A lot of excitement, enthusiasm and interest have been generated on college campuses across the country with regard to the US primary elections. Students are engaging in conversations, asking questions, doing research on the internet, and sharing opinions and observations with each other.

International students on USC’s campus are in a unique position in that though they are not voting citizens, they are exposed to all the media coverage, both in the US and in their home countries and are frequently just as engaged as their American student friends in learning about and discussing the whole election process.

I spent an hour or so talking to four international graduate students about their observations and perceptions of the US electoral process to date. Sharing in the discussion were Animesh Pathak and Sidharth Kumar, both engineering students from India, Desa Philadelphia, a public diplomacy student from Guyana, and Onnicha Sawangfa, an economics student from Thailand.

I asked them what surprised them most about the primary process so far. All of them responded that they were stunned at the “out there” importance of the candidates’ religious affiliations. “Almost every candidate seemed to have frequent media shots where they are either next to a minister or priest, or some religious figure is on stage with them. This would never happen in India,” said Animesh.

The students were also surprised that there were so many different primary dates and they were confused at the disproportionate attention paid to the first of these – the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary. Says Onnicha “It just looks like the focus on these first events contribute to a kind of herd mentality – whoever seems to be doing better in Iowa and New Hampshire has what looks like an early and irrational advantage.”...
26th Annual International Graduation Reception and Awards Ceremony!
April 18, 2008
by Esther Lee, Associate Director

Each year OIS hosts the International Graduation Reception and Awards Ceremony to celebrate the academic achievements of our graduating students, and to recognize students, faculty and staff who have made considerable contributions to the USC international community. This year the event will be held on April 18, 2008 from 2-4 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel, Midtown near USC.

With a vibrant international student community here at USC, the reception serves to honor and commemorate the accomplishments of undergraduate and graduate international students graduating in spring or summer 2008, or those who have graduated in fall 2007. Two separate awards will be presented to students:

**Academic Achievement Award:**
Undergraduate international students graduating with a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.5 or higher and graduate international students with a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.8 or higher will be recognized for their academic performance. Only students graduating in May or August 2008 or who have graduated in December 2007 are eligible (based upon a G.P.A. at the end of fall 2007).

**Leadership Award:**
The Leadership Award is given to international or domestic students who have shown extraordinary dedication, involvement and motivation as leaders on the USC campus. This includes contributions to USC clubs and organizations and to the international student community for the 2007-2008 academic year.

In addition, each year OIS presents a special award to one faculty and one staff member for outstanding contributions to the international student community. These are individuals who have provided dedication, assistance and support to international students, above and beyond their job responsibility.

If you or someone you know is eligible for one or more of these awards and deserves to be recognized, please come to the Office of International Services and submit a nomination form. Forms can be downloaded from the OIS website at www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS.

The reception and awards ceremony is open to all USC students, faculty and staff, and is a wonderful opportunity to see the strength of the international student community at USC. Should you have any questions about the awards or the ceremony, please contact the International Program Assistants JooHee or Ruby at 213-740-9742, or stop by our office located in the Student Union, Room 300.
Tax Season Is Here!!!
b
by Becky Peterson, International Student Advisor

You have until Tuesday, April 15th of this year to file your federal and state forms reporting tax year 2007.

Federal forms are filed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the U.S. government and state tax forms are filed with either California or the applicable state in which you earned income.

Visit their websites to begin the process:
State of California website: www.ftb.ca.gov

General information:
• All non-residents are subject to paying federal and state taxes on any income earned or compensation rendered during the year 2007. However, a tax treaty may apply which exempts certain portions of taxable income/taxation. To claim a tax treaty you must have filed form 8233. Tax treaty information can be found at:
  o www.irs.gov/businesses/international/article/0,,id=96739,00.html
• Most non-resident students (F-1 and J-1) are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A.) taxes for their first 5 years in the U.S. J-1 scholars and researchers are typically exempt from Social Security for their first 2 years. Social Security is the government retirement supplement fund for U.S. citizens and residents. If you have had these taxes withheld in error, you may find information on requesting a refund at:
  www.internationalcenter.umich.edu/taxes/taxrefund.html
• ALL non-residents and their dependents who were here during tax year 2007 must file Form 8843 which is used to claim non-resident status with the U.S. government.
• If you arrived in the United States AFTER January 1, 2008 or earned no income during the 2007 year, you will not have had any earned taxable income but will still need to file a form 8843. However, your USC scholarships/fellowships may have been considered taxable. If they were, you will receive a Form 1042S from USC.
• Non-residents are not eligible to file their taxes electronically (E-file) but must print and sign hard copies to mail-in.

