

# PSU's construction frenzy raises concerns

by David Delulliis  
and Suzan Erem

This past year, as several extensive construction projects are either scheduled for completion or slated to begin on the University Park campus, Penn State's World Campus has grown by 37 percent and tuition by 5.7 percent. These seeming contradictions raise questions about whether this two-pronged expansion represents healthy growth or needless overgrowth.

In September, Penn State received an \$88 million gift from alumnus Terry Pegula to build a new ice hockey arena and, last week, the Board of Trustees approved plans for the construction of a broadcast facility at Recreation Hall. At the same time, according to the Centre Daily Times, the university has begun an initiative to reduce costs by cutting, consolidating and reorganizing administrative programs and academic departments.

Additionally, since 2005, Penn State's

University Park campus has seen the addition of the Smeal College of Business, the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, the School of Forest Resources, the Food Sciences Building, Student Health Center, and the Lewis Katz Building, among many others, totaling nearly 700,000 square feet.

More recently, the Millennium Science Complex, scheduled for completion next summer, has been under construction between Bigler and Pollock Roads since July 2008. Work began on an addition to the Moore Building in June of 2010 and is scheduled for completion early in 2012. Nearby, on the corner of Park Avenue and Allen Road, the Gary Schultz Child Care Center at Hort Woods is expected to be finished in November of 2010. Also, this past summer, Penn State's Board of Trustees approved plans for the Biobehavioral



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Bricks and mortar are going up at unprecedented rates on the Penn State campus while tuition as well as online class enrollment increases.

Photo by Danae Iyamu

# Columbia Univ. professor speaks on human rights

by Emily Dabney

As part of the Africana Research Center's annual Nelson Mandela Lecture, "Human Rights: The African Experience and the Way Forward," Mahmood Mamdani, the Herbert Lehman professor of government at Columbia University, visited Penn State on Nov. 18 to discuss human rights issues. Dr. Mamdani specializes in the study of African history and politics and was listed as one of the "Top 20 Public Intellectuals" by Foreign Policy (US) and Prospect (UK) magazine in 2008.

During his lecture, Mamdani examined historical instances such as the Nuremberg Trials, the CODESA talks, and the Human Rights Movement, asserting a need to move away from a criminal justice Western tradition to a social justice system. This alternative, he asserted, would provide for a process to find the best solution for both sides of conflicts, rather than the traditional Western justice pattern of ending a con-

*flict with a victor. Mamdani spoke one-on-one with Voices following the lecture.*

**Voices:** In speaking at American universities such as this, to a crowd of academics and both graduate and undergraduate students, what do you hope to achieve?

**Mahmood Mamdani:** Communicate. Share experiences. Think of how to understand these experiences. There are different interpretations on the same events. Ultimately it's about interpretation. That is what the academy is about. So if lectures like this can do something, can contribute to opening up people to multiple interpretations, I'd be happy with that.

**Voices:** Whose responsibility is it ultimately to address the African question effectively?

**M.M.:** It's of course first and foremost the responsibility of the Africans. That's what we would like to achieve, some degree of democracy. Some possibility for people to have the opportunity to define their own

concerns and then address them. The problem is that everybody seems to have his own two cents about what the problem is in Africa and what should be done. There's nothing wrong with having a view, but I think there's everything wrong with being allowed to translate your view into a prescription if you're not going to take responsibility for it, if the first time something goes wrong you're going to split the scene. So I think there should be some connection between the people who are in the position to define solutions, and the people who are going to pay the price if the solutions go wrong. It should usually be the same people.

**Voices:** When asked at your talk about potential solutions for African countries, the answer seems overwhelming and complicated. But through your work and efforts, how do you foresee improvements being



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Photo by Emily Dabney  
Nelson Mandela Lecturer Mahmood Mamdani calls for a new way to resolve conflict.

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Health Building, to be erected between the Old Main and HUB Lawns and, early this month, approved an \$11.7 million renovation to Pollock Dining Commons.

Local construction companies are hardly the beneficiaries of the construction boon. The contractor to receive the lion's share is Gilbane Building Co. of Rhode Island, taking in more than \$51 million last year, according to Penn State's annual Stair's Report (published in full by the Joint State Government Commission of the General Assembly). Ranked a distant second is Leonard Fiore of Altoona at just under \$16 million and the local Poole Anderson Construction at an estimated \$13 million.

Is it benefitting the students?

Luis Caza, a member of a student-led coalition aiming to combat rising tuition, said that as tuition continues to rise in tough economic times, administrators should be

considering all options to reduce it, including halting new construction.

