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## The Impact of Veterans Returning to the Pittsburgh Region

■ *By Linda Tanzini Ambroso and Ken Sochats*

**M**ore than 21,000 Pennsylvanians have been deployed in service to our nation since September 11, 2001. Pennsylvania ranks third in the nation for the number of personnel serving in the military, as well as the number of deployed National Guard troops. The veteran population in Allegheny County alone is more than 100,000; statewide, Pennsylvania is home to about a million veterans, according to the Veterans Administration.

Figure 1 shows the population density of veterans within 100 miles of Pittsburgh. Darker regions have a higher concentration of veterans. Roughly one-tenth of the state's veteran population resides in Allegheny County, which is home to 102,000 veterans. Numerous other veterans populate surrounding counties that have economic ties to Pittsburgh.

As these soldiers and sailors complete their tours of duty, their return is affecting ordinary citizens who are

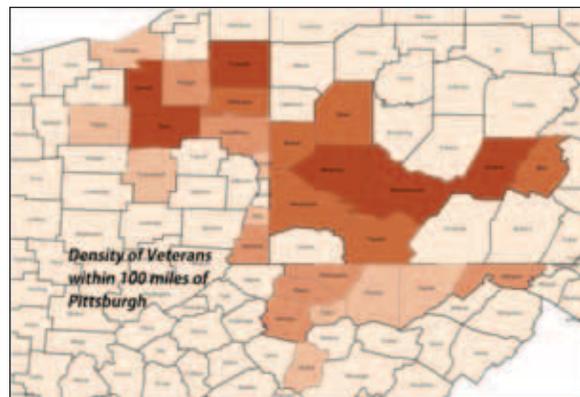


Figure 1: Density of veterans within 100 miles of Pittsburgh. Graphic by University of Pittsburgh Visual Information Systems Center.

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## A New Era Begins: Major Report Investigates Pittsburgh's Strengths and Weaknesses

■ *By Douglas Heuck*

**I**n January 1983, unemployment in metropolitan Pittsburgh reached 17.1 percent as deep recession and structural change rocked the region. Steel strikes raged and famous mills went cold. In time, an unwelcome realization settled in: Pittsburgh would never be the city it had been. As the Bruce Springsteen lyrics went, "Foreman says these jobs are going boys, and they ain't coming back—to your hometown."

The economic cataclysm sent untold thousand of young people from Pittsburgh to seek work elsewhere. It created the Pittsburgh diaspora and left a demographic hole that made Pittsburgh one of the nation's oldest regions. It also set in motion years of soul-searching, major reports commissioned on Pittsburgh's future, and, ultimately, a resolve in quarters across the city to remake a new Pittsburgh.

Part of that effort has been benchmarking the region's progress compared with other cities. And in February, the most prominent of those projects—PittsburghTODAY: Key Indicators for Understanding Our Region at

Pittsburghtoday.org—joined Pitt's University Center for Social and Urban Research (USCUR), with UCSUR serving as both research partner and fiduciary home for the regional indicators (see p. 7).

In early March, the indicators published a 44-page report on the current status and the future of the region, entitled "Pittsburgh Today and Tomorrow." Readers can assess how Pittsburgh compares with 14 other benchmark regions in 10 categories: arts, demographics, economy, education, environment, government, health, housing, public safety, and transportation. Some of the information is surprising. Some will invoke regional pride. And other aspects likely will sound an alarm.

- Pittsburghers use public transportation more than many benchmark cities with comparable populations, including Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Richmond, and Charlotte. And a significant number of those who use public

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transportation use it to travel to and from work. Public transportation diverts thousands of vehicles from highways and city streets, easing traffic congestion and limited parking capacity, particularly in downtown garages.

- Pittsburgh is known as an arts-rich region, with offerings on par with much larger regions. And while the most well-known arts groups reside within the city of Pittsburgh, the greater region is home to a variety of unique arts institutions seeking to build and maintain what they have.
- The region’s bridges are perhaps of greatest concern. In the 10-county region, 32 percent of the bridges are deemed structurally deficient, according to data from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission. This suggests a greater likelihood that weight restrictions and other measures will be imposed to limit their use.

