

A Birthplace of Innovation

An Interview with Dr. Jared L. Cohon,
President, Carnegie Mellon University



EDITOR'S NOTE Jared Cohon became President of Carnegie Mellon University in 1997. He serves as Vice Chairman of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Co-Chair of The Technology Collaborative, and Founding Co-Chairman of the Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse. He has extensive government service experience, including his membership on the U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council and past chairmanship of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board. Before joining Carnegie Mellon, Dr. Cohon served as Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies at Yale. He began his teaching and research career in 1973 at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Cohon earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Pennsylvania in 1969 and a doctoral degree in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973.



Dr. Jared L. Cohon

How critical is research work to the culture of Carnegie Mellon and how broad is the focus of this work?

Carnegie Mellon's research makes a difference in people's lives. For example, we have robotics projects that will aid an aging population and we are working on a "doctor in a box" analysis tool that will allow each of us to have information about our personal genomes. We lead in the area of computer security, which is directly relevant to our national defense and our private lives as many of us do more online. The university's Open

Learning Initiative (OLI) caught the attention of the Obama Administration, which suggested that OLI serve as a model for online education courseware for community colleges.

Carnegie Mellon is focusing on energy and the environment, brain science and learning, and using the power of computation in biology, finance, and computer science. Many fields of science and the arts at the university are experiencing a revolution that will change our understanding of what is possible.

The university recently launched "Inspire Innovation". Would you provide an overview of that program and the innovation culture at CMU?

Innovations is part of our DNA and education is its delivery system. Our fundraising campaign, Inspire Innovation, reflects our way of thinking about the future. We also owe our legacy to key innovative thinkers who understood the multiplier value of education, including Andrew Carnegie, Andrew Mellon and the Mellon family, and most recently, William S. Dietrich, whose \$265-million bequest is designed to grow much larger through investment returns. He made this landmark gift to the university because of its global approach and the quality of its faculty and students, who bring interdisciplinary thinking and complex problem-solving strategies to real-world problems.

You also recently launched Greenlighting Startups. How much of an entrepreneurial focus is there at CMU?

Carnegie Mellon University introduced the Greenlighting Startups initiative to accelerate our already impressive record of turning campus innovations into sustainable new businesses. In the past 15 years, CMU has helped to create more than 300 new companies, adding approximately 9,000 new jobs to the U.S. economy. In Pennsylvania alone, CMU spin-offs represent 34 percent of the total companies created based on university

technologies over the past five years. Additionally, Google, Apple, Disney, Intel, and Caterpillar have opened offices on campus or nearby to engage our students and faculty in innovative research. CMU ranks first among all U.S. universities without a medical school in the number of start-up companies created per research dollar spent since 2007, according to the Association of University Technology Managers.

Carnegie Mellon places an emphasis on involvement in the community. Why it is so important for the university to be engaged in the community?

Community engagement has been part of our strategic planning for decades. We believe in being present in the community, donating time and effort in our local schools, to our area nonprofits, and also participating with our economic development partners in improving the vitality of our region. For its efforts, Carnegie Mellon has been recognized on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll since 2007. We've also taken a lead in green building design and other green initiatives, which align with Pittsburgh's growing reputation as a renewable energy and environmental leader. Carnegie Mellon is home to nearly one-quarter of the green buildings in the region.

What have you done to globalize the Carnegie Mellon student body?

It is important to have a student body that represents our international thinking – and we do, with nearly 30 percent of CMU's students coming from 100 countries outside the U.S. Carnegie Mellon has locations in Pittsburgh, Silicon Valley, Qatar, and Australia, and will be in Rwanda starting in August. During the past decade, Carnegie Mellon has partnered with several other countries, including Portugal, India, China, and Japan to establish high-caliber research and education programs at the graduate level.

As they venture into an international job market, Carnegie Mellon-trained students are going to have to bring to their positions a well-educated, disciplined mind, an open imagination, and the drive to create new value on an international scale. Carnegie Mellon students are making new educational choices that reflect their awareness that the playing field is global. For example, almost 48 percent of undergraduates study a foreign language here compared to a national average of 12 percent at comparable American universities. We can barely keep up with the demand for classes in Chinese. ●

The Carnegie Mellon University campus in Pittsburgh

INSTITUTION BRIEF Ranked 21st in the world by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Carnegie Mellon University (www.cmu.edu) is a global research university with more than 11,000 students, 83,900 living alumni, and more than 4,900 faculty and staff. The university is recognized for its world-class arts and technology programs, collaboration across disciplines, and innovative leadership in education. The university is in the midst of "Inspire Innovation," a comprehensive campaign to build on its unparalleled success. Carnegie Mellon consists of seven schools and colleges: Carnegie Institute of Technology, the College of Fine Arts, the Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the H. John Heinz III College, the Mellon College of Science, the School of Computer Science, and the Tepper School of Business. Carnegie Mellon has campuses in the Silicon Valley and in Qatar.

What are the particular academic strengths of Carnegie Mellon?

Carnegie Mellon University has been a birthplace of innovation throughout its 111-year history. Today, we are a global leader in bringing groundbreaking ideas to market and creating successful start-up businesses. Our award-winning faculty members are renowned for working closely with students to solve major scientific, technological, and societal challenges. We put a strong emphasis on creating things – from art to robots. And our students are recruited by some of the world's most innovative companies.