausman@upmc.edu)
Oral/Maxillofacial Surgery Lecture
"Anesthesia," Michael Goudy, G3 Sustainable U of PAl Symphony Orchestra Bellinzona, 8 pm

Thursday 10
HSLS Workshop
"EndNote Basics," Melissa Ratenski, Falk Library classroom, 2nd fl., 10 am (jg29@pitt.edu)
Faculty/Staff Development Workshop
"Teaching on U-Branes," Vincent Jahn, K34 Cop, 9 am (www.hs.pitt.edu/training-development/faculty-staff)
Molecular Biophysics/Structural Biology Seminar
Anne Carbone, 4201 BBS, 11 am
Health lectures/Research Seminar
"The Social Sciences of Developing Effective Health Communications," Wandi Besiwe de Bruij, Leeds U Biomolecular Science, 3rd fl., 2 pm, 11 am (www.hs.pitt.edu/hs/seminar/)