

UNIVERSITY TIMES

Serving Faculty & Staff Since 1968

VOLUME 55
ISSUE 24, SPECIAL EDITION: JULY 17, 2023

In April interview, Gallagher talked about his nine-year tenure

Monday, July 17, 2023

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the April 29 University Times.

By **SUSAN JONES**

The end is in sight for Patrick Gallagher's time as Pitt's 18th chancellor, but that doesn't mean he's not busy.

Gallagher will officially step down in July, when Joan Gabel becomes the University's first female chancellor.

"A large part of my focus now is really, what can I do to make sure Joan Gabel is the next great chancellor at Pitt and to make her transition as effective as possible and help her be the best chancellor that she can be," Gallagher said in an interview this week.

At Senate Council on April 20, he said Gabel is "just a very approachable, sincere leader, and I think she's doing this for all the right reasons, and that's really what this is about — somebody dedicated to what we're doing here who's going to be a partner and lead us. ... You now need to train my successor as you trained me. I know she'll be looking forward to it, much as I did."

Gallagher sat down recently with the University Times to reflect on his time at Pitt and what's next for him and the University.

On Pitt's biggest accomplishments during his tenure

"It's always hard to summarize nine years in a couple of sentences," Gallagher said. "I think what I'm most proud of is, at a time when higher education has had quite a few headwinds — socially, culturally, politically, a pandemic, financially — the University has managed to

not just survive, but I would say thrive.”

He cited the momentum in academic programs and research, as well as athletics and fundraising.

“It’s just really gratifying to see that we’ve sort of overcome these obstacles,” he said, “but I think the tough times are with us. (Universities are) always mixed up in the turbulence of the day and there’s a lot of turbulence. But we face all of those headwinds from a position of strength.”

The chancellor also is proud that Pitt has chosen in the past several years to look outward instead of inward. This includes the University’s community engagement work, its economic impact through translational and entrepreneurial work and its social impact by working on the important issues of the day. “I just think that the story of impact for the University is really important, and that’s where the value proposition of higher education lives,” he said.

On his toughest challenges

“I would say the most frustrating challenge has been the degree to which political viewpoint has affected people’s perception of higher education,” Gallagher said.

“We’ve lost what has been since World War II a strong, bipartisan national consensus on the importance of colleges and universities, on the value of a college degree, on the importance of university research, on the critical role universities play in communities. That suddenly is now being questioned very broadly, very consistently, and, to an increasing extent, in a way that it draws sharp distinctions based on party. Then it’s becoming a political issue.”

He said this hasn’t been as prevalent in Pennsylvania, but “we’re not immune to it.”

“What universities do, the value of a college degree, the importance of that research, has never been more important. The world is more knowledge-centric than it ever has been, and this is a strange time to have lost our confidence as a country in terms of the value of (higher education).”

On the biggest surprises moving from government to academia

“Well, I didn’t have to worry about athletics or football teams or anything else,” he said of his time as director of the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Institute of Standards and Technology and as acting deputy secretary of Commerce before coming to Pitt.

On a more serious note, he said that although people think government is very complex and has to deal with a variety of constituencies, “I think university leadership is much harder than government leadership, to be honest.”

Just like in government, he’s had to deal with “very many different groups that don’t always agree on everything. ... If I’m honest with myself, I wasn’t expecting that to be as true as it was.”

On the challenges Pitt faces in the next few years

"I'm going to sound sort of facetious about this, but the biggest challenge you face for the next three years is that nobody has a crystal ball that will tell you what the next three years will be like," he said.

Some of the issues ahead include:

- The amount of legislation being proposed nationwide to restrict higher ed is "quite alarming."
- Students coming to universities now have a gap in their learning experience because of the pandemic that still isn't understood.
- A wholesale change in the enrollment landscape is altering where students are applying to go to college and what their expectations are.
- Universities must figure out how to support students after graduation as the world of work goes through massive changes.

Gallagher said the key is to remain flexible. "It almost sounds like the COVID messaging — be very flexible and adaptable as we navigate what's likely to continue to be a dynamic and uncertain period."

On his goals during his last few months

"I certainly don't have a chancellor bucket list," he said. "There are things that will happen under my watch, and I'm certainly working on those. I have to put in an interim provost and ... I have to support the budget process, which should be done before I step down."

Much of his focus now is on helping with the transition to a new chancellor.

"The trick with transitions is they're driven by the person coming in," Gallagher said. "It's not me telling Joan what she should do. It's Joan asking me for information that can be helpful to her. It starts with a lot of listening, being available, collecting information, explaining why we were doing what we were doing and what the thought process was."

"Joan is a very seasoned leader and has spent most of her adult life leading universities in some capacity. But she's never been to Pitt so a lot of this is talking about ... the things that are unique to us. And just to help her get her sea legs."

On Joan Gabel's attributes as chancellor-elect

"She's somebody whose whole life has been dedicated to the mission of higher education," he said. "If anyone has walked the talk, it's Joan Gabel, even more than me. I came in from outside of the academy."

