Rice’s International Community Leads Fundraising Efforts for Haiti Relief

I am convinced that the true spirit of internationalization at Rice is founded more on kindness than anything else. I have been reminded of this many times during my time at Rice working with students and scholars who come from countries all over the world.

Clearly, internationals from abroad have to be brilliant and the top students in their country, or they never would be able to study in a different language and educational system, not to mention just getting admitted to Rice. However, when you add the element of kindness, we find that there is no limit as to what can be accomplished by, and through Rice’s international community!

Such was the case with raising funds for the Haitian people, in light of the tragic earthquake that has killed tens of thousands and devastated so much of Haiti. A two-week fundraiser that started as a grassroots effort to help as one was able ended up with an outcome of: 1) Participation from around the campus, 2) Eight posters for the Haitian Consulate in Houston full of notes of concern and support, 3) 40 countries participating, and 4) A donation of well over $13,000 to the American Red Cross.

Rice internationals were invited to donate a dollar or more, whereby an anonymous donor would match a dollar for every person who participated. In the end, when the money was deposited to Compass Bank for the American Red Cross, the bank matched the funds dollar-for-dollar. Each person who donated was given the opportunity to write a note of care and concern on a poster for the Haitian people.

Thanks to the help of so many groups throughout the Rice community who jumped in and participated, we were able to far exceed what we had hoped for. The Student Association quickly began to help with their representatives in

Continued on page 2...

Inside This Issue:

Letter from the Director
Winter Events
Update: Visa Application
New Faces
SEVIS II
Tax Time
IEW 2009 Recap
Immigration Status
Culture Quest and International Cultural Night
Spring Events
the colleges, as well as RSVP, another important undergraduate volunteer organization. They raised awareness and money throughout the campus by knocking on doors in the colleges and taking posters to meetings and the college serveries for many days. They were relentless in their efforts and work, and we are forever grateful!

There were so many acts of kindness and unique examples of participation, such as the Rice African Student Association who placed jars for donations strategically throughout the campus and raised a significant amount of money with just pocket change. Duncan College held a bake sale and included their large amount of donated money with the OISS fundraiser. The Graduate Student Association had a coffee break and raised a significant amount of money. The Indian Student Association at Rice held a fundraiser at their national day celebration. Hanszen College held a clothes swap. Other colleges and clubs held their own versions of fundraising. There were so many more unique acts of kindness, and everyone contributed as they could.

In the end, it was another example of how students, researchers, teachers, families, and other visitors from the USA and around the world come to Rice, not only to gain an education, but to give back as they can. It was so amazing to see people donate and give richly of themselves, yet turn around and thank us for the opportunity to participate, instead of our thanking them!

Thank you for leading efforts to help others on this side of the world! Each individual made a huge impact, and the memory of your faces of kindness and generosity serve to inspire all of us at the OISS! You truly make a WORLD OF DIFFERENCE!

-Written by Adria Baker, Executive Director of the Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS) -
NEVER LEAVE THE U.S. WITHOUT IT: The Travel Signature From OISS

Many of you have been traveling over the holidays, and some of you had some scary experiences upon returning to the U.S. You woke up to the fact that you have forgotten to obtain the travel signatures on your I-20 or DS-2019 forms! Fortunately, all of our students have been allowed into the U.S. with I-515s, a temporary 30-day stay in the United States, until clearance of status obtained from OISS. We are very thankful that none of our students have been prevented from coming back to the U.S. due to their absentmindedness; but not without much apprehension and frantic phone calls to seek advise from one of our advisors during the holiday. Therefore, please remember, like you remember your best friends’ cell numbers:

NEVER LEAVE THE U.S. WITHOUT A TRAVEL SIGNATURE FROM OISS!

Inspectors of Custom and Border Protection have the authority to bar you from entering into the U.S. or give you a heavy fine if you do not have complete documentation and travel signatures - even if you have a valid F or J visa.

