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## Humphrey says Pitt taught her leadership skills that she'll take to Carlow

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By **DONOVAN HARRELL**

Kathy Humphrey's 16 years at Pitt are coming to end as she transitions into her new role as the 11th president of Carlow University on July 1.

Humphrey, Pitt's senior vice chancellor for engagement and secretary of the Board of Trustees, first came to Pitt in 2005, serving as vice provost and dean of students until moving to her current role in 2015.

Humphrey has been a busy, prominent leader on campus dedicated to making Pitt an inclusive environment for the LGBTQIA+ community. Some of her achievements include helping develop the Cross-Cultural Leadership Development Center and Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The University Times talked to Humphrey about her achievements on campus and how Pitt impacted her life personally and professionally. The conversation has been edited for conciseness and clarity.

### **How are you feeling now that your time at Pitt is ending?**

It's very bittersweet. I've been at Pitt for 16 years. That's a long time to be in one community. I feel knitted to this community in so many ways. I am sad to leave this community every day. But I'm excited about the work I'm going to continue to do as well. Of course, nobody wants to leave their colleagues. But ... I am excited about gaining new colleagues and gaining a new community and the work that is ahead of us at Carlow.

### **What made you decide to take on this new position, and will you be moving?**

I will continue to stay in my house that faces the Cathedral of Learning. The fact that I get to stay in Pittsburgh, that I get to maintain all the relationships that I have because I'm just down the street makes this a nice transition.

When I came to the University of Pittsburgh, I told (former chancellor) Mark Nordenberg that my ultimate aspiration was to become a university president. I said to him that I was willing to come to the University of Pittsburgh if they were willing to give me opportunities and skills that would help me to become a strong university president. And in return, I would help them build a strong undergraduate student experience. And I feel like both of us held our end of the bargain up.

And then when I started working for Pat Gallagher, he too gave me other opportunities that strengthen my abilities to become a university president, and that's why I stayed longer — because of the opportunities to gain more skills, more knowledge.

### **How did your family react to the news?**

Whatever university I work at my family attaches to that university as if it's their very own. I have to tell you, initially, my family's like, "Oh, no, we love Pitt. Why are you leaving?" I explained to them, they could continue to love Pitt, but we have to transition now. I think they were excited that I was moving on to do that which I had been training to do and aspired to do.

I think they were pleased that I was going to a place where I believed that I could continue to make a difference in the lives of students. At Carlow, 42 percent of students are Pell-eligible, and 23 to 26 percent of the students are African-American and Black. And I was both of those. I was Pell-eligible. I am Black, and I know what can happen to a student who is first generational if they are given opportunities and chances. Going to Carlow, for me, is about not just changing the students' lives, but changing generations. And the fact that it's faith-based — I am Christian — that was another real consideration for me as well, to be at a place that's very close to my faith.

### **What are some of your accomplishments at Pitt that you are most proud of?**

I've had an incredible run here. Rarely do people get to work at institutions where they believe that they're helping the institution with its goals to move forward but I feel like I've been a part of that. And it's been exciting, to say the least.

The initial work that I came to do is probably what I'm most proud of. I came here because Pitt needed to create an undergraduate experience that students would feel connected to the University, that they would retain at a higher rate, and that they would graduate at a higher rate. All of those things have materialized in the 16 years. I was given the goal of helping students, to retain 93 percent and 94 percent, we're there today. We weren't there when I came.

We overhauled freshman orientation so that within the first six weeks of school, we knew that students felt connected. We knew that somebody knew every student's name and that even though we were a large institution, it was important to me that students knew that we knew who they were, and we were concerned about them.

I'm proud of the work that Kenyon (Bonner, dean of students) took on and has kept moving forward even to this day. And I'm just pleased every time I see a student with a shirt on that says, I love Pitt. I believe in these 16 years; we've been able to develop some really strong alumni for the future. And universities depend on their alumni as they get older and as they grow.

I'm proud of the students that have come into my life personally. I go to graduations; people call me for birthday parties .... I'm thrilled with the relationships that I still have with many of them today. Those students still call me Dean Humphrey, wherever I go. I was proud to be Dean Humphrey and I enjoyed that job tremendously.

I'm proud of the communications team, of course. The community relations team is huge for me. I think we are not where we should be with community relations, but we are a long way from where we were with the development of the Community Engagement Center strategy and the implementation and completion of the center in Homewood, and the start of the one in the Hill District.

I'm proud that we opened our Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. That was huge for me. When I moved into this role as the senior vice chancellor for engagement, it was important for me that, institutionally, we were doing this work. So, when Pat Gallagher gave me the green light, and I thank God for Pat Gallagher because let me tell you, without a green light in this space, you can't make any progress.

He said systemic racism, we have to do something about it. We started down that road to creating a better Pitt, a more just Pitt. The work that we had to do in the LGBT community, we are light years today, from where we were when I came here 16 years ago

**What are some of the leadership lessons that you've learned here that you'll take with you to Carlow?**

I've learned the power of listening. Not just with my ears, but also with my eyes, and also with the feel of the space. I didn't realize how much I immersed myself into the environment to determine how people are doing and how people are feeling until I couldn't do it. I couldn't feel the environment on Zoom. That was interesting to me from COVID 19.

I've gotten many opportunities to try to inspire our community to do greater things. And I think that's what a leader is. I think a leader inspires; they execute. You can do all the inspiration you want to, if you don't execute, you are not a leader, because you're not changing anything, you're not making anything better, anything different. And I have happened to be one of those people that is motivated by the difference, by the change. I'm not motivated by standing in one place.

**What work remains to make Pitt more inclusive?**

I think we have a good year in front of ourselves. We know who we are. We know our strengths. We know our weaknesses in this area. So now it's that next phase, we've got some strategies. Now we must execute that strategy. Now we must take bold movements to say it's going to be different than most other places.

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