Why We Chose the United States

International Students explain why the United States was their choice for study.

by Desa Philadelphia, Publications Editor

We know that USC is a world-class institution and that getting an education here could lead to a great future. However, we also know that it must be very difficult to leave home, family and friends to travel long distances to the United States.

Ying Wang, left, came from China because she wanted to work in preventive medicine and thought she would find the best collaborators in the United States. “The academic excellence and the outstanding opportunity to work with top of the field scientists” is what brought her to USC she told us.

Almost all of you listed the one thing that Californians take for granted, the thing that people in other states envy, especially during these Winter months—the great weather. Omoikhoje Ojecomogha, above, from Nigeria, put it this way: “The weather is always terrific. Nice and warm all year round.”

"It was an opportunity to experience a different culture while receiving an education.”
- Paul Anglim, Ireland

“I chose California because of the weather and the beach; things that are missing in Switzerland.”
- Andreas Siegfried
In the current global economic downturn, it seems many of us are questioning our basic economic knowledge. Do you know what “sovereign wealth funds” are and how they might affect you personally? Probably not. I know I didn’t. Maria Giovanna Bosco from Sardinia, Italy has come to USC to do research with Dr. Jeff Nugent in the Department of Economics; research which focuses on sovereign wealth funds, their effect on the global market and potentially on global politics.

Sovereign wealth funds are private equity funds belonging to national governments. Governments buy shares in the stock markets of other countries by means of these funds. Monies earned by these investments go back to the governments of the countries investing the funds.

A few examples: in 2005 Saudi Arabia invested a huge sum in Citigroup. China has a large investment in Morgan Stanley and has made many smaller investments in other countries. These kinds of investments are being made with much greater frequency than in years past.

So what’s the problem, who cares you may ask? Part of the problem is that these funds are not transparent. The balance sheets are not made public. There is a waiver on taxation–so the funds operate like a sort of secret investment economy; unlike the investments made by private investors like you and me.

Another concern is that such investments might be an indirect way for the governments investing these funds to exert political power through voting rights as members in stockholder assemblies.

Maria Giovanna is particularly interested in the foreign direct investments of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. These countries invest petrol dollars abroad in banks, real estate and technology, with the goal of guaranteeing future income for the country should the world demand for oil fluctuate downwards or should the oil supply dwindle or run out. Unique to the countries of the Middle East, says Maria Giovanna, is the fact that for the most part there is no industry, no manufacturing, and no agriculture (much of the land is desert), so that if there is a change in the global based oil economy, these countries could face economic difficulties. Investments abroad are a way of securing income for these countries.

[See Bosco on page 11]
Immigration Update: Optional Practical Training

by Esther Lee, Associate Director

Beginning April 8, 2008 new immigration regulations regarding Optional Practical Training (OPT) will have serious implications for students during the 12 month OPT time period. Students are now required to report information regarding their employment to the SEVP (Student Exchange Visitor Program) through their Designated School Official (DSO) at their university’s International Office to maintain F-1 status. In addition, regulations now limit the time of unemployment a student can accrue during OPT to a maximum of 90 days. If a student is not employed 90 days after the start date of the EAD card, the student is considered out of status.

Unemployment is described as time spent without a qualifying job during OPT and each day that the student is not employed is counted toward the limit on unemployment time. The limit is 90 days for students on post-completion OPT. The only exception is that periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed.

If a student is not able to secure a paid job and is coming to the 90 days of unemployment limit he/she may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT and students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that they worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of unpaid employment.

If a student exceeds the 90 day period of unemployment then he/she has technically violated his or her status. Therefore the student is required to either 1) apply to continue his or her education by a change of level or transfer to another SEVP-certified school through reinstatement procedures, 2) take action to otherwise maintain legal status by applying for another immigration status, or 3) depart the United States. Although schools are not required to alert the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) if a student has exceeded the 90 days of unemployment, the student should be aware that he/she may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on valid F-1 status if DHS determines that the student exceeded the limitations on unemployment.

Additionally, SEVP may examine SEVIS data for an individual, a selected group, or all students on post-completion OPT and terminate a student’s record if it fails to show the student maintained the proper period of employment. In such cases, the student will be given an opportunity to show that he or she complied with all OPT requirements, including maintaining employment.

Students are required to report any OPT employer information, changes to employment, or any periods of unemployment at the following website https://sait.usc.edu/ois/infoupdate/SEVP recommends that students report changes within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a DHS official may determine the student is out of status.

