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Martha Rial/Post-Gazette

Brian Namey, a Carnegie Mellon University senior majoring in history and philosophy, and Mahjabeen Obaid, a Chatham College sophomore from Pakistan, who's majoring in graphic design, are among the students the new Campus Visit/Pittsburgh program hopes to recruit and keep in the region.

Check us out

Program launched to woo,
keep college students here

By Donald I. Hammonds
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Great schools with excellent reputations are only half the story in drawing college students to town. You've got to get them to come to the city first.

If the city's dull, has no reputation at all or, worse, has a bad image, then Dick and Jane aren't going to want to come. And even if they do, their parents are going to want to make sure the city is safe, affordable and generally a good place to be.

It's a tall order for many cities with top-notch schools but a so-so reputation. That's all the more true for Pittsburgh, which not only wants to lure students to come but persuade them to stay after they graduate.

So it was that the a new initiative by the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education was greeted with much fanfare yesterday. Aided by the Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau, the council is launching a \$1 million, three-year marketing program to promote Pittsburgh to prospective col-

lege students and their parents.

The program, Campus Visit/Pittsburgh, involves cultivating a close relationship with high school students considering coming to college here. Ten colleges and universities that are part of council will soon receive colorful, youth-oriented magazines about the region that can be given to prospective students inquiring about the schools.

It's expected that, during the first year, more than 175,000 copies of Campus

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Drawing and keeping college students here

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Visit/Pittsburgh magazine will be distributed to prospective students and high school guidance counselors across the country as well as to Pennsylvania Welcome Centers and local visitor information centers staffed by the convention bureau.

In addition, a travel desk and a Web site, www.thecollegecity.com, will help students and their families find out more about local colleges and universities, arrange visits and plan trips, and link with area hotels, cultural attractions and other regional amenities.

"These days, when making a decision about where to go, students may base 60 percent of their decision on the college itself, but 40 percent will be based on access -- to opportunities, to the arts, to a complete education -- stuff you don't get from books," said Todd Hoffman, president of Campus Visit Inc., a private consulting firm that is helping set up Campus Visit/Pittsburgh.

Funding for the program is coming from the state Department of Community Affairs and the council's 10 members: Carlow College, Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham College, Community College of Allegheny County, Duquesne University, LaRoche College, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Point Park College, Robert Morris University and the University of Pittsburgh.

It's hoped Campus Visit/Pittsburgh will not only benefit the colleges and universities but also will enhance the region's image and its ability to keep students here after they graduate, Hoffman said.

"We break it down a third, third and a third," he said. "One third will automatically stay in Pittsburgh because they're from here. Another third will leave because they are not from here or they have a vision to go to another city. But a third are undecided -- and it's those third that we are trying to target."

One factor already playing in Pittsburgh's

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--**Todd Hoffman**, president,
Campus Visit, Inc.

favor are the sheer number of students already here, Hoffman said.

The region has the fifth-highest per-capita concentration of college students in the country.

The region also benefits, he said, from low expectations. Interviews with college students who chose to come here found that they weren't expecting much before they came, "but once they got here, they were extremely impressed with Pittsburgh.

"Pittsburgh is much more than just a college town -- it's a college city," he said. "It's a perfect-size city for attending colleges. It has everything students need to work with, like real opportunities to find internships, exposure to culture, night life, the outdoors and diversity -- it's got the whole package."

After graduation, many students leave because they believe there are more opportunities for young professionals elsewhere.

That's why part of the program is aimed at getting college students early on to think about staying, Hoffman said. "We must do it not by starting in their junior and senior year of college and saying to them, 'Hey, you ought to think about staying.' You need to start all of this when they are coming for orientation, or even better, before that when they are starting to look for colleges."