The regional indicators considers Greater Pittsburgh to be a 22-county region, including eastern Ohio and northern West Virginia. And as part of the “Pittsburgh Today and Tomorrow” report, the project enlisted the help of leaders across this region, asking them to describe a problem the region needs to solve or an opportunity it needs to seize in order to build a strong future.

It’s not a stretch to say that a new era is at hand for the region. I would argue that 1980 marked the end of the 30-year, post-World War II expansion period in Pittsburgh and the beginning of another 30-year phase.

These last 30 years have been an era of seeking a viable future and then swimming through open sea to reach its shores.

From necessity, we began to think and cooperate as a region, along the lines of Ben Franklin’s famous quote: “If we don’t all hang together, then surely, we shall all hang separately.”

Finally, in the last several years, a new city-state of Pittsburgh has emerged. It has a diversified economy built on brain power. And this new regional economy has stood as a rock of stability as “the Great Recession” has battered the nation.

Pittsburgh is still strong in manufacturing, but today it’s a leader in energy, finance, health-care, and education, as well. We’re home to the Steelers and a vibrant arts scene; we’ve hosted the G-20 summit and World Environment Day; and our quality of life continues to win acclaim in national and international rankings.

We have by no means perfected the region, but after 30 years we are poised to consider our regional future, not with a measure of fear, but from a position of strength.

The history of Pittsburgh is a story of human accomplishment, beginning the day George Washington envisioned coal in the hills and a fort at the Point.

Now, as we face the beginning of a new phase in the story of Pittsburgh, what should our goals be for the next 30 years? What kind of new leadership will we need in order to achieve them?

We hope that the regional indicators, through its annual report on the region and future

in-depth journalism projects, is able to provide valuable information in continuing efforts to improve Greater Pittsburgh.

The regional indicators at Pittsburghtoday.org was created by the late John Craig to spark a more informed civic dialog.

By providing timely and accurate information about regional life, the project hopes to stimulate a discussion of where we are and where we hope to go.

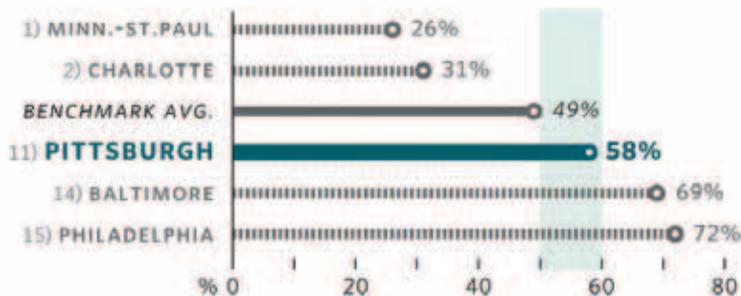
Comparing our region to other areas of the country lets us see how we measure up, and what our strengths and weaknesses are. It also gives us a way to measure progress as we move forward as a region.

The program is funded by the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, The Buhl Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, the Hillman Foundation, the McCune Foundation, and the Richard King Mellon Foundation. The regional indicators at Pittsburghtoday.org is overseen by an advisory committee chaired by Paul O’Neill, former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and retired CEO of Alcoa Inc.

The entire report can be viewed at pittsburghtoday.org, and is also published in the spring issue of *Pittsburgh Quarterly* magazine.

*Douglas Heuck is director of PittsburghTODAY: Key Indicators for Understanding Our Region at Pittsburghtoday.org. He can be reached at: dheuck@msn.com.*

**% OF ROADS IN MADIOCRE/POOR CONDITION | 2008**



source: TRIP

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welcoming home their loved ones from Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, experts and policymakers are assessing the economic and social impact of these returnees.

Veterans who return to civilian society are expected to affect the regional economy in several ways. These include:

1. Contributing battle-tested skills and leadership experience to the workforce;
2. Creating demand for products and services; and
3. Influencing scientific research.

