The Office of International Services (OIS) is pleased to announce the return of our newsletter, formerly known as “CommUNIque” and newly named “The Global Perspective.”

We’d like to use this first issue to welcome all new and returning international students to Pitt, and to share some highlights from our 2011 Fall orientation. August proved once again to be a very busy month for OIS as we hosted new student orientation events for over 200 undergraduate and 600 graduate students. This new student population represents 70 countries, and a new record for international admissions for the University of Pittsburgh!

OIS kept up its yearly tradition of hosting a meet and greet for new international undergraduate students at Nordy’s Place in the William Pitt Union. This event proved to be a great success! OIS would like to extend a special thank you to Pitt’s International Ambassadors, Joyce Giangarlo, and the office of Cross Cultural Leadership and Development (CCLD) for joining us on this special evening, and for playing such an instrumental role in making these students feel welcome in their new home.

Our new graduate students were treated to a special evening cruise aboard one of Pittsburgh’s Gateway Clipper fleets. This event provided a unique opportunity for new students to start developing relationships with their departments, as well as experience our beautiful city from one of its greatest spots—the three rivers.

We wish all of our incoming students the best of luck with their first academic year!
CULTURE CORNER

Ramadan

Last month many Muslims partook in the fasting traditions of Ramadan. Ramadan is a very important practice in Islam that is not well-understood by some. OIS wanted to take this opportunity to share some facts about this ageless tradition.

What is Ramadan?
Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar calendar where Muslims around the world spend 30 days fasting and abstaining from other pleasures. This practice allows Muslims to focus more clearly on their faith through prayer and be grateful for what they have. Muslims also use this as their “New Year,” a time to make new resolutions and start fresh with a new direction. This year Ramadan started on August 1st and ended on August 29th.

How does a person not eat for 30 days?
Muslims only abstain from eating and drinking during the daylight hours. They are encouraged to eat breakfast before the sun comes up. At sunset they have a meal called Iftar which is prepared in the Halal fashion. Most people begin this evening meal by eating dates which is representative of the practices of Muhammad. This meal is usually a big celebration and many families will eat together. Children under the age of 10, the elderly, pregnant women, or people with medical conditions are exempt from the fasting. If there are other reasons for not being able to fast during Ramadan, Muslims are allowed to fast during a different month.

What is Halal?
The translation for halal is “Lawful” and it denotes any object or action that is permissible by Islamic law. As far as food is concerned, the animal has to be free of any sort of chemicals and slaughtered in a particular manner to ensure that all the blood is drained. It also applies to the ingestion of any type of alcohol.

What else do Muslims do during Ramadan?
Normally, Muslims pray 5 times a day but during Ramadan, they pray more often. They also try to give up things that are bad for them or would make God angry such as smoking, swearing, treating people with disrespect, being mean, drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Other things Muslims may try to limit include watching television, playing board games, spending too much time dressing up, listening to music, or shopping.

Fasting reminds Muslims about how fortunate they are and gives them perspective as to how it would feel to be poor and have nothing to eat. This is why Muslims also use this as a time to donate to charities and give to the less fortunate.

How do Muslims decide when Ramadan begins?
Ramadan is based on the Georgian Lunar calendar. This is very different from the Roman calendar that the United States and other countries follow. It still has 12 months but it is only 354 days long which makes it move back 10 days every year. So, even though Ramadan is in ninth month, it sometimes falls in August and will start on a different date every year.

What happens when the fasting comes to an end?
The last day of Ramadan is August 29th and this is called Eid ul Fitr. On this day Muslims dress in their best clothes, go to an early prayer, donate food to the poor and then spend the rest of the day visiting family and friends. There is always a large feast and festival. Usually people give each other gifts of money or clothes.