"We believe that we do not need all the construction going on, because it affects the students directly because the money going to the construction of the buildings is coming out of the pockets of the students," said Caza. "We have so many classrooms around campus that are not being used, why can't we just remodel the old buildings instead of wasting money on new buildings?"

These projects are funded by a combination of private gifts, internal borrowing, self-supported auxiliaries, tuition, and state appropriations independent of the operating budget, according to the university. The University Budget Office reports tuition accounts for 34.2 percent, or an estimated \$1.37 billion, of the total operating budget of just over \$4 billion. Capital improvements and operations are usually considered two separate budgets, yet, approximately 4 percent of tuition is applied to construction debt, according to Penn State

records, which means that nearly \$55 million in tuition, or \$573 per student per year, goes to pay off the interest debt, or the debt service, of construction projects.

New construction and major renovation has accounted for about 30 percent of all of Penn State's requests to the Pennsylvania General Assembly in recent years. The university requested \$361 million from the Pennsylvania General Assembly for operations for 2010-2011 (it received \$334 million, the same it received the year before). The university also requested \$143 million for construction projects for 2008-09, and \$131 million the next year. Yet new construction and renovations cost an additional estimated \$4.5 million of this year's operating budget in maintenance alone – a cost that becomes a permanent part of future operating budgets – according to Penn State's 2010-2011 Appropriations Request published by the University Budget Office.

To put this in context, \$143 million would pay the tuition at today's rates for 2,344 Pennsylvania residents to graduate from Penn State with a four-year business degree, without any of the additional and permanent operating costs that a building requires.

By comparison, in South Carolina, one of the hardest hit states in rising tuition costs, state law ties a college's tuition revenue to the amount of debt it can take on for campus construction projects. With this in mind, the South Carolina Budget and Control Board recently passed a resolution stating that no construction projects could begin or continue at four-year colleges that raised tuition by over 7 percent, or 6.3 percent at two-year schools, over the past year.

With a struggling economy, rising tuition

rates and an increasing shift toward online education, is all this construction really necessary?

"Absolutely," said Lisa Powers, Penn State's Director of Public Information. "Penn State lags behind its Big Ten counterparts in facilities. I don't think any student would be happy to say they have a lot less space than their peers at comparable institutions."

Craig Housser, a recent Michigan State graduate who works in the area, disagreed, saying that there are other ways to attract students without expensive construction.

"Michigan State probably has more buildings but the buildings here are more modern," he said. "I think a lot of the modern buildings are used more to attract students than for educating the ones already there."

The university ranks eighth in the Big Ten in space per student, Powers said, and of the 13 million square feet of educational and general space at Penn State's campuses, more than 9 million is more than 35 years old. The university has struggled with deferred maintenance and the aging of its physical plant, she said.

"We are trying to address these issues as resources permit and we remain committed to overall improvement," she said. "As you can imagine, it's difficult to teach computer science in a building that was constructed before computers even existed."

Geoff Duva, a 2009 engineering graduate, said that while he understands that the university must have modern equipment for technology and engineering fields, if new

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construction is used to promote the university, it should not be at the cost of current students.

“Even if a small percentage of tuition is being used to fund all the building projects, it’s still too much,” he said. “The university should be able to attract students on its academic reputation, not by how nice the buildings are.”

Powers said the university has had to turn down research grants and professional conferences because it did not have the required resources to conduct the research or space to host the event. Despite these challenges, the university has not seen a decline in enrollment, but she said must remain competitive in attracting students and keeping faculty on the cutting edge of their disciplines.

The university does not appear to be suffering from interest among prospective students. This year, a record number of more than 115,000 students applied to Penn State, a 5.5 percent increase over the year before, according to reports in the Centre Daily Times.

“Attracting top students and top faculty raises the bar for learning and raises the quality of research and education at Penn State,” said Powers. “These new facilities also greatly benefit students who are expected...to be well-versed in current technology and practices, things that can only be learned in modern facilities.”

New construction also provides the carrot that draws star researchers and their work, upon which the university has placed great emphasis in recent years. Penn State attract-

ed more than \$780 million in research funds this year, a 77 percent increase over the past decade, according to the university’s office of the vice president for research. Standard practice is for a university to take an estimated 47 percent of grant funding for overhead expenses, plus the university owns all patents and copyright to work produced while those researchers are in its employ.