We examine veteran personnel in the region in their capacity to affect the regional economy.

### **Skills and leadership**

Adam Strotz was a Navy corpsman and an assistant supervisor in emergency medical services at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, where he managed over 20 personnel and handled transportation schedules and emergency response duties around the clock. Certified in fleet marine force warfare, he participated in over 200 Marine combat infantry foot patrols and over 40 mounted patrols (in a HUMMVEE) in the Iraqi towns of Ramadi and Saqlawiyah.

He has treated gunshot and improvised explosive device (IED) wounds and other trauma-induced injuries. Now finishing his

communications degree at Pitt, he works at St. Clair Hospital as an emergency room technician. In this capacity, he handles IVs, phlebotomy procedures, EKG's, and other duties, and serves as an emergency medical services communication specialist.

His supervisor is Peggy Furman, RN, MSN, and director of emergency services at St. Clair Hospital in Mt. Lebanon. She notes that serving in the military provided Strotz with all the technical and medical skills required for his current position. "But more important," she says, "in an ER setting with constant movement and change from second-to-second, he is equipped to handle everything that happens in a calm, disciplined manner. He is a great employee and a great find."

Kelly Barcic is a tank turret repair technician in the Army National Guard. A graduate of Leadership Pittsburgh Inc., she also is executive director of the Pittsburgh Regional Business Coalition for Homeland Security. In this capacity she coordinates regional voluntary disaster planning efforts by the private sector, which owns or operates 85 percent of our nation's critical infrastructure sectors, which include energy, telecommunications, health care, chemical manufacturing, and transportation.

Barcic has a variety of contacts who have

served in the armed forces. She is channeling their logistics, rapid response, and teamwork skills, along with corporate support, to create an evolving inventory of assets, experts, and communication networks that can be accessed in a crisis by the Region 13 emergency response organization. For example, member resources such as dump trucks and communications equipment helped the city recover from a crippling snowstorm in February 2010.

When asked how her military experience facilitates her Coalition work, Barcic responds, "My experience, and that of my veteran and corporate colleagues, probably helps in that we are prepared to operate in crises, allocate resources, share information, and just get things done."

Veterans can be a source of reliable labor to meet workforce needs. Ronald Conley, director of Allegheny County Veterans' Services, helps organize "Operation Troop Employment," an annual job and resource fair for veterans and their families held at Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum in Oakland.

In addition, Conley's office has partnered with the Steamfitters Local 449 to offer a welding school for veterans, where they learn not only high-demand skills but also applicable safety rules and construction regulations.



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“If you say *semper fi* around here, people will jump,” says Joseph B. Smith, senior vice president of marketing at Dollar Bank.

Dollar Bank was the primary sponsor for the May 2010 Oakland job fair. Smith says his bank “actively seeks veterans for employment” and recognizes their sacrifice.

Smith also understands that “any time you can get young people to come back to the region, the local economy benefits.”

## Creating demand

Not only young people, but also military retirees are being encouraged to settle in Pittsburgh. In December 2010, the United Services Automobile Association (USAA), the largest U.S. military and veteran membership organization, rated Pittsburgh #8 in the overall top 10 “Best Places for Military Retirement.”

This rating, the first of its kind, was based on variables such as proximity to a military base, employment and education opportunities, and general quality-of-life features such as affordability.

Based on their sheer numbers alone, returning and retiring veterans are expected to add to the demand for products and services in the Pittsburgh region.

Veterans are expected to stimulate demand as they continue their education, purchase homes, and engage in deferred spending upon their return to the region.

In Allegheny County alone, their compensation and pensions exceeded \$145 million in 2009. Federal spending dedicated to veteran education, vocational rehabilitation, and employment across Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Westmoreland, Fayette, and Washington counties totals nearly \$20 million.

Data from the 2005 American Community Survey suggest that veterans have higher median earnings than nonveterans. Other research suggests military service and training contribute to the human capital of veterans by providing training and experience that would not have been received in the civilian

labor market.

