Program I AM

International student helps local high schoolers get into college

by Raquel Orellana

Ji Zhou wanted to volunteer for the I AM Program, but assumed that she would not qualify. She had just moved to Los Angeles from China and knew nothing about the college application process in the United States.

Hoping to be wrong, she emailed the program’s director and asked. Moments later, he replied with one word: “Absolutely!”

Ji’s volunteer work began in September 2010 and continued throughout the school year. This fall, she signed up again.

The I AM Program pairs volunteers with high school seniors from local, low income communities who do not have the support and guidance necessary to go through the college application process. The volunteers become their mentors and help these high schoolers identify fitting colleges, write essays, and apply for financial aid, among other important tasks. Mentors receive training on how to advise students and are provided with resources to guide their mentees.

The high school students are chosen based on their grades and only those likely to be accepted to a four-year program can participate. The students are often the first generation in their

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USC student bridges gap between man and machine

by Snir Levi

“What makes a human more intelligent than a robot? Can a machine ever be intelligent? What differentiates a human being from a machine?” These are questions that Srideep Musuvathy, a USC student from India pursuing his PhD in Engineering, asks himself daily as he explores the potential of machines for improving the lot of humanity.

As a child, Srideep was “obsessively curious” about biological systems and their intricacies. He recalls that when he couldn’t find the answers to problems about people, animals, or plants, he would feel “very unsettled, sometimes for days on end; though eventually there came a point of clarity and direction.” It was only when he

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families to attend college and do not have the necessary support for the application process at home. At school, guidance counselors have too many students to attend to, and are only able to give a minimum amount of support. As a result of the I AM Program, students are able to submit better applications, expand their school and scholarship options, and get reliable answers to their many questions.

Last year, Ji had one mentee whom she helped with writing college essays and keeping a positive attitude. “I helped her become a better writer and I encouraged her,” says Ji. Her mentee graduated from high school in May and now attends a four-year college.

This school year, Ji will mentor two students. She hopes to interact with them even more than she did with her first mentee, and wants to stay in touch with them during their first year of college.

The I AM Program started in 2005, with about 30 students in a single high school. According to the program coordinator, Diane Yoon, the program now helps about 150 students in 12 schools each year. In 2010, about 85 mentors volunteered for the Program.

Diane explains that the only requirements for being a mentor are to have graduated from high school and started college, to have a sincere desire to help, and to be able to make the time commitment. She especially encourages international students to apply, since she believes they can provide valuable support to students who have recently immigrated. “Many of the students recently came from another country in Latin America or Asia, so they can relate to international mentors,” Diane said. For other students, an international mentor can provide valuable exposure to a new culture.

Ji agrees, however she warns that for an international student, it may require more time to learn about the college application process. “But if they are willing to make the commitment, I think they should. It is very motivating. We help students, and we see them grow along the way.”

For more information on the I AM Program, please visit http://chepa.usc.edu/ or contact Diane Yoon at dyoon@usc.edu

Raquel Orellana is a first year Strategic Public Relations MA student from El Salvador.

British USC student honored by Hollywood and royalty

by Anne Kaufman

In July of this year, Cinema MFA student Oliver Riley-Smith was selected as one of 42 Brits to Watch by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA). The group, which includes both working professionals and students, were selected for showing signs of promise in a wide range of creative professions, including acting, directing, producing, writing, and beyond.

As part of their first trip to America, the newlywed Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, William and Catherine, hosted a red carpet event in Downtown Los Angeles to promote and celebrate emerging British filmmaking talent. Also invited were industry professionals and celebrities to honor the Brits to Watch and offer them a chance to mingle with Hollywood elite.

“It was such an incredible honor,” says Oliver, who was selected for his directing, writing, and producing skills. “to be named part of this prestigious group was a real thrill, and then getting to meet some of your idols was the chance of a lifetime.”

Quentin Tarantino, Tom Hanks, Judd Apatow and Nicole Kidman were just a few of those in attendance, as well as representatives from major studios. “It felt like I was living 24 hours in the life of someone else, these icons were so friendly, they talked to us like equals,” says Oliver, “so I really hope I get the chance to work with them in the future.”

As part of the night, the group of 42 Brits walked the red carpet, met the press, and were introduced to Hollywood professionals by Prince William, who is the honorary head of BAFTA. William said it was his goal to promote British filmmaking in the United States, and that those in attendance were the bright future of the U.K. film, TV, and computer games industry. William and Kate then met each of the 42 Brits. “They were very down to earth, like any regular twenty-somethings just chatting about films,” says Oliver. “They wanted to get to know us and wished us luck in our careers.”