Penn State appears to be following national hiring trends toward star faculty who focus on research and part-time instructors who teach undergraduates. Nationally, the percentage of part-time instructors at degree-granting institutions has jumped from 30 in 1975 to more than 50 while full-time tenured faculty numbers have dropped by 15 percent, to just over 20 percent, according to U.S. Department of Education statistics compiled by the American Association of University Professors.

Under the current financial climate, it’s only likely to get worse.

“The use of cost/profit measurements to decide what should be offered as education or what kind of research should be done...is even more intense, just as the goal of greater equity for students seems to be diminishing” said Marvin Lazerson, author of Higher Education and the American Dream, in a recent issue of The Chronicle Review. “The fact that approximately 45 percent of entering college students fail to graduate, with even higher percentages of minority students and students from low-income families, is disheartening.”

Classroom space may simply be a frequent by-product of the new construction, but it is one that is paying off for the university in terms of customer satisfaction.

Nearly 85 percent of undergraduate students were satisfied with the quality of their classroom and lab facilities according to the 2010 Student Satisfaction Survey conducted by Penn State Student Affairs, a substantial increase since 2004. But Caza responded that satisfaction with buildings should not be confused with students’ willingness to pay for them.

Regardless of where the funds come from, the construction projects likely to continue. More fundamentally, Penn State’s survey represents the willingness of students to accept an embodied on-campus experience independent of their education, according to Marc Bousquet, a professor at Santa Clara University who has written extensively on the subject.

Meanwhile, Penn State’s World Campus, which requires no classroom space at all, grew by 19 percent last year to just over 7,000 students, according to Powers, 7.6 percent of the total student population of 94,301. Statistics from the World Campus website represent an ever steeper increase

of 37 percent over the past year to 9,600 students, all of whom are taught by the same faculty teaching residential students on Penn State’s campuses.

Since 1998, Penn State’s Academic Outreach has grown to serve more than 5 million people in 67 Pennsylvania counties, 50 states and 114 countries each year, according to the university. A number of factors, including increased maturity, recognition and marketing, are responsible for the World Campus’ recent success, said Wayne Smutz, the executive director of Penn State World Campus and associate vice president for Academic Outreach. Smutz said that technology can be used to reach people who want a Penn State education but cannot be physically present, especially non-degree students and those who work full-time, are in the military or must remain in a particular location.

Declining state funds also mean that the

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same technologies that bring the classroom to locations thousands of miles away are increasingly being used by students within a few minutes' walk. Nationally, the 2008 fall semester saw 4.6 million students, a 17 percent increase, taking college courses online, according to the New York Times, which cites the Sloan Survey of Online Learning. An estimated 65 percent of these students were also taking on-campus courses, according to the same survey, and residential students at the University of Florida currently earn 12 percent of their required credit hours outside the classroom, a figure which, according to the New York Times, will increase to 25 percent by 2015.

Powers said the World Campus also allows for students enrolled in on-campus courses to simultaneously take online courses that would not otherwise fit their schedules. In light of the new building projects, questions remain as to how hands-on

modern equipment and a cutting-edge faculty can be when the only contact many students have with instructors – and each other – will be increasingly intangible.

“The World Campus provides students with a flexible, high-quality educational experience and in many respects, it is able to serve a different population than does residential education,” said Powers. “The World Campus is just the latest chapter in providing educational access to residents of Pennsylvania and beyond.”

Yet that access is limited, because as Powers noted, the new facilities on campus provide “current technology and practices” that can “only be learned in modern facilities.”

One of the most common complaints aimed at the opponents of the construction is that there is no student activism and resistance. Caza responded to this stating that the lack of response is not a product of student apathy or indifference, but of an administration that doesn't listen to its students.

“I think if they wanted to construct more buildings they should build more housing for students because there are a lot of students in supplemental [housing],” he said. “The worst part about this is students have no say when it comes to changes in our campus.”

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made for the state of African countries?

*M.M.:* I was talking about internal conflicts. That was my particular concern. What I'm saying is, if you look at the conflicts which we have managed to solve, or at least diffuse (move them from the battlefield to negotiations, discussions, debates, elections) these are conflicts where we've looked for solutions which are conclusive. We have not demonized any side. We have given them all a chance to participate in the solution. We have left nobody out on grounds that they are criminals. We've recognized that these are political conflicts. In a political conflict, all the adversaries need to be part of the solution, otherwise the solution won't work. We've recognized that this is not a court case, where one side is right and the other wrong. If we've turned this into a court case, we will just continue the conflict, because the outcome will be zero sum. And we've recognized that part of the problem is zero sum outcomes. If you are in a conflict and you realize one side will lose, you will fight. If you are in a conflict where you realize there will be no loser, you will be open to other solutions rather than victory. There seems to be this

*The story idea was reader recommended. If you have a story idea, please send it to voices@voicesweb.org. Voices thanks the blogger who goes by Thorstein Veblen of Left of Centre for assistance with tracking down primary source documents for this article.*

huge enthusiasm and demand for court cases in the West. But people in the West have forgotten that they've also had civil wars they didn't settle through court cases. Every civil war is settled through negotiations if you're going to remain part of the same country.