In addition, students will need to be advised that any new information regarding immigration regulations that could affect them while on OPT will be sent to their USC email address and it will be the responsibility of the students to check this email address for these updates.

International Connection

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Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Please send them to: Judy Hartwich, OIS, STU 300, MC 0899, email: hartwich@usc.edu.
The Oscar goes to... You?
by Desa Philadelphia, Publications Editor

It’s Academy Awards time and American movie industry types are waiting with anticipation to see which film and filmmaker will win Best Picture and Best Director, the two marquee Oscars. But for most of the rest of the world, the big moment is somewhere in the middle of the show when the foreign language Oscar is announced.

This year 67 countries threw their names (and filmmakers) into the ring. That list was narrowed down to nine, before the five finalists who will be competing for the prize were selected.

The director accepts the prize but the foreign language Oscar rewards the country of origin. Therefore, a win gives a globally recognized boost to the native film industry, and makes each citizen feel like a winner.

Veteran publicist Fredell Pogodin has represented many highly-regarded international films as they contend for Oscar. She says governments take huge risks when they put their country’s reputation behind certain films. Oscar recognition, in the form of a nomination or (if the stars are aligned) a win, can provide a big payoff, especially if the film portrays a cultural issue. “Every culture needs images of itself to sustain its cultural integrity,” says Pogodin. “If you are doing something historic or if what you’re talking about is your tradition, you can reach far more people with a film than you could with a book.”

Foreign Language Film Buzz

Everyone’s talking about these three:

Gomorra
(Gomorrah); Italy
Matteo Garrone’s film is based on the book of the same name that exposed Naples’ most powerful crime family and caused its author to go into hiding. It has been released in the U.S. so it will probably contend in other categories, including a Best Director nomination for Garrone.

The Class; France
Entre Les Murs (The Class) is about a teacher trying to survive a year in one of the roughest middle schools in Paris. This also qualifies for other nominations but the foreign language category is where it has a real shot at an Oscar.

Captain Abu Raed; Jordan
This film is noteworthy because it marks Jordan’s entry into the Oscar arena. It had never submitted a film before. Captain Abu Raed has received mixed reviews from critics and is not expected to be a contender for the big prize, but anything is possible in the foreign language category.

This year Pogodin is representing the front-runner, Gomorra from Italy—an exposé about Naples’ mafia culture that has received critical acclaim, including winning the second place Grand Prix at the Cannes film festival.

Another contender is France’s The Class about a year in the life of a school in a rough Paris neighborhood. It took the top prize, the Palme d’Or, at Cannes.

Critical acclaim is no guarantee of success. Last year, the expected winner, a gritty film about abortion in communist Romania, called 4 months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days didn’t even make the short list. Nor did Persepolis based on Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel about growing up in Iran. Both films had topped critics’ lists.

This year the Academy has changed the process to try to make sure critical as well as popular favorites have an equal shot at a being nominated. However, the choices in this category always seem to provide some level of surprise.

Jordan has entered the race for the first time this year. It’s entry Captain Abu Raed is about an airport janitor who forms a bond with the children in his working class neighborhood when he pretends to be a pilot and tells them fantastical tales about the world outside Amman.

The 81st annual Academy Awards ceremony will take place on February 22nd. On that night, somewhere in the world, a filmmaker will become a national hero.
The Trees that Immigrated to L.A.

by Desa Philadelphia
Publications Editor

The palm tree is so ubiquitous in Los Angeles that it’s considered one of the native markers, right up there with movie stars, sandy beaches and the Hollywood sign.

But most palm trees are not California natives. Like many Angelenos, the palm tree immigrated to the city and made a place for itself.

Palm trees first came to L.A. more than a hundred years ago, from Latin America and other tropical regions of the world. As the growth in the movie and aviation businesses led to urban sprawl in the 1920s and 1930s, more and more palm trees were planted. The movies made them famous, as shots of Los Angeles boulevards always seemed to feature palms. In fact the trees can be found in every corner of the city, from fancy west side beach locales, to the gritty immigrant neighborhoods on the east side, and across the valleys. There are more than 85,000 palm trees in the cities of L.A., Santa Monica and Beverly Hills, and that’s just counting the trees on city property.