Ramadan is an important time to Muslims around the world as it is a time of devotion to God and a time to begin again.
FEATURED STUDENT GROUP
Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)

The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) was founded more than forty years ago at the University as a resource organization and student government dedicated to graduate and professional students and their concerns. Throughout its existence, GPSA has operated to provide services, information, representation, event planning, and (more recently) funding opportunities to all graduate students across the university. It is the only organization that represents graduate and professional students across all schools and colleges at Pitt, and takes this responsibility to the constituents seriously. GPSA is currently located in 825 William Pitt Union and online at www.gpsa.pitt.edu. The website has information regarding operations, events, funding, and more. There are a number of services GPSA offers for students, and these can be divided into three main categories: representation, funding, and event planning.

GPSA represents graduate students at Pitt on every possible level: by sitting on on Provost, Senate, and Board of Trustee committees throughout the university to communicate graduate student needs and concerns; sitting on the Pittsburgh Student Government Council as a liaison with the mayor and city council; by speaking to local and state elected officials in conjunction with Pitt's Governmental Relations Office; working with the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students to lobby federal legislators; and finally, by helping represent students by retaining a licensed attorney for legal council free of charge. For funding, GPSA operates the hugely popular Travel Grant and Travel Award program, in which they award funding for graduate and professional students to travel for conferences, presentations, or dissertation research. GPSA annually funds 6 international graduate student organizations - ANKUR, CSSA, GOSECA, the Pan-African GPSU, the Persian Panthers, and TASA. Funding awards can also be sought by any registered graduate student organization.

Lastly, GPSA hosts numerous events throughout the year to bring graduate students together. Examples of recent events include: an international potluck competition, a Masquerade Ball, happy hours, breakfasts, meetings with legislators, waterpark and skiing trips, picnics, and movie showings. Many other events are hosted in collaboration with international graduate student organizations, school governments, and other graduate organizations. Some upcoming events can always be found on their website (www.gpsa.pitt.edu).

One particularly proud moment for GPSA occurred in 2009-2010. The mayor of the city of Pittsburgh had announced plans to levy a tax against all students in the city in order to balance an unrelated deficit in the city’s budget. GPSA led the opposition response for students across the city; garnering national press coverage, appeared on news and TV programs, gathered thousands of petition signatures, networked with colleges and administrators across Pittsburgh, and presented evidence and testimony to the mayor and city council in chambers. With cities around the country watching to see if taxing students was a viable budgetary solution, GPSA and many allies forced the mayor and council members to concede and table the proposed tax indefinitely. This victory has led to closer relations with the city and Pitt’s administration as well as the ongoing collaboration of all the universities in the city through the establishment of the Pittsburgh Student Government Council. GPSA was elected to serve as the chair of this organization in 2010-2011, host the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students regional meeting in 2010, and was awarded the prestigious Good Government Award for Allegheny County in 2011 for our commitment to our constituents. Stronger than ever, GPSA continues to take on new issues and address student needs in order to serve the graduate and professional students at the University of Pittsburgh.
OIS PRACTICAL TIPS

On-Campus Employment

Most students will want to seek employment at one point or another while studying at the University of Pittsburgh. International students have a few different options for working in the United States without violating their nonimmigrant status. In this edition, OIS will discuss the option of “on-campus employment.”

On-campus employment is typically work performed on the school’s premises that is paid by the University of Pittsburgh. On-campus employment may also include work at on-location commercial firms which provide services for students on campus, such as the school bookstore or cafeteria. “Work study” opportunities do NOT qualify as on-campus employment.

Both F-1 and J-1 students are permitted to do on-campus employment, although the requirements for each visa category are slightly different.

F-1 students are permitted to do on-campus employment without additional authorization from OIS as long as the student is currently enrolled, has a valid I-20 issued by the University of Pittsburgh, is otherwise maintaining F-1 status, and employment is restricted to 20 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters. F-1 students may work full-time during the summer or winter breaks.

J-1 students sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh ARE required to seek authorization before beginning on-campus employment. J-1 students can do this by contacting their Immigration Specialist and requesting an on-campus work authorization letter. J-1 students who are sponsored by an organization other than the University of Pittsburgh will have to contact their sponsor to request permission for on-campus employment.

