



2010/2011 Series: Economic Prosperity in the Next Decade

chapter ten: **Keep the Vision Alive**
Growing and Building in Tough Economic Times



Keep the Vision Alive

Growing and Building in Tough Economic Times

Dr. Paul Hennigan: President of Point Park University

Just months after we announced plans for the Academic Village at Point Park University, the country's financial markets were in turmoil. Clearly, from an economic and fundraising perspective, 2008 was an immensely challenging time to launch a major growth strategy. Yet, the benefits we envisioned—new academic and cultural facilities and programs, architectural and streetscape improvements, and economic opportunities for students and residents—made the \$244 million initiative critical to pursue.

We had two choices: delay our plans or move ahead and embrace the future.

Our strategic planning clearly indicated the need for the Academic Village, and our community collaborations affirmed its importance to Pittsburgh. We chose, therefore, to aggressively pursue the initiative and with it, our vision to become one of the most dynamic, private urban universities in the country.

Today, the Academic Village at Point Park University is on track to complete two key projects within the next 18 months. This is the story of how one university identified its potential and developed its opportunities despite the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

A Downtown Anchor

For more than 75 years, Point Park has been an anchor in downtown Pittsburgh. What started as a business training college in one building, is now a University with four schools—the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business, the School of Communication, and the Conservatory of Performing Arts. Point Park also now is the second-largest property owner in downtown. The University currently enrolls 4,077 full- and part-time students in 101 undergraduate degree programs and 11 graduate degree programs.

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Qualitative Analysis

In the past decade, in response to its growth, Point Park started acquiring property, and downtown stakeholders began to take notice. The University decided to use the opportunity to engage these decision makers and make community collaboration a cornerstone of future planning efforts. So, in 2007, Point Park asked the city, county, state, and a local foundation (The Heinz Endowments) to financially support a collaborative planning process. We brought in national experts from the Urban Land Institute to facilitate that process. More than 125 stakeholders participated, representing property owners, corporations, foundations, community organizations, and city, county, and state governments.

We also continued to look deep within our University. Teams of board members, faculty, staff, and students analyzed our University's strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats. We benchmarked all academic programs and facilities, and we sent interdisciplinary teams on site visits to other urban universities.

The results of our comprehensive internal and external planning were clear: Point Park should pursue its vision for academic excellence, create a living and learning hub on campus, and continue to enliven its downtown neighborhood. Soon after, our Board of Trustees approved a strategic plan to provide overall direction and a broadly stated set of outcomes to be achieved between fiscal years 2008 and 2014.

Four principles now guide Point Park's mission to educate students in a diverse environment and prepare graduates to apply knowledge to achieve their goals, advance their professions, and serve their communities. The Academic Village at Point Park University is the confluence of these four guiding principles: academic excellence, quality student experience, managed growth, and community engagement. The strategic plan makes clear that the Academic Village is necessary beyond bricks and mortar. It's rooted in providing outstanding academic resources and a quality experience for our students, and it's about defining and managing the University's growth.

With foundational elements in place and the Academic Village publically announced, we sought funding for an architectural design phase and to hire an architect/planner to oversee the entire initiative. The Heinz Endowments awarded Point Park a \$2 million grant in December 2008 to support this work.

Quantitative Analysis

Next, we sought an independent assessment of the Academic Village's economic impact. The Pennsylvania Economy League, a regionally based public policy organization, undertook the study and released its findings to the community in April 2009.

The research affirmed that Point Park University is a growing force in the region and contributes to the vibrancy of downtown Pittsburgh. The study explored the Academic Village's \$244 million investment in downtown Pittsburgh and quantified nearly \$280 million in total value to the local economy. The report also cited the Academic Village's potential to create 3,700 full- and part-time jobs through direct spending on design and construction and indirect and induced ripple effects in the marketplace.

The Pennsylvania Economy League report added new credibility to the Academic Village and proved key to the initiative moving forward.

Public Financing

Given the economic climate in 2008, Point Park made a strategic decision to pursue those projects that could tap into state and federal government funding. This strategy has paid off, as public space enhancements, including streetscape improvements and a new urban park, are now underway on campus.