There are numerous varieties of palms in Los Angeles, and many can grow as tall as 12-story buildings. One palm can claim native status, the California Fan Palm (scientific name *Washingtonia filifera*) has long been in the state. However, the very tall, skinny palm trees you recognize from movies about Los Angeles are probably the Mexican *Washingtonia robusta*, the Mexican Fan Palm. They line many streets including the scenic Ocean Ave. drag in Santa Monica. Hundreds were planted for the 1932 Olympic games. The similar-looking Canary Island Date Palm is another popular variety. It has a rough trunk and fronds that look like dreadlocks. Date palms, which can be found in Beverly Hills, were succumbing so badly to fungus that some L.A. municipalities ordered pruners to switch from hard-to-clean chain saws to hand saws that had been cleaned in a bleach solution.

The city of Palm Springs got its name from the abundant California Fan Palms that grew around the hot springs, or agua caliente, that the city is known for. Palm Canyon Drive, the city’s main artery, is lined with palms.

Palm trees have also become popular with casino landscapers in Las Vegas. So popular, in fact, that they have caused the prices for palms to rise dramatically.

In recent years, the expense of replacing diseased trees has led city planners to announce they will replace dead palms with oaks, sycamores and other species native to Los Angeles. In 2006 the city began an ambitious plan to plant one million new trees in Los Angeles county. They gave away seedlings and encouraged residents to plant the types of trees that were on a recommendations list. There were no palm trees on the list.

Such news has met resistance from Angelenos who can’t imagine a Los Angeles skyline that doesn’t include palm trees.
We sent you, our readers, a survey asking you to tell us about your favorite places in Los Angeles in six categories: Ethnic Restaurant, Bookstore, Supermarket, Coffee Shop, Tourist Attraction, and Website for news from home (OK, that last one would be your favorite virtual place).

Your picks highlighted the whole range of the city’s offerings. Everything from ethnic neighborhood nooks to global franchises.

So here now—according to you—is the Best of L.A.!!

**ETHNIC RESTAURANTS**

Considering that vegetarian food is generally harder to find, **Vasantha Bhavan** in Cerritos had to get top billing on this list. Go here for divine **Indian** vegetarian that even meat lovers can’t resist. They also cater.

11321 East 183rd St., 562-809-1600

**Seongbukdong** at 3303 W 6th St (213-738-8977) offers authentic **Korean** at affordable prices. Bulgogi, kimchee, pancakes, all get great reviews.

You also liked:

**Los Balcones del Peru**
1360 Vine St, Hollywood, 323-871-9600

**Little Malaysia**
3944 Peck Rd, El Monte, 626-401-3188

**Asakuma**
11701 Wilshire Blvd. L.A., 310-826-0013

**3 Square Cafe**
1121 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, 310-399-6504

Outside of Little Ethiopia, there aren’t many choices for **African** food in Los Angeles. Luckily there is **Ngoma Restaurant**, which serves up food from West, East and South Africa. The music is also an African experience. Get introduced to Kwai-to from South Africa or Soukous from the Congo region. The African folk art and other ethnic touches polish off the atmosphere. At 5358 Wilshire Blvd., 323-934-1565.
ETHNIC FOOD MARKETS

99 Ranch by Tawa Supermarkets is the largest chain of Asian supermarkets in the United States and Canada. Angelenos are lucky because most of the stores are located in our region. This is the place to go to for products from Taiwan and to find other Chinese specialties. For locations www.99ranch.com.

Mitsuwa Marketplace has Japanese groceries, beauty products, household goods and a host of cute unnecessaries that could probably be best described as knick knacks. You could spend hours going through the aisles here. Bring cash for the food court at the Centinela location. 3333 Alameda St., 213-687-6699; 3760 S Centinela Ave., 310-398-2113. mitsuwa.com

Other places you like include:

Galleria Market, 3250 W. Olympic Blvd. 323-733-3800 is on the ground floor of the fantastic Koreatown Galleria.

Roma Italian Deli and Grocery in Pasadena, 918 N. Lake Ave, 626-797-7748 is great for Italian meats and cheeses.

Whole Foods and Bristol Farms top the big supermarket chains for ethnic goods. wholefoods.com and bristolfarms.com

India Sweets and Spices has Indian and Pakistani groceries and prepared foods. Are you picky about your curry powder? Mix your own here. The closest one to USC is at 3126 Los Feliz Blvd. (323-345-0360) but there are seven other locations across Southern California. To find those, go to www.indiasweetsandspices.net.

WEBSITE FOR NEWS FROM HOME

While you have many choices for news from your part of the world, Yahoo!'s country pages give you easy access. Their websites were listed most frequently by those of you who responded to the survey.