A J-1 student will receive an authorization letter from OIS as long as the student is currently enrolled, has a valid DS-2019, is otherwise maintaining J-1 status, and the employment is restricted to 20 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters. J-1 students may work full-time during the summer or winter breaks.

F-1 and J-1 students who have completed their academic programs are NOT eligible to do on-campus employment. This includes continuing employment that began before the program ended. All international students should contact their Immigration Specialist if they are unsure of whether or not employment qualifies as on-campus.

Maintaining Status—Full-time Registration

International students are required to be registered full-time in order to maintain their F-1 or J-1 status.

What does full-time mean?
If you are an undergraduate student, full-time means that you are required to complete at least 12 credits a semester. If you are a graduate student, it means that you are required to complete at least 9 credits a semester.

Are there any exceptions to this rule?
Yes. You do not have to register for classes during the summer UNLESS it is required by your academic program. There are very few exceptions to this rule during the fall and spring semesters.

The most common one occurs during a student’s final semester when he/she does not require a full course load to complete the academic program. For other exceptions, please visit the OIS website (www.ois.pitt.edu).

How do I request a reduced course load?
If you qualify for an exception to full-time registration, you can request a reduced course load by visiting the OIS website and clicking on the “Drop Below Full-Time” link in our F-1 student section. A form will come up for you to print and complete with your academic advisor. Make sure to read the instructions carefully!

Updating Addresses

Many of you new to Pittsburgh may still be looking for a place to call home for your first academic year. Please remember that you MUST notify the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) within 10 days of any address change. Both F-1 and J-1 students can do this by following these simple steps:

1) Log into my.pitt.edu
2) Click on Self Service
3) Click on Campus Personal Information
4) Click on Addresses. Make sure your “SEVIS U.S. address” is your current residential address in Pittsburgh

Please remember that this requirement applies to ALL international students, regardless of how long you have been in the United States!
**INTERNATIONAL PHOTO CONTEST 2011**

Studying abroad is not just about travel, it can be a life changing experience. Have you studied abroad and captured photos that describe that experience? The International Photo Contest is a great way to showcase your photos and encourage your peers to study abroad. The Office of International Services, the English Language Institute in the Department of Linguistics and the Study Abroad Office are sponsoring the International Photo Contest.

All University of Pittsburgh students are eligible to submit photos about their experiences. **All entries must be received by midnight on November 1, 2011.** Information about contest entry and how to enter is located on the OIS website:

http://www.ois.pitt.edu/international-photo-contest-2011

**PRIZE INFORMATION:**

There will be six prizes. $100 will be awarded to all category winners and $200 for the Judge’s Choice Award. Prize money will be deposited as Panther Funds on your Pitt ID.

**HOW DO I APPLY?**

Please read through the Contest Rules and Release form on the OIS website for details about how you can submit your photo!
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER:

- 8th (Thursday) GPSA: Group trip to see the Broadway show “Wicked” at the Benedum Theater in Downtown Pittsburgh.

- 9th to 11th (Friday—Sunday) Annual Pittsburgh Irish Festival at the Riverplex at Sandcastle

- 17th (Saturday) Dragon Boat Festival South Side Riverfront Park 11AM-7PM

- 26th to October 1st (Monday—Sunday) International Week at the University of Pittsburgh

OCTOBER

- 14th to 23rd (Friday—Sunday) Pittsburgh International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival at the Harris Theater and Andy Warhol Museum

- Coming at the end of the month Student Barometer Survey! More details coming soon

ONGOING

- First Sunday of every month— International Market Days in the Strip District 10AM-4PM.

- Every Friday OIS hosts a session on Optional Practical Training (OPT) from 2PM-3PM. Registration is required and can be done on the OIS website.

If your student group is organizing an event, during the months of November and December, you are invited to publicize it in our next issue. Please contact OIS at adb89@pitt.edu no later than October 20, 2011. Other announcements of importance to international students may also be submitted for consideration.

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