Possible forms you may be receiving in the mail that will give you information to file your federal and state tax forms:
1. Form 1098-T

Some students have received form 1098-T in the mail. Most F-1/J-1’s do not need this form for tax filing. It is only needed for U.S. residents and citizens to claim a possible tax exemption (Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning Credit) for education expenses. It would not be applicable since you are a non-resident. However, certain non-resident aliens who are married to U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens, and who qualify to file a joint-income tax return, may, in some cases qualify to claim the credits.

Regarding the Social Security number found on form 1098-T:
If you DO NOT have a social security number, the number found in the box is a “dummy” or “placeholder” to populate the USC database. IT IS NOT VALID and should not be used. If you need a Social Security number and have a job offer, please come to OIS for help in applying for a valid one.

To see a sample form 1098-T:
www.bursar.psu.edu/form1098t.cfm

2. Form 1042-S

The purpose of this form is to report U.S. taxable income and U.S. income tax withholding for:
• Scholarships, fellowships or grants awarded to students or postdoctoral fellows and compensation for services rendered.
• Income claimed as exempt from U.S. income tax under a tax treaty. Treaties are claimed by filing form 8233.

If you DID NOT receive a Form 1042S from USC, your scholarships/fellowships were not considered taxable. If you were taxed, please consult the list of scholarship amount exemptions under tax treaties to see if you can claim any or all as exempt from federal taxes.

To see a sample form 1042-S:
www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/tax/Files/04.jpg

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Bicycling Your Way Through Los Angeles and the USC Campus

by Michelle Lee, Publications Editor

USC is no stranger to the bicycling community. Thousands of bikes can be found on the campus at any given moment – belonging to USC students, faculty, and staff. And why not? With the friendly weather and numerous bicycling opportunities Los Angeles has to offer, bicycling can be a fun and practical activity for the hard-working college student. Whether it is to get across campus, get to campus, or get away from campus, there are many things to know and take into consideration. With summer coming, bicyclists should take advantage of the upcoming events, sunny paths, and new friends LA can provide. While riding a bike can be economical, environmentally-friendly, and good for the health, it can also be dangerous so please remember to wear a helmet and obey safety rules!

Being situated in Southern California can have its perks, but being situated in the heart of LA can be even better. The biking community is a vibrant and growing one. In the Spring of 2007, a Canadian-based nonprofit, Agents of Change, rode their bicycles from Vancouver down to Tijuana, Mexico to raise awareness and support for their mission (micro-financing). Through the 6-week bike ride, one rider, Christine Yeung, observed, “The entire west coast of the United States had a handful of brilliant paths with excellent scenery. However, the big cities such as San Francisco, and especially Los Angeles offered a different type of biking experience that was just as rewarding: the city bike community.” Los Angeles has demonstrated that there are a large number of riders congregating through events, bike “gangs”, parties, and mission causes. Some riders are purely athletic and sporty, some are stylish, and some just need a cheap mode of transportation.

With such a large group of bike-riders, many businesses and establishments have burgeoned to serve their needs: bicycle shops, used-parts stores, societal groups, events, safety-watchers, (bike-friendly) restaurants and bars, in addition to repair shops that provide assistance and education to the bike community. For instance, Los Angeles is home to a handful of “kitchens” or repair shops that do not actually fix bikes for patrons. Instead, they offer a great space for the public to work on bikes, ask for advice or answers, purchase used-parts, and learn more. In association are organized groups as well as “bike gangs” that set up social events for riders to take part in. And if you are in or around the Long Beach area, do not forget to check out the services provided by the Bikestation. With a membership, you can have access to discounts on bicycle rentals and purchases, opportunities to try out new electric bikes, free indoor bike parking, and access to a plethora of resources, maps, and information.