Another great way to use Yahoo! is to click through their directory to news and information from other countries. Go to: dir.yahoo.com/regional/countries
Why the United States  From Page 1

Your answers, combined with OIS’ latest enrollment report, paint an interesting picture of who you are.

The largest number of international students at USC are from India. Almost half of you, 48%, are graduate students, with undergraduates making up 40% of the USC international population.

A majority of you come to the Viterbi School of Engineering, which suggests that USC has earned a good reputation in engineering education. Sushain Chhangani from India called his master of Electrical Engineering program “one of the best, as compared to anywhere else in the rest of the world.”

The Marshall School of Business also draws many of its students from around the world. Frank Yun Huang, who came from China, says the main reason he came to get a bachelor’s in Business Administration is because he knew he would get a quality education. However, he also had a very personal explanation for his choice. “I’ve been listening to my aunt talk about the United States since I was five years old,” he told us. “As time went by I developed an interest in America.”

Many of you hope to improve your English language fluency while at USC.

Undoubtedly your education was the first consideration when you chose to come to the United States, and to USC. However, you clearly appreciate all the other things that go into making USC a unique place, including, of course, the great weather.

Los Angeles’ diversity is reflected in the population at USC. The international student population contributes to that profile. You also mentioned it as one of the things that influenced you. “I want to see the world and the U.S. is my first stop,” says China’s Min Zhu. “The U.S. is a melting pot and I wanted to feel the international environment.”
While it’s well-known that a large number of USC’s international students come from East Asia, what’s not as obvious is how much work goes into the task of informing prospective students about the university. Each year Admission staff and representatives from many of USC’s individual schools spend time in locations around the world, including East Asia, seeking the best and brightest students to encourage them to apply to USC.

In October I joined a group of USC representatives on a trip to five Asian cities—Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei. In each of the destinations “Discover USC” events drew hundreds of students interested in undergraduate or graduate study at the university. Many USC alumni also showed up to meet the prospective students and offer their own advice about studying at USC.

Visiting five such fascinating cities in a short two-week time span left little time for getting out and seeing the sights. However, each city offered something unique and interesting. For me, a key point to any trip is the food, and I was not disappointed. From hairy crab in Shanghai, to traditional dim sum in Hong Kong and street-vendor food at Dongdaemun market in Seoul, the opportunities for great eating were limitless.

I have long been fascinated by skyscrapers, so a visit to the top of Taipei 101, currently the world’s tallest building, was a must for me. And for impressive city views, I highly recommend riding Peak Tram up to an amazing hilltop view of Hong Kong, or walking along the Bund in Shanghai to admire the futuristic cityscape of Pudong across the Huangpu river. Finally, the amazing historical sites in Beijing, including the Forbidden City, left me eager to go back soon and spend more time exploring.

Upon return to campus, with a little time to reflect on the trip, my lasting impression is of the strong relationships USC has already forged in Asia, and the need to continue to be very active in the region to be able to attract the best students to come to USC.

This was the first time the Office of International Services has participated in this kind of recruitment. As the OIS representative, my role was to present information about student visa requirements, and services available for international students. As expected, prospective students had many questions about campus life, working in the U.S., housing, and other issues. One thing that was apparent from the interactions I had on this trip is that USC is very well regarded in East Asia.

During meetings at educational advising centers, U.S. Consulates, and universities, people spoke very highly of the university’s reputation, and local alumni groups demonstrated great pride in their USC education.

Where USC Recruits
In addition to Asia, USC has also done international recruiting trips to:

Canada (Vancouver and Toronto) Mexico (Mexico City and Guadalajara) India (several locations)
Best of L.A.  From Page 7

BOOKSTORES
This category could have been called “Name your favorite Barnes and Noble superstore.” Is it the comfy armchairs, the great magazine rack or the many levels of tomes? Whatever the reason, you love Barnes and Noble bookstores in every corner of the city. Go to www.bn.com for locations.

Other bookstores mentioned include the New Mastodon, 5820 Wilshire Blvd. 323-525-1948 for German literature.

And of course, the good old Pertusati Bookstore at USC.

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS
There’s no shortage of things to do in L.A. and you have been getting around.
The Getty Center, above, was a popular pick.
Other places you mentioned:

Dockweiler beach, which includes Playa del Rey and El Segundo. 12000 Vista del Mar, Playa del Rey.
Griffith Observatory is the perfect place to reach for the stars. And you can see Griffith Park while you’re at it.
The Huntington, library, art collections and botanical gardens in San Marino can feel like a different world. Go to huntington.org.
Santa Monica Pier and Venice Boardwalk are familiar beach favorites. Try the new ferris wheel at the Santa Monica pier, and buy interesting crafts in Venice.
7+ Figueroa is just a sprint down Figueroa from USC and offers shopping and dining amenities. www.7fig.com.

