Johnson Institute Leads Discussion on Taxing Nonprofits

Up until now, nonprofit organizations in Pennsylvania were exempt from paying property taxes to local taxing authorities. But that may change if the City of Pittsburgh's tax exempt proposal is approved.

That was the impetus for discussion on Nov. 6 when the Johnson Institute for Responsible Leadership convened a panel of local and national experts to analyze the special budgetary challenges that property tax-exemptions create for cities with large land-owning nonprofits like universities and hospitals.

Pittsburgh's Mayor Luke Ravenstahl recently proposed a 1% tuition tax on all university students in the city. Other fiscal proposals from municipal and county government have attempted to impose service fees on nonprofit institutions in Pittsburgh, or asked charitable organizations to voluntarily contribute to public coffers.

"The nonprofit sector [in Pittsburgh] is big and growing," said Sabina Deitrick, associate professor at GSPIA. "When Pittsburgh lost 100,000 manufacturing jobs during the decline of the steel industry in the 1970s, the city and region looked to a new partner in its economic development, more specifically the healthcare and university sectors."
PhD STUDENT PUBLISHES MONOGRAPH

Alla Khadka, a second year GSPIA PhD student, recently published her monograph, Putin's Federal and Constitutional Reforms and Democracy. The monograph, which explains and outlines Russian President Vladimir Putin's government reforms, dispels some of the negative interpretations of change offered by Western analysts.

"My hope is that this study will instill a deeper understanding and consequently a more tolerant attitude towards the Russian political regime, or at least challenge some of the existing negative images," Khadka explains.

The session framed the Pittsburgh debate within a national context, and brought about interesting policy recommendations that could be implemented in cities across the country. Nonprofit, public sector and academic leaders agreed that the first step toward achieving a compromise between taxing authorities and nonprofit institutions is an ongoing and civil conversation between concerned parties. The conversation should be mediated by a credible, neutral community leader, and the group's consensus should be taken to the state capitol in order to lobby for a state-run solution.

"The panel discussion is a great first step in bringing an open dialogue to a controversial issue," explained Kevin Kearms, director of the Johnson Institute. "It's our hope that the ideas and recommendations forged during this meeting will facilitate future policy analysis and debate."

GSPIA Executive Management Initiative

An information session was held Friday, Nov. 13 to announce the school's new Executive Management Initiative in Downtown Pittsburgh.

GSPIA will now offer video conferencing classes at the Moorhead Federal Building to federal, state and other government agency employees interested in pursuing either a certificate or master's degree in public policy and management. Classes will begin in the Spring semester.

Although the issue is not new to the region, tensions have intensified due to ongoing budget concerns exacerbated by the global financial crisis. The Nov. 6 discussion was moderated by Rick Cohen, national correspondent for Nonprofit Quarterly. Community participants engaged with panel members Evelyn Brody, Chicago-Kent Law School; Woods Bowman, DePaul University; Sabina Deitrick, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs; Joe Geiger, executive director, Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO); and James Turner, former finance director, City of Pittsburgh.
Kobe University and GSPIA Formalize Partnership

GSPIA has formalized its agreement with Kobe University to expand educational opportunities to students. The agreement was finalized when GSICS' Professor and Former Dean Motoki Takahashi presented the signed agreement to GSPIA Dean John Keeler on Tuesday, Oct. 27.

The Kobe program will provide GSPIA students the opportunity to earn a Certificate in International Development and Asian Affairs while pursuing their MPA, MID or MPIA degree. Students will also be able to pursue internship opportunities and advanced language studies while in country.

AGORA Networks in D.C.

This year AGORA organized its first professional development trip to Washington, D.C. to offer GSPIA students an opportunity to meet and discuss future career options with alumni working in the nation's capitol.
AGORA’s two-day Washington event, held Nov. 5-6, began with a happy hour just a few minutes' walk from the White House. It offered students a chance to meet one-on-one with alumni representing a diverse group of organizations, including government and private sector businesses.

Friday morning opened with breakfast at a local hotel followed by three panel discussions of alumni who invited student questions. Panelists included representatives from the Brookings Institute, ACDI/VOCA, the Free Trade Federation, the World Bank, USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. After the last panel, students traveled across town, stopping for lunch, and then met with representatives at the General Accounting Office's headquarters for an informative discussion.

Students were offered a choice between informational sessions hosted by two prestigious institutions. Some students attended a seminar at the Academy for Educational Development (AED), a nonprofit organization working globally to improve education, health, civil society and economic development in collaboration with local and national partners around the world. Others met with representatives from Search for Common Ground, which works with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving.

New Staff Arrive at GSPIA

**Shannon Brenner, Career Counselor**
Shannon Brenner earned her BA in English/Creative Writing at Pitt and an MAT from Chatham University. She was previously a high school teacher in the Woodland Hills School District of Pittsburgh before serving as a Program Coordinator and Instructor for the Career Development Center of Jewish Family & Children's Service in Pittsburgh. Shannon will provide additional services to students seeking career opportunities.

**Diane Roth Cohen, Assistant to the Director of the Ford Institute for Human Security**
Diane Roth Cohen is the newly appointed Assistant to the Director of GSPIA's Ford Institute for Human Security. She comes to Pitt with a career in fund development, nonprofit management and event planning. Previously, Diane worked for a variety of organizations, including Citiparks, Achieva and Girl Scouts. She utilizes her management and planning skills on a daily basis as mother to three children and wife of Nat C. Cohen, a Pittsburgh area real estate attorney. A lifelong resident of Pittsburgh and Squirrel Hill, Diane earned her undergraduate degree from Pitt.