*Voices:* The average individual may feel disconnected from having an ability to positively contribute to changing the ongoing corruption in Africa, what effect do you hope talks like the one you gave here have on the problem? Have you seen results?

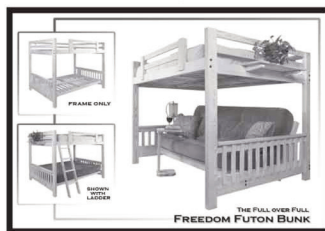
*M.M.:* The average African today feels a little less depressed over the corruption. Because over the last few years, Africans have been reading stories about the escalating corruption in the US. About the banks in the U.S., billions of dollars being guzzled, after having lost billions of dollars. Everybody is astounded that this is happening and everyone knows about it. In Africa corruption happens behind closed doors. This is daylight robbery and yet nothing is happening. As people learn more about the problems, they see their problems are a bit smaller. Everything has changed because we've learned more about the world. We've learned that there is nothing particularly wrong with us. And the problems we face are shared, and particularly larger other places.

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# It's a good time of year for Santa's advice

by Jamie Campbell

Well it's that time of year again. You know, where you do the smallest good deeds in hopes of getting big rewards at the end of the month.

Yep, it's Christmas time again!

So, for my karma-supporting good deed, I have offered to help Mr. Kringle read some of his letters. The hours are long and there is no heat in any of the buildings, but anything for a PS3 and new MP3 player.

I thought I would share some of the requests, or least my modified version of their requests, with you.

First, there was a letter from a young man with an interesting request; he wanted to be strong willed. You see, even though he is in charge and is popular with about half of the people he knows, he just cannot get everyone to like him. No matter how hard he pleads, begs, acquiesces, or goes



against his own beliefs, he just cannot get some of the louder kids to work with him. He thinks the problem lies within himself, so he wants a strong will. He wants the will to stand up to the meaner kids. He also wants the strength to make the hard decisions that need to be made. By doing this, maybe they would stop antagonizing and verbally abusing him.

Well, in doing my duty I responded to this young man.

I wrote and told him that I would pass the letter on, but I told him to do a couple of things first. I explained to him that bullies are cowards. They do not have the sense to work out problems rationally, so they yell

and pick fights to get their way. I explained to the little guy that while he was new to his leadership position, there is only one way to take on bullies: head-on. Cowards confronted with a fight often run away. I explained to him that if he stands up for himself, others will learn from his example and stand with him against the bullies. I told him that I knew it would be hard, but he is going to have to stand up for himself and use the power that his peers have given him. If that does not work, then roll up your sleeves and fight for what you believe. Find those that support you and do not take that support for granted. The bullies have decided not to like you anyway. Why not show them that they have no power by doing what you think is right instead of trying to get them to like you? Stand fast and fight on young man. Your true friends will stand with you.

Kris wasn't fond of the fight part, but he said he would give me a shot at another letter. Well this one was from a little girl from the North Pole area. She wrote that even though she wears very big glasses, no one thinks she is smart. Well, this was a tough one, but I took a shot at it. I kept it simple; I tried to use small words for clarity.

First, I explained to her that she should

probably stop talking. When you want people to think you are smart, you should stop saying things that aren't so smart. Reading newspapers and books will help increase your worldliness.

Listening to people other than those who you pay to speak could help as well. I also suggested that she quit comparing herself and her followers to animals. It makes the animals look bad. Pigs in lipstick, bears in dresses, it's just too silly and too much. Be yourself and finish the job for which you were elected, but since you quit, don't try for another elected job, it's a lot like the first one. We would not want you to be seen as a repeat quitter. You should look for something else; maybe try writing a parenting book.

Needless to say, Mr. Kringle was not too thrilled with that one either (although he did admit I was right). At this point Kris and I both agreed that I should quit while I was ahead. It seems the two letters were from two little guys, one from Texas and the other well-tanned.

I tried, really I did.

So I hope my last good deed pays off. May you have a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Merry Kwanzaa, Prayerful Ramadan, Joyous Feast of Three Kings, and a great New Year!



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