COFFEE SHOPS

Jin Patisserie
1202 Abbot Kinney Blvd. Venice
310-399-8801

Coffee shops are important to students, providing caffeine and, sometimes, a little bit of solitude.

Here too, you sometimes like the familiar. Many of you mentioned your neighborhood Starbucks as your favorite java destination (starbucks.com for locations).

Jin Patisserie in Venice is probably better known for their pastries. But oh, what delightful pastries. And a serene garden (above).

Tribal Cafe in Echo Park, at 1651 W. Temple St. (213-483-4458), also serves a multitude of smoothies. Urth Caffe has great health food. Find several locations at urthcaffe.com.

Cafe de Leche is Central American inspired. 5000 York Blvd. 818-653-0558
And of course, a USC favorite: Ragazzi Room, at 2316 S. Union Ave. (213-741-1723), gives Trojans a place to escape to.
Bosco From Page 2

that is not based on oil. While tourism is a growing part of their economies, there has been little growth in industries involving water or technology, and their education system can’t support development for these new industries. Along with this, most of the countries are experiencing growth in their population. There is a need for jobs, and the jobs do not exist.

Maria Giovanna’s interest is not only in the effects of direct foreign investments on the global economy and global politics, but also on the development challenges the Gulf Cooperation Council countries face. Her work is aimed at contributing to the debate in economics circles on developing countries and their increasing importance in the world economy. “I have always focused on international and regional economics, knowledge creation and diffusion, and capital movements,” she says. “So the issue of sovereign wealth funds seems challenging and interesting to me right now.”

Maria Giovanna earned her Ph.D. in Economics in 2002, from Bocconi University in International Economics in Milan, which is considered one of the best schools in the world for business and economic studies. She has had her own challenges adjusting to life at USC. “The difficulty to find suitable housing was probably my most difficult hurdle,” she says. “I wanted to live near campus, to not have to buy a car and to be able to participate in University activities. I live just north of USC, but my night life is definitely inhibited. I have been told that it is not safe for me to be out alone at night and so since I walk, I try to get home before dark and I generally do not go out at night unless I am with a friend with a car.”

She is also puzzled by some of the lifestyle choices she sees in L.A. “As an economist I am dumbfounded by some situations that I see in the area around me. I encounter people who are obviously homeless and living in their cars – but the cars they live in! They are luxury SUVs and their owners seem to be outfitted with the latest technology in terms of cell phones. This is puzzling to me. No Italian would ever put owning a vehicle or a cell phone above having basic accommodation.”

And because she is an economist, she unsurprisingly has strong views about the economic crisis in the U.S. “I am amazed at the 700 billion dollar bail out of the financial institutions,” she says. “Basically that money is coming from people who pay taxes and going to people who don’t. This bail out is pretty much a nationalization of the US banks so I find the situation extremely ironic. Free market economists criticize more socialist leaning countries for things like the nationalization of banks because it is contrary to the values of a liberal democracy.”

While life in L.A. has been challenging, Maria Giovanna seems to be enjoying her USC experience. “The number one thing to me has been the kindness of people at USC,” she says. “I have experienced it in so many different ways from so many different people, many of whom don’t really know me at all. This is a very different attitude than you will find in many of the countries of Europe.

“Also feel very lucky to have so many opportunities to become involved in the life of the University. I take classes in yoga and the martial arts. I swim in the pool and use the gym. I love the football games! I don’t really understand what I am watching on the field, but I love the feeling of all the people being together in the stands and I love the pageantry of the Trojan Marching Band and Traveler. I’ve participated in the Thanksgiving Match-up program and in the International Diners’Club.

“At Thanksgiving I went with ten other international students to a home in Altadena. The family were a husband and wife and three children and then the eleven of us! I am not sure if this is a normal American Thanksgiving, but I was very impressed with the kindness and graciousness of our host family. I will return to Italy with experiences I’d never thought I would have.”

Maria Giovanna plans to spend just one year at USC before returning to Italy to continue working. But she’ll always have fond memories of being a Trojan.
OIS staff Ariel Suarez, Anne Kaufman, Zach Williams and Sarah Bang, aka the rock band KISS, perform at the 2008 Student Affairs holiday party.

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM OIS!