In addition to the aforementioned LA biking features, the LA landscape offers diverse biking paths to enjoy a variety of scenery. Virtually every Los Angeles area beach has a somewhat flat bike path for easy rides along the coast. There are winding paths through parks, mountain regions, along the coastal cliffs of Palos Verdes and San Pedro, through city centers in the midst of traffic, and even alongside the 110 freeway. For company and chances to meet new people, Los Angeles hosts a variety of events allowing bikers to ride for joint interests or just for fun.

With all the fun in this bustling city, however, are reasons to PRACTICE CAUTION! While Los Angeles as well as the USC campus can offer a wide array of biking experiences, it can also lead to accidents involving pedestrians, vehicles, and other bikers if not executed with precaution and an adherence to safety guidelines (and laws!). Since so many students, staff, and faculty cross the USC campus daily, it is easy to inadvertently ride into someone or cut someone off. It is not a rare occurrence to walk on campus when suddenly a bicyclist will swoosh past your nose, missing you by an inch. Sometimes, the circumstances are stickier with clumsy maneuvers, both parties not knowing which way to go, and resulting, unfortunately, with someone getting hurt. If you are not yet confident or stable on your bicycle, practice in a secluded area first until you know you will be in full control of your bicycle in any situation. And don’t forget to stay alert, making note of any oncoming traffic or obstacles in the path. Follow the rules and practice safe riding and everyone will be a lot happier and safer.

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LA Today

Spring is here! Are you ready for more LA Today events?

**Angeles National Forest Hike is back!**

Last semester, we were forced to cancel our hiking trip because of the forest fires, so we’re giving it another try. Come join us!

On Saturday, March 8th, we’ll hike up to and have a picnic at the Vetter Mountain Fire Lookout. Come take in the captivating view of more than 40 miles of surrounding valleys and mountains while learning about the historic location from a volunteer fire ranger.

The cost is estimated at $15 per person, which will include transportation and lunch.

**Griffith Observatory Star Party!**

Come and enjoy the beautiful LA night skies with LA Today!

We’ll be attending the monthly Star Party at Griffith Observatory on Saturday, April 12th. You’ll have the chance to look at the sun, moon, visible planets, and other objects, to try out a variety of telescopes, and to talk to knowledgeable astronomers about the sky and their equipment.

We will also be attending a show at the famous Samuel Oschin Planetarium. The program will take visitors on a cosmic journey of exploration and discovery through our universe.

The cost will be approximately $15 and will include transportation and tickets to the Planetarium. Don’t miss out!

For more information about any upcoming LA Today event you can email Jeff or Ruby at latoday0708@gmail.com.

**Diners’ Club!!!**

**WELCOME BACK** to a new semester at USC! Diners’ Club has many events planned for this semester.

The USC Diners’ Club introduces you to various ethnic dishes that are available in Southern California. In the past, there have been various menus based on the Ethiopian, Cuban and Thai cuisines. In addition to experimenting with new cuisines, the Diners’ Club program offers you opportunities to learn and understand the culture, people, and origins of the diverse nations behind the dishes.

The program has already had its first event in early February at the Empress Pavilion in Downtown Los Angeles’ Chinatown. To celebrate Chinese New Year, the Diners’ Club took participants to enjoy an array of dim sum! It was amazing!

If you missed out, don’t worry because the following events are still planned for the rest of the semester:

Friday, March 7th: Experience Peru! Peruvian cuisine is one of the most versatile in the world. Dishes of the Peruvian influence include Chairo, Chicharrones and Alfajores – but, they can be so hard to pronounce! It will be a very unique experience.

Early April: Brazilian BBQ!! Also known as Churrasco, Brazilian barbeque has a rich history involving various meats marinated and cooked to savory perfection!

Join the Diners’ Club at these exciting events to experience the delicious cuisines as well as meet new friends!

If you have any questions, or would like to make reservations and/or suggestions, please contact either Joohee or Josh by visiting OIS at STU 300, by phone (213) 740-9742, or via email at dinersclub0708@gmail.com.