New programs are emerging for veterans, such as the welding school mentioned above. These are expected to generate a “multiplier” effect on the regional economy.

In 2009, the University of Pittsburgh created an Office of Veterans Services to offer academic, financial, and other assistance to about 430 veterans who are earning their undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees at Pitt. Similarly, about 460 veterans or their dependents attend classes at the Community College of Allegheny County.

According to research by the U.S. Census Bureau, “Veterans, an older population in general, tend to be enrolled in college at older ages more often than nonveterans. Twenty percent of veterans 25 to 34 years old were enrolled in college in 2007, compared with 11 percent of nonveterans the same age.” Some veterans eligible for benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill may transfer them to dependents, a feature that will diversify the age range of beneficiaries.

The veteran population in Pittsburgh has attracted stimulus bill funds. For example, the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System recently received \$2.4 million to construct a newly completed suite that includes 12 state of the art intensive care beds and two negative pressure isolation rooms. It also received \$7.2 million for an emergency power distribution system to be completed by March 2011, along with plumbing enhancements valued at \$1.5 million.

## Research ‘ripple effects’

The economy and research agenda nationally, and in Pittsburgh, are affected by veterans. As shown in the table, our region is home to more than 40,000 “unique patients,” i.e., those who received treatment at a Veterans Administration health care facility.

Dr. Steven H. Graham is former associate chief of staff for research at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VA Pittsburgh) and now is director of its Geriatric Research, Education

and Clinical Center (GRECC), one of the system’s four research centers of excellence.

A 2010 recipient of the Federal Executive Board’s Excellence in Government Award for Outstanding Contribution to Science, Graham notes that VA Pittsburgh physicians and scientists receive nearly \$30 million a year in research grants from the VA, the National Institutes of Health (about \$14 million of the total), the Department of Defense, and other federal agencies, as well as non-federal research grants from pharmaceutical companies and non-profit foundations.

Recently VA Pittsburgh’s surgical ward participated in an innovative study that used the production system principles of the automaker Toyota to reduce transmission of a troublesome hospital-related infection; this approach resulted in a 60 percent decrease in this type of infection (MRSA) over four years.

In addition to affecting health outcomes, the research dollars support about 150 principal investigators and are affecting the demand for real estate.

For example, in April of 2009, developers of the \$130 million Bakery Square project in the East End of Pittsburgh announced a new tenant: the University of Pittsburgh’s Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), a partnership between the University, UPMC, and VA Pittsburgh.

HERL occupies about 40,000 square feet in the complex and is led by Dr. Rory Cooper, a veteran and, among other things, an international authority on wheelchair design.

Dr. Graham explains another benefit, “Veterans are ready and willing to participate in research trials” sponsored by his center of excellence and others.

He says more than a thousand veterans at the VA have volunteered for research studies and that these veterans “make a little-noticed contribution that is an important resource for the region. Our veteran research volunteers are playing a direct role in the improvement of both VA and civilian medical care, and local

initiatives to develop new medicines and assistive technology.”

According to the Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, its research and development (R&D) efforts are managed in these categories:

1. Biomedical laboratory R&D
2. Clinical science R&D
3. Health services R&D
4. Rehabilitation R&D

These areas mesh with Pittsburgh’s strengths in biotechnology, clinical medicine, and public health. Graham points out there are numerous partnerships between VA Pittsburgh and the University of Pittsburgh on such important topics as traumatic brain injury and

post-traumatic stress disorder.

Data that accurately document the economic effects of returning veterans to the Pittsburgh region are still being gathered for analysis. In the meantime, Pittsburghers have wasted no time in welcoming home from duty their sizeable cohort of native sons and daughters.