It only takes you a short trip and minimum planning to go to OISS with your passport, I-94 card, and I-20/DS-2019s to obtain the signature. Please come by at least one week ahead of your flight schedule in case the advisors are in conferences or other campus related events.

So once again, NEVER LEAVE THE U.S. WITHOUT A TRAVEL SIGNATURE FROM OISS.

Have fun traveling!

by Lily Lam, Sr. Associate Director, Advising & Program
For the second year in a row, OISS has hosted a series of events during the winter break to connect the international population with one another with fun activities all around Houston. We had almost 200 students, scholars and staff members participate in all of the fun events which included Rice basketball games, a tour of historic downtown, celebrating with a White Elephant Party, going ice skating, checking out the Cool Globes and ice carving competition at Discovery Green, going to the Houston Museum of Natural Science, Houston Zoo, Contemporary Arts Museum, Health Museum, and watching professional basketball game with the Houston Rockets!

The uncontested highlight of this year’s Winter Events was the large group that came together to attend the Houston Rockets game against the LA Clippers—we had 98 people attended which was comprised of Rice faculty, staff, scholars, students, and spouses! For those of you planning to be here next winter break, don’t forget about all the fun activities right here in your own backyard.

by Cory Owen, Senior International Student Advisor
New Electronic Visa Application Form DS-160 required at all U.S. Consular Posts by April 30, 2010

DS-160 replaces both the Form DS-156 and the Form DS-157 for visa applications at the consulates. This is a multiple pages on-line form which can take up to an hour to complete. Applicants have experienced difficulty in completing the form in the time allowed, so please save your information frequently to avoid frustration, instead of having to re-do the form from the beginning. Please bring with you the passports, education history, travel itineraries, employment history, and other necessary information with you while you attempt to complete this new form. The following consular posts have started implementing this form as of March 1, they are: Beijing, Caracas, Chennai, Frankfurt, London, Mumbai, Paris and Singapore. All other consular posts will implement this form by April 31, 2010.

Long Wait for Security Clearance

Many of our students experienced long wait for security clearance check when they applied for their visa. In these kind of situations, please call the following number to inquire about your clearance status: 202-663-1225. The visa applicant needs to make this phone call of inquiry himself or herself. Unfortunately, the OISS really cannot intervene on this issue on your behalf.

Visa Applicants with Arrest Record and Traffic Ticket

All arrest history or travel tickets must be reported while filing for the visa application form. The U.S. consulates have the means to cross check these records. If you have been arrested, you need to present your certified copies of court records. You may apply for the DHS (Department of Homeland Security) Waiver with the U.S. Consulate if your charges have been dismissed. For DWI charges, you may need to meet with medical doctors designated by the U.S. Consulates to verify that you have been sober or clear of alcoholism for a certain period of time.

Special Provision for F-1 and J-1 Visa Application in Summer

The Department of State will provide additional visa officers to interview the F and J Students during summer months and give these applicants priority for visa processing, in order to avoid delays for academic enrollment.

by Lily Lam, Senior Associate Director, Advising & Program
**New Faces in OISS**

**Matt Stein** joined the OISS staff in January as an international student advisor. Matt comes to OISS with a broad international background. He studied international relations at Brown University and completed a master’s degree in East Asian Studies at Stanford University. After living in Japan for several years, Matt worked in Silicon Valley as editorial director for Yahoo! Inc.’s network of web sites in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Matt speaks Japanese and French and enjoys taking advantage of Houston’s many international cultural activities, festivals, and restaurants. He is excited to be back on a university campus and is looking forward to getting to know and support Rice’s diverse group of international students.

**Agnes Vajtai** joined OISS last summer after moving to Houston from Upstate NY, where she worked in the International Services Office at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She is a native Hungarian where she gained most of her experiences both in the business and academic field. She feels very lucky to have to lived in Switzerland and Sweden for a year, and take short visits to other countries around the world. She has a master’s degree in Communication from the SUNY, Albany, and she is very happy to work with, and be a part of Rice’s International Community.
Do we need to know where you sleep at night?