You can also join our facebook group to keep up with upcoming Diners’ Club events. Search for OIS International Diners’ Club on facebook groups and join us today!
... One student said he’d been talking a lot to some American students living in his building and was surprised that they felt so strongly about not voting for a woman - no matter what, even if it meant they would vote outside their party. “She just can’t do it,” said one student.

In India, women and minorities are both elected to power without much discussion or worry about how that would affect their performance. I expected that my American student friends’ views would be more liberal and more sophisticated.

All of the international students also agreed that the media doesn’t seem very independent in the US. Network TV coverage is disappointing. Many of the students relied on news coverage from their own countries to get a clearer idea of what was going on. Another student relied on NPR, the Daily Show and the Colbert Report.

When I asked what each of them would be most interested in over the coming months before the November election, there were varying responses. One student was very interested in looking more closely at the candidates’ positions on global issues, especially issues that will affect relations between the US and their own country. Another student is interested to watch the development of the dynamics between Senators Clinton and Obama. All were interested to observe how things play out in the coming months with consideration to race and gender issues as these seem to be prominent in the discussion right now.

It’s an exciting time across the country and on US college campuses. If you are an international student, don’t be shy to engage your American student friends in discussion about the election process. Ask questions, share observations, talk about how the process is similar to or different from the process in your country. If you are a student from the US, take advantage of all the different perspectives you can gain on our election process by talking to your international student friends. They are eager to ask questions but sometimes hesitant to do so. Listen for the questions. Ask some of your own. There’s a lot to talk about.

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STATE OF THE WORLD PANEL DISCUSSION

International Perspectives on the U.S. Presidential Elections

A panel of international students will share their perspectives on the U.S. electoral process.

Thursday, March 27th
5:00 - 6:30 pm

Location: Doheny Intellectual Commons

Sponsored by the Office of International Services
For additional information call (213) 740-2666

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USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY BLOG

In recognition of the international interest in this year’s Presidential election USC’s Center on Public Diplomacy and the Foreign Policy Association introduced their new blog, “Public Diplomacy and the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election.” It will collect and analyze statements by the candidates on world opinion, and do the same for world opinion on the U.S. elections. The blog aims to highlight how the candidates and their policies are viewed by the world’s publics and how the candidates are communicating across borders.

Check it out at www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org.

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VOTE!!!
Tax Season!!!
-continued from p. 3

3. Form W-2

This form shows all income earned and income tax at the state and federal level that is withheld. If you had more than one employer, you should have received more than one W-2.

To see a sample form W-2:
www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/tax/Files/w2.jpg

4. Form 1099

This form shows any interest earned on bank accounts, stocks, funds, etc. which you may need to claim.

To see a sample form 1099:
www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/tax/Files/1099.gif

*You will use Forms W-2, 1042-S and 1099, if received and applicable, to fill out your federal and state tax forms. You may request a replacement W-2/1042S if it is lost, stolen or never received.

For further information on replacements:
http://ais-ss.usc.edu/empldoc/faq/faq9.html#05 or email USC Payroll at payroll@usc.edu.

Procedure for Filing for Taxes

FEDERAL TAXES

This year, USC’s nonresident aliens (students and scholars) will be able to fill-out all their FEDERAL tax forms online to print and submit to the U.S. government. This free software portal (CINTAX) is now available through the OIS website:
www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/tax/tax.html.

CINTAX is a fully resourced program which will guide you through the entire process of which forms you need to file, how to fill them out, and how to store your information for future tax seasons. Even if you have earned no income or received compensation during 2007, all F and J’s and their dependents must file a form 8843 which claims non-residency tax status. CINTAX can assist with this as well.

**Please make sure to have all your information forms (W-2, 1042-S, 1099, etc.) BEFORE you fill out your tax forms in CINTAX and mail them. It is EXTREMELY difficult to file an amended return – CINTAX and OIS will not be able to assist you with this.

To access CINTAX and for general information:
• Click on “Taxes” to the left of the OIS main page or go to www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/tax/tax.html.

STATE TAXES

State taxes are not covered by the CINTAX program and you cannot fill-out your state tax forms with the program. For states other than California, please go to that state government website for more information on procedures. Each state has its own tax form to file.