*Linda Tanzini Ambroso is a former civil servant with the U.S. Navy and State Department, a former legislative aide, and now a consultant on security, education, and government relations issues. She can be reached at ambroso4@verizon.net. Ken Sochats is codirector of the University of Pittsburgh Center for National Preparedness, head of the Visual Information Systems Center, a faculty member in the*

*Department of Industrial Engineering, and a telecommunications expert. He can be reached at sochats@pitt.edu.*

*The authors would like to thank Dr. Paul Rogers, Dr. Steven H. Graham, and Dawn Fuhrer of VA Pittsburgh; Kelly Barcic of the Pittsburgh Regional Business Coalition for Homeland Security; Joseph B. Smith of Dollar Bank; Robert P. Crytzer, Peggy Furman, and Adam Strotz of St. Clair Hospital; Ronald Conley of Allegheny County Veterans Services; and all others who contributed to this article. Additional information is available from the Reaching Rural Veterans Initiative of the Geisinger Health System and the Veterans Administration.*

### DATA SNAPSHOT: Selected Categories of Spending on Veterans in the Pittsburgh Region, 2009 (Expenditures in \$000s)

	Allegheny County	Beaver County	Butler County	Westmoreland County	Fayette County	Washington County	Pennsylvania
<b>Veteran Population</b>	102,008	17,957	15,724	36,950	13,679	18,620	995,135
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	\$472,689	\$47,717	\$72,398	\$91,238	\$ 47,118	\$ 49,539	\$3,508,671
<b>Selected spending categories:</b>							
<b>Compensation and Pensions</b>	\$145,036	\$23,220	\$21,208	\$ 46,443	\$ 25,720	24,653	\$1,483,207
<b>Construction</b>	\$ 32,572	-	\$ 356	-	-	-	\$ 47,829
<b>Education and Vocational Rehabilitation/Employment</b>	\$ 11,036	\$ 1,716	\$ 1,436	\$ 2,807	\$ 1,120	\$ 1,372	\$ 102,054
<b>Medical Care**</b>	\$240,021	\$21,637	\$46,751	\$39,519	\$ 19,375	\$ 22,149	\$1,637,892
<b>Unique patients***</b>	19,696	5,030	4,779	7,581	3,015	3,983	228,607

\* Veteran Population— As of September 30, 2009, VA Office of the Actuary.

\*\* Medical Care expenditures include dollars for medical services, medical administration, facility maintenance, educational support, research support, and other overhead items.

\*\*\* Unique patients are patients who received treatment at a VA health care facility. Data provided by the Allocation Resource Center (ARC).

Note: The table highlights only selected categories of spending; rows do not add to totals.

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. [www1.va.gov/VETDATA/GDX/Geographical\\_data.asp](http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/GDX/Geographical_data.asp)

# Allegheny County Snapshot—Where New Residents Are Moving

Recently released data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) program provides detailed information on patterns of economic activity within the region.

In December 2010, the program released its first data at the census tract level, collected over five years between 2005 and 2009.

Here we employ recently released ACS data

to categorize individual census tracts by the percentage of their population one year or older who resided outside of Allegheny County one year earlier.