By Agnes Vajtai, Compliance Assistant

Do you remember when you first arrived in the U.S. and filled out the check-in sheet in our office? You were asked all kinds of questions, including one about your addresses. The reason is that as an international student or a visitor studying or doing research at Rice University, you are required by the Department of Homeland Security to maintain a correct record of both your local address (the place you stay here in Houston), and your permanent one (the place in your home country). In other words, the OISS needs to know your most current address at all times, and the way to comply with this is very easy. You do not even need to come to the office in person. Just log in to your Esther account and click on ‘update addresses and phones’. After that our office will automatically be notified about the changes you made. The important thing however is that you must update this information within 10 days of moving. Failure to do so results in losing your immigration status. You may get a “hold” put on your account.

The good news is that the OISS staff is here not only to be your overprotective “watch-dogs” but also to help you in any way we can, so a step by step guide was created by Sandra Bloem-Curtis, our Sr. Associate Director, to help you with this process. The description is available in the OISS if you need it, and as always, if you have any questions feel free to contact us.

http://oiss.rice.edu
Have you heard about SEVIS II?
Sandra Bloem-Curtis, Senior Associate Director, International Compliance & Administration

SEVIS II (Student & Exchange Visitor Information System II) is the upgraded version of the current SEVIS program used to track and monitor students and scholars in F-1 and J-1 status throughout the duration of U.S. academic or exchange visitor programs. SEVIS II is expected to be implemented sometime at the end of 2010 or early 2011.

SEVIS II is still in development by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), but is intended to be a more efficient, interactive, and paperless system. Some examples of how SEVIS II may affect international students and scholars on F and J visas are:

- Immigration Identification Number (IIN) - Students and scholars will need to set up a SEVIS "customer account" and will have an Immigration Identification Number (IIN). The IIN is a unique identifier for SEVIS II that will create a “one-person, one-record” system to reduce data inaccuracies and document fraud through biometric identifiers. The IIN will be used for all future visa transactions in the F and J visa categories. This will replace the current SEVIS ID numbers.
- Paperless System - Students and scholars will no longer carry paper I-20 or DS-2019 forms.
- Self-reporting - Students and scholars will be responsible for self-reporting address information, as well as employer information while on OPT. Students will need to log into the SEVIS II system to make these updates, while international advisors will continue to make other updates to the student and scholar records.
- New Regulations - F-1 and J-1 visa regulations are in the process of being rewritten with changes that will affect benefits and compliance requirements for students and scholars.
- Admissibility Indicator - SEVIS II will have an “admissibility indicator” that will inform students and scholars whether or not their SEVIS record shows them as admissible to enter the US when coming from abroad. This will let students and scholars know ahead of time if there is something they need to correct before trying to enter the US.

Be sure to read all communications from OISS. As we learn more about how and when SEVIS II will begin, we will provide you with information to help you continue to maintain your compliance.

Free English & Culture Classes
by Su Yeon Yoo, International Administrative Coordinator

Classes end in May.
Stay tune for special summer language opportunities.

Advanced/Intermediate English Conversation
- Teacher: Catherine Spain
- Class: Monday from 1:00pm to 3:00pm in the Ley Student Center, 2nd floor
- Began from: Monday, January 25, 2010

Beginning English Conversation
- Teacher: Carol Marshall
- Class: Thursdays from 12:00pm to 1:00pm in OISS office
- Began from: Thursday, January 28, 2010

English Idioms & Slang
- Teacher: Martha Alexander
- Class: Tuesdays from 12:00p to 1:00pm in OISS office
- Began from: Tuesday, January 26, 2010
It’s Tax Time Again!
Sandra Bloem-Curtis, Senior Associate Director, International Compliance & Administration

All international students and scholars who were in the U.S. during 2009 must file U.S. tax forms, even if no income was received during the 2009 calendar year. Those who did not receive any income may only need to complete the Form 8843. However, those who did receive income (including scholarships, stipends, on-campus or off-campus employment, etc.) may have additional forms to complete.