Forms 540NR regarding State of California taxes are available at OIS and assistance on state tax filing will be available on the following dates:

Friday, February 22: 2 pm - 4 pm
Location: MHP106

Thursday, March 13: 2 pm - 4 pm
Location: VKC102

Friday, March 28: 2 pm - 4 pm
Location: MHP106

Wednesday, April 9: 2 pm - 4 pm
Location: MHP106

**Please come to your session with your W-2 and federal form 1040NR completed as you will need the information from them.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Software packages:
For those of you who would like to do your own taxes, you can purchase software such as TurboTax or H&R Block Tax. Again, non-residents cannot E-file (electronically file) tax forms but will need to print them, fill them out and mail them as hard copies to the federal and state governments.

Software packages tend to cost approximately $30-50 at stores such as Best Buy. The software should:

• Cover both state and federal tax forms.

• Be for the 2007 tax year. Do not purchase older versions on the internet for earlier tax years as the forms and regulations may have changed.

Tax manual for non-resident aliens:

USC websites:
http://ais-ss.usc.edu/empldoc/faq/faq4.html#8 Payroll

Other universities tax websites:
University of Texas, Austin:
www.utexas.edu/international/taxes/

Boston University:

Please note, the staff of the Office of International Services is not trained or licensed to answer questions concerning your tax situation or offer any tax related advice. USC students and scholars should consult tax professionals for specific tax advice.

March/April 2008
Preventive Safety Rules:

- Park your bicycle only in designated areas, making sure not to block any building entrances and exits, or handicap ramps.
- Obey USC speed limits: 15 miles per hour on regular streets and 5 miles per hour on Trousdale Parkway and Childs Way malls.
- Yield to pedestrians, especially at crosswalks!
- Remain to the far right of the street.
- Do not ride under the influence of any drugs or alcohol.
- Make sure your bicycle has proper, working brakes.
- Do not hitch rides on vehicles.
- Use bike lanes whenever possible.
- Do not leave bicycles in the way of other pedestrians or bicyclists.
- Wear a helmet (It is the law for those under the age of 18).
- Always ride on the right side of the street – in the same direction as traffic.
- Do not wear headphones or earplugs in both ears.
- Make safe left turns when riding in streets.
- Make sure your bicycle has a working headlight or reflectors, especially when riding at night.
- Remember bicycle riders must follow the same regulations as motor vehicle drivers.
- Always stop at stop signs.
- Always ride with at least one hand on the handlebars.
- Do not forget to use the proper hand signals when turning or stopping.
- Remember to make sure your bicycle fits you properly in size and is well-maintained.
- Remember there are laws to abide by as well as USC policies.

Please visit the following websites for full bicycle rules and laws:

USC’s bicycle policies:
http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/bicycle-policy/

LADOT’s codes, laws, and regulations:
www.bicyclela.org/Law.htm

California Highway Patrol’s “Common Causes of Bicycle Accidents”:
www.chp.ca.gov/html/bicycleriding.html

Bicycle Resources:

Bicycle Kitchen:
A nonprofit “kitchen” offering repair guidance, classes, and used-parts for a small hourly donation.
706 Heliotrope
Los Angeles, CA 90029
(323) 662-2776
www.bicyclekitchen.com

Bike Oven:
A bike-repair assistance establishment relying heavily on the work of volunteers.
3706 N. Figueroa St.
Los Angeles, CA 90065
(323) 223-8020
www.bikeoven.com

BIKEroWave:
Similar to the kitchen and the oven, Bikerowave provides education and help with bike maintenance. 1816A Berkeley St.
Santa Monica, CA 90404
www.bikerowave.org

Long Beach Bikestation:
A facility located on the First Street Transit Mall in Long Beach, providing transportation and resources for bikers.
221 First Street
Long Beach, CA 90802
(562) 436-2453
www.bikestation.org/longbeach

C.I.C.L.E.:
Cyclists Inciting Change thru Live Exchange promotes the bicycle as a “visible, healthy, and sustainable transportation choice.”
www.cicle.org