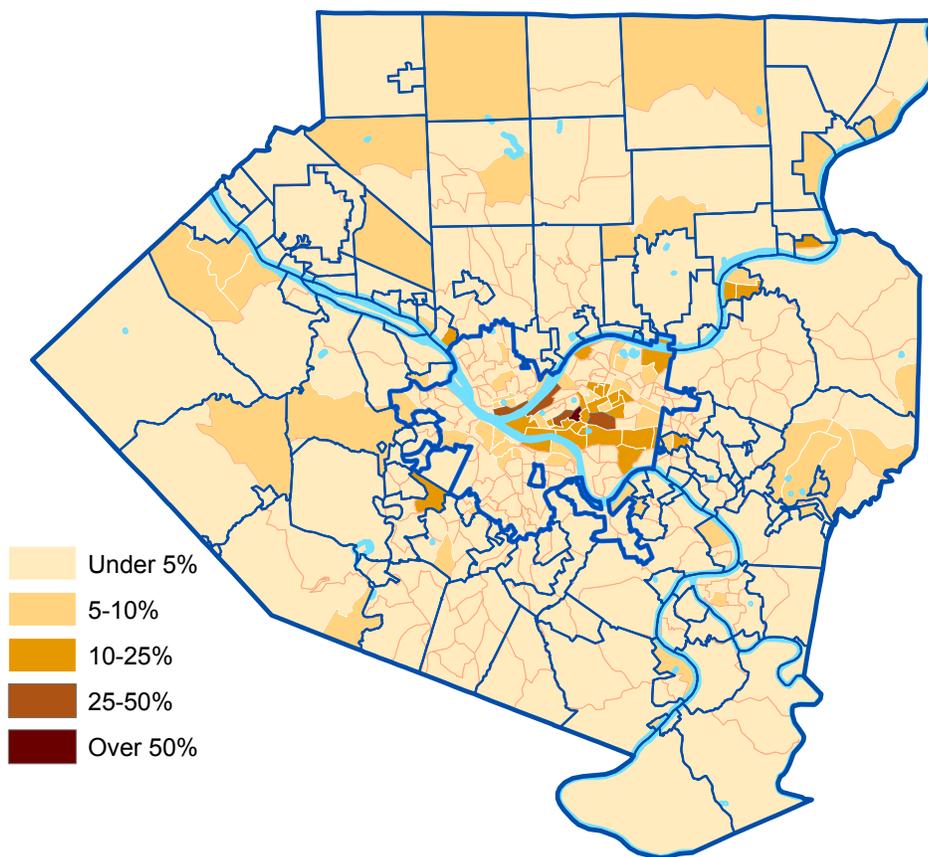
This provides a description of what communities and neighborhoods are more likely to be attracting new residents.

Certainly evident is the strong impact

students and temporary residents have in moving into areas near higher education institutions concentrated in the Oakland and downtown neighborhoods of the city of Pittsburgh.

Forthcoming in PEQ, we will focus on neighborhood data from the ACS and 2010 decennial census, as they are released.

**Percentage of Residents Who Resided Outside of Allegheny County One Year Earlier By Census Tract (2005-2009)**



## New Staff—Urban and Regional Analysis Program at UCSUR

The Urban and Regional Analysis Program welcomes new staff members Doug Heuck and Milana Nick to UCSUR. Doug and Milana bring to UCSUR PittsburghTODAY: Key Indicators for Understanding Our Region.

PittsburghTODAY was developed by the late John Craig, former editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. John was also our former colleague here at UCSUR and documented his vision of the regional indicators project through PEQ (“The Southwestern Pennsylvania Indicators Consortium,” March 2006; “UCSUR at Center of New Regional Indicator Site,” September 2006; “Update on the Regional Indicator Project,” December 2007). In 2009, John relocated the project to 3RC in Downtown Pittsburgh.

Now, in 2011, Doug and Milana have joined UCSUR and relocated PittsburghTODAY back to its first home.

Doug Heuck is the director of the PittsburghTODAY: Key Indicators for Understanding Our Region project. Doug is a long-time journalist and, while at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, worked with Editor John Craig on a series of benchmark reports to understand how the Pittsburgh region compared to a number of comparable metropolitan areas in the country. This work became the genesis for the indicators project. Heuck is also editor and publisher of *Pittsburgh Quarterly* magazine, which he founded in 2006.

Heuck spent the first 20 years of his career at the *Pittsburgh Press* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. As an investigative reporter, Heuck penned 13 newspaper series and won several national writing awards and three Keystone Distinguished Writing Awards, given annually for Pennsylvania’s best newspaper writing. His newspaper series ranged from living on the streets disguised as a homeless man to the last in-depth interview of polio pioneer Dr. Jonas Salk. Heuck was *Post-Gazette* business editor for five years before leaving the newspaper and founding *Pittsburgh Quarterly*.

Milana Nick began working on PittsburghTODAY in 2007 and is its research and data manager. Milana is a 2003 graduate of Pitt’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs with an MPA degree in policy research and management, and public and nonprofit management. She received her BA from Johns Hopkins University in international studies. Milana previously was a graduate student researcher here at UCSUR. She also worked at the Housing Assistance Council in Washington, D.C. and the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh. Milana and her husband, Robert, live in Washington, Pa., with their son, Robby.