**Emily Griffith, Assistant Director of Career Services**
Emmy Griffith is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned a BA in Communications. She previously worked at the Pennsylvania Culinary Institute in downtown Pittsburgh as a Career Services Coordinator/Employer Services Coordinator. During her time at the Culinary Institute, Emmy was responsible for assisting students with securing their externships, providing job search assistance and planning and executing all on-campus recruiting events.
Kathy Risco, CONNECT Associate Director

Kathy Risco earned her BA in Political Science and History at Pitt and her MPPM from GSPIA. She is very active in the Pittsburgh community, serving on the GSPIA Dean Alumni Council, the Point of Pittsburgh Sailing League, Run Baby Run Political Action Committee and the Host Committee for the YWCA Racial Justice Awards. Prior to her work with CONNECT, Kathy was the Senior Program Manager at Leadership Pittsburgh Inc., where she was charged with the strategic development and management of the Leadership Development Initiative. In her current position as the Associate Director of CONNECT and the Congress of Neighboring Communities initiative she will coordinate the collective activities of the City of Pittsburgh and the municipalities that share its border to better advocate the collective interests of its 680,000 residents.

Washington Connection

GSPIA and Pitt Law alumni participate in a panel discussion on healthcare reform. Pictured (from left to right): Tony Choe, William Pierce (MPIA ’84) and Jennifer Ray.

On Nov. 10, GSPIA and the University Pittsburgh School of Law held a forum entitled "Understanding the Health Care Debate" at the Farragut Business Center in Washington DC. Jessica Hatherill, associate director of Alumni Relations and Career Services in our Washington Center, and Brianna Green, the Law School's associate director for D.C. Outreach, invited a panel of distinguished GSPIA and Law School alumni to address the subject. Each panel member gave a presentation highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the current health care legislation. After the presentations, the panel fielded questions from the audience and engaged in a lively discussion on the topic.
Alumni Update - Christine Carr, MPIA ’76

Even after three decades, Christine Carr remains so emotionally invested in her work that attending a ground breaking for one of her projects still chokes her up.

As the manager of community development finance for Silicon Valley Bank, Carr helps people fulfill a basic human need: finding decent, safe, and affordable housing.

"I still get goose bumps and tears in my eyes. I love my work. It just makes such a difference in people's lives," she says. "I'm very proud to be a part of that. Affordable housing, with supportive services, is how to lift people out of poverty."

Read more

Student Spotlight - Aruna Raman, MID ‘10

GSPIA student Aruna Raman participates in a renewable energy simulation game with industry experts, as part of a gaming workshop at CSTEP. Raman coordinated media relations for this event.

A year ago, I would not have believed that I would spend my summer clambering up roofs to study solar panels. But my internship at the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy in Bangalore, India, was filled with work of this nature. All these experiences contributed to an interesting time in an environment that encouraged innovative research and a healthy spirit of inquiry.

I first heard of CSTEP fortuitously during a Carnegie Mellon University conference, which prompted me to conduct a Google search. The results led to an interview with one of CSTEP’s principal researchers, Dr. Robin King, a development and labor economist.

I was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of the interview since my homework revealed that CSTEP housed PhD researchers with several years experience in economics and engineering. However, I was reassured by the organization's interdisciplinary focus and small size, which would give me an opportunity to focus my efforts into different projects. Surprisingly, a prior three-year technical writing stint that I had undertaken proved instrumental in securing the internship.
My first day at CSTEP turned out to be a pleasant surprise. I expected a pre-determined internship plan with an assigned list of tasks. Instead, I was given a choice of research projects, which I thought was a refreshing approach, and yet an overwhelming responsibility for an intern new to the organization. I picked two projects - renewable energy (specifically solar lighting), and urban poverty, as manifested in the rapid growth in slums in the city of Bangalore.

In the coming days, I focused my energies on understanding solar energy policy in terms of principal debates and the role of different stakeholders. Because of the organization’s size, I wasn’t strictly assigned to a senior researcher, but was given a free rein in designing my research as long as I reported to the director of the organization. I was initially intimidated by the lack of direction provided and my minimal expertise in renewable energy. However, I determined that the best way to learn about different facets of the project was to speak to different stakeholders. I set up interviews, therefore, with state government officials, policy experts, solar product dealers and engineers at CSTEP to understand different aspects of the solar policy debate. My classes in economics and policy analysis proved very useful. In fact, I was able to construct a policy debate on solar lighting and sounded like a quasi-expert thanks in no small part to a renewable energy case study discussed in Dr. Siddharth Chandra’s microeconomics class!

As the days passed, I organized more field visits to organizations that had solar panel installations. Some days there was much roof-climbing and pretending to be technologically aware. Other days consisted of routine "being thrown to the wolves" drills. I still remember one afternoon when a senior researcher invited me into a conference room filled with state government officials and policy experts to "present my findings so far." Though I had been keeping a somewhat diligent record of my observations, the request to present was unexpected. Nonetheless, I was grateful for the opportunity to present before such an esteemed audience.

In addition to my work on solar lighting, I also wrote content for and administered the CSTEP blog, and was the media relations contact for a gaming workshop organized by the Technical University of Delft, The Netherlands. I also coordinated and edited a major report on climate change that was circulated to central and state government officials. While I didn’t quite relish being on speed dial for a cabinet minister at the time, I am now glad for having had the opportunity!

I enjoyed a great degree of autonomy in carrying out my internship work, and was heartened to see the easy camaraderie between people at all authority levels. It was not unusual to see the founder of CSTEP (who served as technical advisor to a former prime minister of India), walking up to interns and sharing a joke, or inviting them to high-level meetings on subjects as varied as organic farming, climate change and zoning laws.

My solar lighting research reports gained traction in creating best-practice recommendations that would eventually be presented to the state energy secretary. I was sanguine about leaving CSTEP at a critical time for the organization; however, what I learned during my two months at CSTEP will fill a lifetime of memories.