After the introductions, short clips from the work of the Brits to Watch were shown on the big screen during dinner. The honorees were then invited to an after-party at Chateau Marmont.

“The best thing about the night was that we were the first members of this select group of 42 filmmakers,” says Oliver. “I was grouped with some incredibly talented people, so I hope we can progress in our careers together and collaborate as the years go by to fly the flag for British filmmaking at home and abroad.” BAFTA has not revealed whether they will be repeating the event next year, but for now, Oliver remains USC’s representative in the Brits to Watch.

< Oliver Riley-Smith, center, with musician Ben Gibbard and actress Zooey Deschanel at the BAFTA Brit To Watch Awards, 2011
The global uses and abuses of social media
by Ben Riley-Smith

U SC students are all too familiar with social media. Many international students on campus now see the likes of Twitter and Facebook as essential tools for communication – the perfect way to stay connected with old friends and loved ones across the globe, while socializing locally with new friends.

The role of social media has become controversial, however, in recent global events. Twitter and Facebook, both Californian companies, have found themselves facing some unfortunate questions. Did Twitter help escalate the London riots? Was Facebook’s impact on the Arab uprising actually detrimental to the democratic cause? The Golden State may be home to those who innovated online social networking, but their impact around the world will continue to be debated, shaping their future.

Within days of U.K. policemen shooting suspected gang member Mark Duggen on August 4, the incident had given way to all-out rioting in areas of London, spreading to other major English cities.

The speed of the violence left police bemused, since the rioters were mobile and flexible, dispersing when cornered only to quickly reappear in new locations to continue their looting. How did such sporadic criminal activity spread so effectively? According to some, including Prime Minister David Cameron, the use of Twitter and smartphone instant messaging was crucial. “Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organized via social media,” he told Parliament at the time. “When people are using social media for violence we need to stop them.”

Suddenly California’s glittering business success stories were being connected to vandals, thieves and arsonists. During those same days of anarchy, the power of social media had also been harnessed for undeniable good.

The night of the worst rioting in London, on Monday, August 8, a new account called @RiotCleanUp appeared on Twitter. It quickly started tweeting locations and times for people to gather and help tidy up the damage. The next morning hundreds took to the streets, brushes in hand, to clean some of the worst affected areas.

Elsewhere on that chaotic Monday night, when new pockets of looting rapidly appeared all over London, a handful of innovators decided to use the latest technology to keep people in the loop. Interactive online maps were created, detailing the latest confirmed incidents or, in one case, actually attaching riot-related tweets to the points on the map from which they were sent.

Here was clear evidence that social media could be a force for good as well as for destruction. That same truth can also be found many miles away from the London riots, in the event of the Arab Spring.

In the wake of Hosni Mubarak’s resignation as the President of Egypt in February, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was quick to emphasize the role American websites played in his downfall. “On Facebook and Twitter, journalists posted on-the-spot reports,” she said. “Protestors coordinated their next moves and citizens of all stripes shared their hopes and fears about this pivotal moment in the history of their country.”

But again, there were those who argued that a simple interpretation of social media’s role as just positive or negative was misleading. In this case, it was Wikileaks founder Julian Assange who suggested Clinton’s account failed to paint the full picture.

Lambasting the Secretary of State’s faith in what he sarcastically termed “two great American companies,” Assange declared that Egyptian authorities had actually been known to use Facebook to round up and incarcerate participants of protests, thereby preventing the push for democracy. The internet, he said, was “the greatest spying tool the world has ever seen.”

As the popularity of social media continues to flourish, arguments about whether it is a force for ‘good’ or ‘bad’ will only continue. What is clear, however, is that technology is impartial. Tools like Facebook and Twitter are just that – tools – whose impact entirely depends on the hands in which they are held. If history is any lesson, then social media simply reflects a user’s desire, be it to riot, revolt or, in USC’s case, keep tabs on friends from afar.

Ben Riley-Smith is a Journalism MA student at City University, London, U.K.
American Culture 101

by Shams Hussain and Snir Levi

For many students arriving in America for the first time, the country can seem daunting and difficult to understand. Luckily, both the Office of International Services (OIS) and USC Orientation Programs have been softening the landing for years with unique and informative classes that teach American culture to international students.