In late 2010, work began on the 18-month project to revitalize the Wood Street Corridor. The \$5.5 million construction features installation of urban-hearty trees and tree gates, accessible sidewalks and curbs, distinctive pedestrian-scaled lighting, a milled and resurfaced street, and new signaling systems at two intersections. The University received a \$3.95 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Community Transportation Initiative for the upgrades and enhancements, one of the largest awards in the state. The funding came about as a direct result of the University's ongoing collaboration with city, county, and state leaders.

A new urban park also is underway in the heart of the campus. A surface parking lot at the corner of Wood Street and the Boulevard of the Allies is being transformed to create a dramatic new green space with a water feature, tree canopy, glass stair tower, and outdoor café for the University community and downtown neighborhood. This will be the outdoor hub of the campus and the neighborhood.

The park and streetscape improvements are both part of phase one of the Academic Village and are already playing an important role in helping to define our urban campus.

More Central Campus Development

In recent years, the University has invested more than \$30 million in new student housing and academic facilities in the heart of the campus.

Next door, a new \$31.5 million Student and Convocation Center is slated for completion in phase one to offer a rich assortment of academic, student life, and athletic amenities to enhance students' educational, social, and physical experiences. The Student and Convocation Center will house an 1,800-seat space for community events and activities, a gymnasium and health center, a multi-purpose lounge, advanced computer labs, student club offices, and areas for group and quiet study. The University received a lead gift of \$4 million from the Richard King Mellon Foundation for the project—\$2 million in direct funding and \$2 million as a challenge grant.

Phase two of the Academic Village will feature the construction of a new Pittsburgh Playhouse downtown with three performing spaces: a 400-seat proscenium theater, a 250-seat thrust theater, and a 150-seat studio theater. We are planning a parking garage below the structure to be developed through public and private partnerships. As with the University's dance complex (completed in 2007), all new construction on campus will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified.

Transforming Students

Our vision to become one of the most dynamic, private urban universities in the country includes a commitment to continuous quality improvement. Academic excellence leads our four guiding principles, and we benchmark all of our academic programs in an ongoing process known as Point Park Excellence.

A critical piece of our plans, therefore, is to add \$7 million to the University’s current \$21 million endowment to support academic programs and student scholarships. The increase will allow Point Park to continue and expand faculty-led research, engage additional research faculty, update equipment in technology-based majors, and continue a tradition of offering some form of financial assistance to more than 90 percent of attending students.

At Point Park, we focus on applying knowledge and helping students prepare to enter the professional workforce and serve their communities. Our mission is success for students in all four schools. Our School of Arts and Sciences provides a well-rounded liberal arts education. Our School of Communication is on the frontier of new media. Our Conservatory of Performing Arts is nationally recognized. And our School of Business is Pittsburgh’s premier provider of management-level business education.

Role of an Urban University

We continually ask ourselves, “What is the role of an urban university?” As the Academic Village develops, we will continue to engage the community in this question as well.

In the words of University of Pennsylvania professor Robert Zemsky, who founded Penn’s public policy center for educational research and analysis, we strive every day to be “mission driven and market smart.” At Point Park University, we are fully developing our potential and pursuing our opportunities despite challenging economic times.



Dr. Paul Hennigan became President of Point Park University in 2006. Prior to that, he served as the University’s Vice President for Finance and Operations since 2000.

Dr. Hennigan was Chief Financial Officer for the city of Pittsburgh from 1994–99, reporting directly to the mayor. He also has served as an adjunct faculty member and senior management analyst for the H.J. Heinz School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University. Hennigan worked at Carnegie Mellon from 1988–1994 as a management consultant to the government of Allegheny County, responsible for managing its strategic planning project.

On behalf of the city of Pittsburgh, Dr. Hennigan accepted the Innovations in American Government Award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 1999 for the first-ever use of the Internet to sell municipal bonds, a project that Hennigan directed and was reported on in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Dr. Hennigan holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. He earned a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

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