Please be sure to mail off your tax forms to the U.S. IRS on time so that you are in compliance with all US laws.

Do you need help to file your taxes? OISS has a list of helpful resources:

- **CINTAX** – A web-based software program that will assist “non-residents” for tax purposes to prepare their tax forms. You may also use CINTAX to help determine if you are considered a “resident” or “non-resident” for tax purposes. To use the software, you will need to purchase a $2 user license from OISS. For more information visit: http://oiss.rice.edu/content.aspx?id=132.
- **Tax Workshop for Internationals** – OISS has invited an international tax expert to host a workshop for all Rice internationals. Be sure to bring your questions and learn how to navigate the often confusing tax reporting requirement on Thursday, March 25th in Keck Hall 100. http://oiss.rice.edu/events.aspx
- **University of Texas international tax website**, an excellent resource for any international: http://www.utexas.edu/international/taxes/.
- **IRS**: www.irs.gov or call 1-800-829-1040
- **Additional resources** available on the OISS website: http://oiss.rice.edu/content.aspx?id=132

Don’t Forget!

- Tax forms are due to the IRS by April 15, 2010 to avoid penalties.
- Make sure you have received all your tax supporting documents before filing your taxes.
- Check your mailbox! If you have received wages or scholarships from Rice during 2009, you will receive tax documents in the mail. You should receive a W-2 (for wages earned) or a 1042-S (for scholarships or fellowships). If you have not received anything by mid-March, contact the Rice Payroll office.
- Foreign nationals who have tax treaties should pay close attention to the terms of their treaties (http://www.irs.gov/publications/p901/ar01.html). If you have questions concerning benefits you think might apply to you, please inquire at the Payroll office (please note that you would have to provide your SSN and you may need to complete additional forms in Payroll in order to receive those benefits).
- If you do not have an SSN or an ITIN to file your taxes, please see the OISS on how to apply.

**OISS Lunch Munch**

Thursday, 12-1 p.m.

OISS staff has been visiting the various colleges on Thursday to eat lunch with our international students. Please check the OISS website for a schedule to find out when we are coming to your college. We will resume Lunch Munch in the fall semester 2010 to welcome the new international students.
IEW 2009

By Vanessa Pena, International Department Coordinator

With the international student body increasing every year, International Education Week marks an important stage in OISS. IEW has come about as our numbers have grown and with it, our ability to explore new and interesting cultures. This year, we welcomed the valuable participation of the Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance at Rice University, EducationUSA, The Office of International Programs (OIP), Athletics, Rice Counseling Center, Rice 360: Institute for Global Health and Technologies, and the Wellness Center, to name a few.

For the first year, OISS invited all international students and scholars to a weeklong “Consular Outreach and Appreciation” where they wrote thank you notes to their consulates and embassies for all their hard work towards the respective communities. OISS also had the opportunity “to go to Chile” through a teleconference in which Chilean students asked Dean Sanders, Mark Davis, and two other Rice students from Chile, questions about the possibility of becoming future owls!
Rice is so fortunate that a large percentage of its student population is international, as well as a significant presence of international scholars teaching and conducting research on campus. However, the numbers of non-immigrants and the increasing regulatory responsibilities can make it challenging to keep abreast of all the immigration laws that are required for nonimmigrant visitors.

Rice had created built-in systems to help our internationals maintain their legal immigration status, including automatic alerts from the OISS database, good communication systems between OISS and academic departments and other offices, as well as academic advisors that remind students to register for a full course load (12 minimum credit hours for undergraduate students and 9 minimum credit hours for graduate students).