The United States: An American Culture Series is a semester long class that helps first year international students feel at home, providing information about navigating life in L.A., while providing a great opportunity to make friends with other newcomers to the country. “The goal is to teach students about American culture so that they feel more comfortable going to school at USC,” said Chrissy Roth, manager of this Orientation Program.

The 13-week class, taught by volunteers from student affairs, academic advising, and admissions, is comprised of 180 students, the majority of whom are from China, India, and Korea, with Chinese students representing over three quarters of the student body. Vicky Meng, an undergraduate, said that taking the class made her feel “more confident and at ease in my classes and at student events.” Topics covered include American history, politics, sports, and the history of California, all designed to give the students an understanding of the cultural complexity and diversity of the country in which they have decided to study.

For those who cannot make the commitment to the full program of the American Culture classes, OIS offers the Living in the U.S. Series, a spread of practical workshops that cover specific topics ranging from earthquake safety to American football, as well as provide advice on how to form American relationships and reduce your accent.

“The courses are integral to bridging cultural gaps on campus,” says Rebecca Peterson, the series coordinator, who aims to make the students feel they can be successful in an all encompassing way during their time in the States. “American culture is packed with assumptions and slang,” so Peterson designed workshops to help with terminology and practicalities for everyday life adaptability.

The classes are run in conjunction with experts from various USC departments, including health services employees who explain the intricacies of U.S. health insurance and the co-pay system, and occupational therapists who teach stress management workshops.

Paulien Snellen, a graduate exchange student from Holland, found American ways “a bit confusing” when she first arrived, including the number of “strangers asking me how I was and wishing me a good day.” The casual, exploratory nature of the classes helped her “get used to life here,” and she has even learned how to surf at Venice Beach.

Given all the potential pitfalls of American society, these programs offer international students added confidence to connect and flourish in their new home, and help avoid some of the hiccups and faux pas that all too often can be an everyday occurrence for foreign students in their early stages of life in the U.S.

Shams Hussain is a senior from Pakistan majoring in Business Administration.

The ISA is comprised of almost twenty nationality and cultural groups, making it one of the largest student-run assemblies at USC, housed under the Undergraduate Student Assembly Program Board.

It’s purpose is to express and promote international students’ concerns while providing intercultural educational experiences for the campus, as a whole. ISA sponsors many events on campus along with collaborative programming with other student groups and organizations. Its’ two largest events are the International Food Fest, featuring ethnic cuisines from different ISA nationality clubs, and International Night, offering an exciting evening of cultural entertainment from around the world. Also, every spring ISA has its’ own version of the “World Cup” with the nationality groups competing against each other for the prized ISA World Cup trophy!

For more information:
Email: isa@usc.edu
Website: www-scf.usc.edu/~isa/index.php
Facebook: International Students’ Assembly
discovered robotics that he began to see “a way of answering my questions by replicating biological systems in machines.”

At the intersection of two diverse fields, medical science and engineering, Srideep was inspired by “the challenges in robotics and how those problems push engineers to their wits end.” Set in a new direction, the young scientist went on to earn degrees in Electrical Engineering and Mathematics in preparation for his current work with robots.

“As a child, Srideep was “obsessively curious” about biological systems and their intricacies.”

Today, Srideep conducts research at USC’s Brain-Body Dynamics Lab, where he explores the neuromuscular processes that occur between the human brain and the human hand, replicating the structure of the human hand in humanoid robots.

Srideep’s research is two-fold. The first part lies in advancing the capability of robots to mimic human actions in uncertain environments, in the hope of making robots a part of our households one day, “so that humans can use their brains for better tasks.” He is working towards this goal by finding ways to program robots to grab objects “gracefully and with ease, without dropping them; recognizing how much force is needed to pick up an object as efficiently as humans do.”

He is mapping out both the neuronal firing systems in the brain and the systems of muscle fibers that contract in the hand in an attempt to engineer human motions in a robotic framework. “The robotic fibers that I study have tendons and joints that recreate these motions,” he explains, “I am trying to emulate all of this with a combination of hardware and software.”

The second aspect of Srideep’s research seeks to improve medical rehabilitation, in an attempt to understand why people lose their ability to perform simple tasks after an injury or when they grow old, exploring “whether or not one can be fully rehabilitated or retrained to perform these tasks again with the same precision,” Srideep explains. “Suppose you lose the ability to perform a task, and want to strengthen your muscles again, what do you do to bring back the strength?”

