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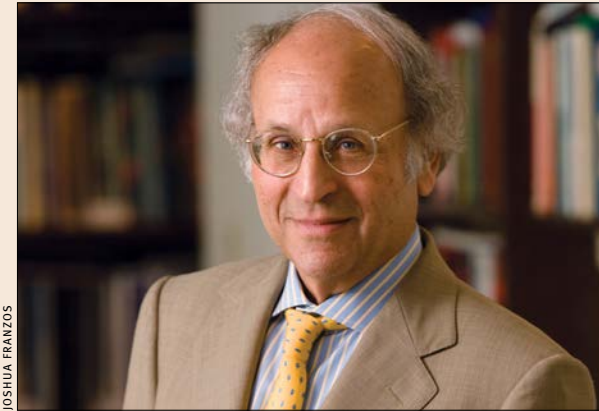


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**L**ike people, ideas have social lives. They're one way when they're by themselves, and another when they're surrounded by their peers. Crammed together, they grow more uncertain, more interesting, more surprising. . . . [T]here's a special atmosphere that develops whenever truly different ideas congregate, and, on the whole, it's too rare. —Joshua Rothman



JOSHUA FRANZOS

When I came to Pittsburgh in 1998, I was already part of a community—the community of physician-scientists. And here, I was welcomed into a far broader community of scholars—an extraordinary cohort of artists, writers, engineers, economists, chemists, sociologists, historians, and other thinkers. In many ways, it was a return to my roots. I come from a long line of rabbis; which is to say, my people have always been scholars and academics—philosophers, even. And in my youth, I was a student of literature, an actor, and an aspiring writer. My early explorations of the humanities were anything but a false start. They were not a misguided attempt to find my way. And they did not delay the discovery of a more appropriate path for me through the biomedical sciences. Quite the opposite, literature and theatre, writing and acting, led me straight into a life of the mind, where we investigate what really matters and where truth lies, where we explore the fullness of human potential, and where I was encouraged to interrogate my own *raison d'être*.

I'm not sure I could have articulated it as an undergraduate, but I know now that the most exciting ideas and intellectual advances often occur in the space where disciplines collide. We all do some of our most important work when we find our way to this space.

For the past 50 years, in addition to my leadership roles, I've been a physician and molecular biologist, studying, in my more recent history, how DNA becomes damaged and how it repairs itself, especially with respect to cancer. Now, I am turning my attention to the brain, especially to DNA damage and repair therein. If ever there were a space where disciplines needed to collide, this is it! Even with my somewhat naïve, and frankly amateurish, perspective on neurobiology, perhaps I can contribute a bit to what we know about the structure and function of our gray and white matter—the life of the mind and the uniqueness of our species writ large. I plan soon to establish a lab within the new Alzheimer's Disease Basic Research Center, a part of the University's Brain Institute. As our population ages, perhaps the greatest threat to public health and to our health care economy is Alzheimer's disease. It would be deeply rewarding if, in some small way, I could help us take steps toward preventing this terrible disease. As with virtually all chronic diseases, prevention would be far more effective—and certainly more definitive—than treatment.

The mysteries of the brain will become my new focus as a physician-scientist. I will be stepping aside from my roles as senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and Petersen Dean, effective once a search is completed and a successor is in place.

I have very much relished these leadership roles. And I have great pride in what we've collectively accomplished here. By any objective measure, we've raised the academic stature, visibility, and respect of the health sciences programs and, in turn, all of Pitt.

We've recruited and retained many wonderful scholars during my tenure. They are attracted to Pitt and Pittsburgh for many reasons, but especially our collaborative environment and our bench-to-bedside ethos. Pitt's psyche and structure (notably our many centers and institutes) encourage cross-pollination and healthy collisions between disciplines. I expect that my own research will reap these benefits, as well. Wish me luck! (Of course, just as I have never abandoned the humanities, I think it unlikely that I will ever abandon my relishing the whole of medicine and biologic science and the people and structures that lead to their advance.)

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