That said, with all of efforts on the part of international student office to send reminders to them, international students and scholars in the USA could experience problems maintaining their legal status because they become too relaxed. Some potential pitfalls include (list not exclusive):

1) Working off-campus without proper immigration authorization.
2) Accusations of breaking the law on traffic tickets, drinking, drugs or other issues that can affect getting a visa from the Consulate (or cancellation of a current visa) and/or your re-entry into the USA at the port of entry.
3) Dropping below full course load without getting proper permission from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) via the International Student Advisor AHEAD OF TIME.
4) Travelling outside the USA without the proper signatures, paperwork and visa preparation.
5) Not updating your address properly in the student systems (at Rice this means that all international students and scholars must have their local address properly (and within 10 days of any change) input in the "mailing address" field in Esther. For graduates on OPT, employment and address updates must be made on the OISS website (follow links on "student gateway").
6) Using public assistance funds, which is not authorized for non-immigrants (i.e. Federal Aids).

Please see an OISS advisor if you have questions about anything that could directly or indirectly affect your immigration status, since problems stay on your record forever and could hinder your future status in the USA. We want to be of assistance to you with any academic, immigration, financial, personal, and other regulatory question you might have. If we can't help you, we will definitely do our best to refer you to the right place.

Don't take your immigration status for granted because a minor infraction can turn into a very surprising and difficult situation. It is much easier to maintain your legal status than repair it after an infraction.
Culture Quest 2010: A Common Thread

Please join us for this year’s Culture Fair! The theme will be “A Common Thread” and we will be celebrating with a quilt comprised of small squares decorated by different culture groups to represent the artistic traditions of each country or culture. There will be music from all the different cultures represented and booths to highlight and teach on the diverse world.

The Culture Fair will take place on:
Friday, March 26 from 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM.

Graduate International Cultural Night

For the first time in Rice history, several graduate clubs will be joining hands with the GSA to organize and host the first Graduate International Cultural Night, to be held at RMC Grand Hall on Tuesday, April 6, 2010. This event will be an entertaining evening of performances and food from various countries. This is a great opportunity to “visit” the world without traveling thousands of miles, and to build friendships with people from around the world. This event is made possible through the great efforts of all the Rice graduate international clubs as well as GSA and OISS.

This idea was initiated by a few students who wanted to do something to celebrate and promote the diversity offered to Rice by the over 800 international graduate students. The idea of Graduate International Cultural Night was greatly welcomed by several graduate clubs and the efforts by volunteers to make it happen are steadily underway. Graduate International Cultural Night will include colorful performances by the international graduate students, a flag procession by students displaying their ethnic attire, and samplings of food from all over the world. Everyone will experience something different and surprising at this event. Everyone will get to see arts and culture they may have never known before or experience some exotic cuisine they may have never tasted before.

Do not miss this great opportunity to know the world here at Rice. All Rice students and their friends are welcome. Join us for a great evening of arts, tastes, and fun! Tickets will be sold at $3 each. Please visit http://gsa.rice.edu/GICN for more information.
Spring Events

Tax Workshop
Mr. Andrew Lai, ESQ, CPA on tax issues
- Thursday, March 25th
- 4:15—5:30p for 1st and 2nd year students
- 6—7:15p for upper classmen and postdocs

International Cultural Night
- Tuesday, April 6
- 6—8p
- Grand Hall RMC
- Tickets ~$3 for graduate students.
- For information, visit GSA web site

Cultural Fair
- Friday, March 26, 2010
- 11:30a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- Grand Hall, RMC

SIR Lunches
- Meeting for the international ladies (including the spouses of internationals undergraduate and graduate female students, postdocs and faculty.)
- Wednesdays, April 7th and May 5th
- 12p—1:15p
- Grand Hall, RMC

OISS is looking for a few good men and women to help with the 2010 Fall Orientation for the undergraduate and graduate students orientation the month of August. If you want to volunteer please email Lily Lam at llam@rice.edu