Ten years from now, Srideep dreams of being able to replicate his research in other systems in the human body, beyond the neuromuscular processes in the hand. Examining his own hand, he says “I would love to at least have the science and mathematics for the movement of one finger clearly nailed down by that point.” He envisions that period as a time in which humanoid robots will be used as household cleaners, and is confident that by that time his research will have yielded great improvements in medical rehabilitation.

Guided by his curiosity for scientific inquiry, Srideep Musuvathy will continue to bridge the gap between man and machine – one finger at a time.

Snir Levi is a junior from Israel majoring in Communication.

Current ISA student groups and emails:

Africa SC  africasc@usc.edu
Armenian Students’ Association  marslani@usc.edu
Asha USC  gowrappa@usc.edu
Association of Indian Students  india@usc.edu
Association of Indonesian Students  asis@usc.edu
Association of Malaysian Students  mohdmuh@usc.edu
Caribbean Students’ Association  usccsa@usc.edu
Chinese Students’ Association (undergrad)  csa@usc.edu
Chinese Students’ & Scholars’ (grad)  usccssa@usc.edu
European Student Association  euroclub@usc.edu
Hong Kong Students’ Association  hksa@usc.edu
Iranian Graduate Students’ Association  igsa@usc.edu
Japanese Students’ Association  uscjja@usc.edu
Korean International Students’ Association  kia@usc.edu
Lebanese Club  lebanon@usc.edu
Singapore Students’ Association  ssa@usc.edu
TESOL and TEFL Society  tesol@usc.edu
Thai Students’ Association  thaiclub@usc.edu
Turkish Students’ Association  turksa@usc.edu
Vietnamese International Students  uscvisa@gmail.com

Srideep Musuvathy, pursuing his Engineering PhD at USC, is investigating how robots can help humans.
LA County Museum of Art (LACMA)  
www.lacma.org/

Opened in 1965 on the Miracle Mile, LACMA was the first comprehensive art museum in L.A., and is the largest art museum in the western United States. It's 100,000 art objects originate from almost every geographic region and time period, with special strengths including the Latin American and Asian holdings, while the Broad Contemporary Art Museum, opened in 2008, showcases world class modern art. The current standout exhibition is a retrospective of Tim Burton’s work, running until October 31, while Chris Burden’s ‘Urban Light’ lampposts are already an L.A. icon.

Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)  
www.moca.org/

L.A.’s premiere spot for post-1940s art, MOCA is a modernists haven, residing snugly amidst the towering skyscrapers of downtown. It regularly houses fantastic contemporary exhibits in both its main location, and the cavernous warehouse known as the Geffen Contemporary over in Little Tokyo. Their permanent collection exhibit is a comprehensive introduction to contemporary art, while their membership program offers discounted prices to their many talks and events.

Getty Center and Getty Villa  
www.getty.edu

Surely the most picturesque of all L.A.’s art houses, the beautiful Getty Center, a temple of curving white stone and manicured gardens, overlooks the city from its Westside hilltop viewpoint. For many, the Getty is better known for its architecture than its art. It does, however, house a wide collection of 19th and 20th century art. It’s counterpart, the Romanesque Getty Villa in Malibu, is dedicated to Greek and Roman antique art. Parking costs $10, but entry is free.

Norton Simon Museum  
www.nortonsimon.org

Previously known as the Pasadena Art Institute, the Norton Simon specializes in Asian and European art, especially sculpture. A redesign by Frank Gehry in 1996 made the galleries more intimate, while the gardens offer a beautiful artistic escape.

Huntington Library  
www.huntington.org

A museum, gallery, and gardens combined, the Huntington is a perfect mix of culture and nature. Regarded by many as one of the most romantic galleries, on any given day you can stroll through their internationally styled gardens (a Chinese lily pond being one of the highlights), and then check out an original Shakespearean folio inside.

Annenberg Space for Photography  
www.annenbergspaceforphotography.org

The premium spot for photographic art in L.A., the Space is a wonderfully laid out modern gallery situated next to uber-agency CAA, with its free entry belying its glitzy location. The exhibition on Beauty Culture, running until late November, is shocking and inspiring all at the same time.

Museum of Latin American Art  
www.molaa.com

Founded on the site of an old silent film production company in Long Beach, the MOLAA is dedicated to showcasing the best of Latin art in its high ceilinged, wooden-floored galleries.