The other thing she brings is, "she's not Pat Gallagher," the chancellor said, "and she comes in with her own viewpoints and new ideas and new energy. And there's a wonderful kind of creative disruption that happens when somebody new comes in and gets to know the team"

and starts to ask a lot of the key questions. There's an opening of possibilities that are part of that new start. And I think that's really magical. And that's why I think it's actually good for institutions to change at the top from time to time."

On joining the faculty ranks

Gallagher said he does plan to join the faculty union when he starts teaching in the physics department in fall 2024, but he's not sure if there's a waiting period before he can do that.

"My intention is I would be a member of the union because the faculty voted to be represented by one. And I think that's part of the deal — when the faculty have agreed to be represented that way, you should be part of that process."

He'll also be moving to the North Side shortly after commencement to give crews time to clean the chancellor's residence in Shadyside before Gabel arrives in mid-July.

Gallagher's tenure

Chancellor Patrick Gallagher announced in April 2022 that he will step down this summer. During his time, all of the deans in both the provost and senior vice chancellor for health sciences areas and all the senior leadership have changed — some more than once.

Below are some key developments since Gallagher arrived **in** 2014.

AUGUST 2014: Patrick Gallagher is appointed Pitt's 18th chancellor, succeeding Mark Nordenberg.

MAY 2015: Pitt appoints its inaugural vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion.

2016: The first strategic Plan for Pitt is launched, with an update unveiled in 2021.

APRIL 2017: The Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Research is created to help Pitt's push to grow research funding. Today, the University receives more than \$1 billion a year.

FALL 2017: Pitt's first new school in 20 years — the School of Computing and Information — enrolls its first cohort of students.

JANUARY 2018: Gallagher establishes a committee to examine socially responsible investing as it relates to Pitt's investment portfolio.

JULY 2018: Pitt's Office of Sustainability is established to centralize campus-wide sustainability activities and strategies. Pitt has since pledged to become carbon neutral by 2037, the University's 250th anniversary, and has developed a Climate Action Plan.

OCTOBER 2018: Pitt's first Community Engagement Center opens in Homewood. A second opened in the Hill District in 2021.

DECEMBER 2018: Panthers Forward welcomes its inaugural class — students who receive \$5,000 in debt relief as well as mentorship from Pitt alumni. As of fall 2022, the program had helped 600 students pay off \$3.75 million in debt.

FEBRUARY 2019: The 30-year Campus Master Plan is released, outlining many of Pitt's plans for future infrastructure, expansions, parking, transportation and more.

FEBRUARY 2019: The Pitt Success program is announced, restructuring financial aid by matching the students' Pell Grants across all Pitt campuses.

MARCH 2019: The two-story, 7,000-square-foot Chemical Engineering Building opens at Pitt-Johnstown.

2019: The first Pitt Seed Project funding cycle is introduced. This project, which was adapted in 2021 to reflect the new Plan for Pitt, aids faculty and staff in developing ideas that will advance Pitt's strategic plan and have a systemwide impact.

SPRING 2020: Pitt shuts down its campuses because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The University's subsequent prevention and response efforts, focusing on mitigation, communication and targeted surveillance testing, have been studied as a possible model for other institutions to refer to in the future.

AUGUST 2020: Pitt-Titusville is revamped into an Education and Training Hub, an academic and technical school that shares space with Northern Pennsylvania Regional College, Swanson School of Engineering's Manufacturing Assistance Center and Brockway Center for Arts & Technology.

OCTOBER 2021: Faculty vote overwhelmingly to unionize under the United Steelworkers. Negotiations are ongoing for the group's first contract.

NOVEMBER 2021: Pitt receives a pledge from the Richard K. Mellon Foundation for \$100 million to develop Pitt Bioforge, a highly specialized bioresearch and development facility on Hazelwood Green.

2021: Pitt begins the process to switch to a responsibility center model budget, which puts more control in the hands of each school. The first full year of the new model will be 2023-24.

MAY 2022: The Assembly opens in a former Model T factory in Bloomfield, bringing researchers of diverse disciplines together to develop the next generation of cancer treatments.

SEPTEMBER 2022: The Campus Wellness and Recreation Center breaks ground. The 270,000-square-foot facility will feature a recreation pool, jogging track, weight-lifting equipment and courts for basketball and volleyball when it opens in fall 2024.

JANUARY 2023: New buildings open on the Greensburg and Bradford campuses to accommodate growing health science and engineering technology specialties, respectively.

— Adapted from Pitt Med Magazine

Susan Jones is editor of the University Times. Reach her at suejones@pitt.edu or 724-244-4042.

Have a story idea or news to share? Share it with the University Times.

Follow the University Times on Twitter and Facebook.

UNIVERSITY TIMES
Serving Faculty & Staff Since 1968

University of Pittsburgh
Craig Hall, fourth floor
200 S. Craig St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

412-648-4294
utimes@pitt.edu

Archive

Volume 55-50
Volumes 49-27

Email Subscription

Name

Email*

SUBSCRIBE

Revised 06/13/25 Copyright 2025 Site by University Communications [Send feedback about this site](#)