We look forward to PittsburghTODAY’s return to UCSUR and exciting new developments in the project. PittsburghTODAY will be releasing a new annual report in the coming weeks. This report will provide a comprehensive view of how the Pittsburgh region is doing in comparison to 14 benchmark regions. The project will also be revamping its Web site to provide more

context for the data to be more useful and user-friendly.

In addition, PittsburghTODAY is launching a major in-depth journalism initiative later this year. As the journalistic landscape continues its dramatic change, it is clear that, while there is an explosion of information in all directions, the quality of some of the most important information is diminishing. Specifically, project journalism is wanting. This kind of journalism helps a community understand itself, chart courses of action, and realize when it has deviated from its course. Our reports will educate regional decision makers and the public, and lead to civic improvement. The initiative will combine the strengths of investigative reporting with the real-time indicators on PittsburghTODAY.org and research from the URA program to provide reporting and statistical depth.

Visit the PittsburghTODAY project at: [Pittsburghtoday.org](http://Pittsburghtoday.org).

### Urban and Regional Analysis Program Announcing Spring Brown Bag Seminar Speakers

The Urban and Regional Analysis program at UCSUR Brown Bag Seminar continues through the spring. Please join us from noon–1:30 p.m. at 121 University Place in the 2nd floor conference room, unless otherwise noted.

- Friday, March 25: Lisa Nelson, Senior Policy Analyst, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, “Mortgage Delinquencies in Pennsylvania: Are Loan Modifications Stemming the Tide?”
- Thursday, April 7: Karl Schlachter, Senior Vice President and Senior Project Manager, McCormack Baron Salazar, Inc., “Affordable Housing Strategies”
- Friday, April 15: Rachael Woldoff, PhD, Associate Professor, Division of Sociology and Anthropology, West

Virginia University, “White Flight/Black Flight: The Dynamics of Racial Change in an American Neighborhood”

Also, please join us for the 2011 *Iris Marion Young Lecture on Political Engagement*: Dr. Heidi Hartmann, President, Institute for Women’s Policy Research

“Achieving Equal Pay—What Will It Take”

March 31, University of Pittsburgh, University Club, Ballroom A, 3 p.m.

Cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh’s Women’s Studies Program, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, and UCSUR

Please check the UCSUR Web page for additional seminars throughout the term ([www.ucsur.pitt.edu](http://www.ucsur.pitt.edu)).



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## Recent Publications by the University Center for Social and Urban Research

Impacts of Vanpooling in Pennsylvania and Future Opportunities (2010)

Migration Trends in the Pittsburgh Region, Update September 2009 (9/09)

Social Return on Investment Case Study Analysis: Community Human Services and The Union Project (1/09)

The Nonprofit Sector: An Economic and Community Asset (1/09)

EEO Employment Data for Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh Region (2/08)

Gender Wage Disparity in the Pittsburgh Region (12/07)

The Impact on Nonprofit, Large Landowners on Public Finance in a Fiscally Distressed Municipality: A Case Study of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (11/07)

The Impact of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and UPMC Cancer Centers on the Pittsburgh Regional Economy (10/07)

Migration Trends in the Pittsburgh Region, 2000–06 (7/07)

Diversity Among Pennsylvania State Boards (12/06)

Census 2000 city of Pittsburgh Neighborhood Employment by Place of Work Profiles (3/06)

Allegheny County Economic Trends (12/05)

Allegheny County Housing and Socio-demographic Trends (12/05)

Disabilities in Southwestern Pennsylvania (10/04)

Women's Benchmarks Reports (4/04)

Black-White Benchmarks Reports (3/04)

The State of Aging and Health in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County (5/03)

2002 User Survey for the Pennsylvania Allegheny Trail Alliance (3/03)

Diversity Among Elected Officials in the Pittsburgh Region in 2002 (2/03)

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