SPARC, Venice  
www.sparcmurals.org

One of the most widely-practiced but under-appreciated forms of art in L.A. is the mural, examples of which can be found on walls across the city. In this old jail, painted purple, you can find exhibitions highlighting some of the finest murals in the city, and a restoration and heritage society that is ensuring these beautiful works aren’t forgotten.

Artwalks  
www.downtownartwalk.org

The most exciting manifestation of L.A.’s art scene are the monthly artwalks, where galleries open their doors for free and patrons flock to the streets for drinks, music, and a multi-venue extravaganza. First Fridays in Venice (first Friday of every month), the Downtown Art Walk (2nd Thursday of every month), and the Brewery Art Walk (once every Fall and Spring) are some of the best examples.
On the weekends, you’ll likely find Ariel hiking in L.A.’s Runyon Canyon or hanging out at Hermosa Beach. A self-described fitness enthusiast, he loves spending time outdoors.

Ben lives in West Hollywood with his wife, a filmmaker, and their lazy German shepherd, Macy von Matterhorn.

Ariel Suarez, Immigration Advisor

As a former USC student himself, Ariel Suarez loves being an advocate for students as opposed to being the one seeking help. “A lot of times students come into OIS anxious and stressed out,” he said, “and I can relate to the cultural differences, language learning and assimilation issues international students face on a daily basis. I know that it isn’t always an easy transition, but I remind them that everything is going to be okay.” Ariel speaks from personal experience; he emigrated from the Philippines to Dallas, Texas when he was 9-years old.

Ariel served as Information Specialist in OIS for three years before being promoted to Immigration Advisor in Summer 2011. In his new position, Ariel “enjoys advising students one-on-one and welcomes the challenge of interpreting complex immigration regulations for each unique case.” Judy Hartwich, Senior Associate Director of OIS, boasts, “Ariel is kind and attentive and always makes sure that every student feels their needs have been met.” It is his calm and cool demeanor that put excitable students at ease.

Benjamin Logan, Information Specialist

Benjamin Logan always wanted to work in higher education – it is where he feels most comfortable – so earning a M.Ed. in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs (PASA) at USC is a natural fit. Shortly after beginning the program, he landed an internship in OIS and is now here to stay. “Ben’s performance as an intern was outstanding, so we were thrilled to offer him a fulltime position as Information Specialist in Summer 2011,” commented Esther Lee, Associate Director of OIS.

Ben especially enjoys working with international students because of “the diverse and delightful perspectives students from other countries provide to the university atmosphere.” He has adapted quickly to his new role and always handles the high volume of visitors to OIS with professional aplomb.

Ben strikes a fine balance juggling the role of graduate student, fulltime employee and volunteer. He volunteers as an Ethics instructor for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and as a Student Ambassador for the Rossier School of Education. When asked how he manages all his responsibilities, he quipped, “Lots of coffee and very little sleep!”

Logan, who grew up in Michigan and moved to California to attend Biola University as an undergraduate, enjoys playing guitar and mandolin.
Nasi Goreng
a daily dish for Singaporeans

Nasi goreng is an Indonesian dish, which has been adopted by Singaporeans and incorporated into their cuisine. The rice dish is eaten for lunch or dinner, and is particularly popular at hawker centers, inexpensive food courts found all over Asia where locals eat during the week.

This recipe was shared by Melody Yuan, a first year Strategic Public Relations Program student at the Annenberg School, who is originally from Singapore. Melody loves nasi goreng, but hasn’t been able to find a good restaurant that sells it in Los Angeles, so she prefers to make her own using ingredients found in local Asian stores.

For this recipe, you will need a large wok, and a food processor. Enjoy!

Nasi Goreng
(serves 1)

1 cup of day old rice
1 egg
2 tablespoons of oil
1 teaspoon of palm sugar
1/2 tablespoon of kecap manis (a sweet soy sauce)
1 red chili (remove the seeds)
1/2 teaspoon of belacan (also called terasi, a sauce made of shrimp paste and chili)
1 shallot
1 clove of garlic
1 lime (cut in half)

1. Fry the egg and set it aside.
2. Toast the belacan in a wok, until it dries into granules and releases a smell.
3. Mix the belacan, garlic, shallot and red chili in a food processor until they become a paste.
4. Heat oil in the wok, add the paste, and stir until aromatic.
5. Add the rice and mix well.
6. With the heat still on, add the palm sugar and the kecap manis.
7. When everything is well mixed, serve the dish with the fried egg on top and the lime on the side.