Los Angeles Bicycle Coalition:
A member-based nonprofit for Los Angeles bicyclists:
www.la-bike.org

BikeBoom Calendar:
One of the most comprehensive calendars for bike events in the Los Angeles and Orange County areas. Listed are social rides and bicycle events, including Critical Mass rides and the Midnight Ridazz ride which takes place every second Friday of the month.
http://bikeboom.com

Los Angeles Bike Paths:
A well-organized guide to bicycle paths in the Los Angeles area. Beach, forest, city, park, and suburban rides can be found here. Additionally, you can find resource links, calendars, and maps at this site.
www.labikepaths.com
Academy Award Winning Films Reviewed

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

- Best Art Direction

*by Lindsay Plake, IPA*

Horrifying and disturbing, yet strangely comical, *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* is another odd masterpiece from director Tim Burton. After a break period, Burton returns with this gruesome and tragic Stephen Sondheim musical starring the brilliant Johnny Depp along with Helena Bonham Carter. Once again, the actor-director duo, Depp and Burton, stuns audiences across the nation through wit, humor, and gallons of blood.

With a long career of playing dark, complicated characters, Johnny Depp continues his forte with this masterful performance as Benjamin Barker. His portrayal of the sad and demented barber is genuine. Amid murder and deceit, the audience sympathizes with Benjamin and roots for his success. Johnny Depp has once again created a loveable villain. However, one cannot forget to mention the glorious performance of Helena Bonham Carter, who lights up the screen playing Mrs. Lovett with her unkempt appearance and ironic humor.

The plot seems relatively slow-paced injected with musical numbers and ghastly images. Primarily driven by revenge, Benjamin Barker returns to London and sets up a barber shop connected to Mrs. Lovett’s meat pie bakery. There, his shop becomes popular, famed for giving the closest shaves ever, while Mrs. Lovett’s bakery kills the competition. In time, the desire for revenge brings tragedy to the barber and the baker.

Like most Tim Burton films, *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* was captivating, thrilling, and disturbing. I enjoyed the epic cinematography, quirky characters, and handsome period costumes. Most importantly, I loved the fact that this movie with its dark ambiance was a musical. I recommend it to anyone and everyone who enjoys some good gore.

*Ratatouille*

- Best Animated Film

*by Jeff Pfingsten, IPA*

Film, at its best, transports us completely to a different place. Isn’t that why we sit in a darkened theater for two hours? Rarely does a film ever touch us entirely on that level, engaging us so deeply that we forget we’re watching a movie. For me, *Ratatouille* was such an experience.

Part of what makes *Ratatouille* such a great film is how warm and familiar it all feels. Even more, the script is actually a revelation, especially for an animated film. In an industry where many animated films continually rely on paper thin rehashes, predictable plots, or stories constructed entirely of tired pop culture references, *Ratatouille* is a much needed breath of fresh air. The story begins with a great introduction to Remy, our hero. The first shot we see is of Remy bursting through a window, clutching a cookbook. In that one shot, we know every thing about this character’s plight: he loves to cook, but can’t because he’s a rat. Few films have such rich, yet subtly conveyed, characterization.

Our other hero, Linguini, is just as charming. Watching him fall in love is especially heartwarming. Linguini is a goofy guy, but never becomes the one-dimensional archetype of “the wacky guy”. Watching him combine his talents with Remy so they both can succeed makes for incredibly compelling cinema. *Ratatouille* somehow manages to craft not one but two compelling protagonists and it’s amazing how much chemistry they both have together when they share the scene. Remy and Linguini never exchange dialogue, but the connection they share is so touching that one smiles just thinking of it.

Aside from the fantastic story and characters, *Ratatouille* is also an absolute feast for the senses. The musical score and sound design are superb, and the film looks simply... delicious (I resisted the food metaphor as long as I could). The color palette the animators use is both vibrantly colorful and silky smooth, making the film the most romantic animated film I’ve seen....

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Film Reviews

...And the animation is remarkable. Watch the scene in which Remy controls a sleeping Linguini to see what I’m referring to. His body contorts in ways that only animated characters can, and yet all of his joint movement is staggeringly lifelike.

*Ratatouille* is a film that really transcends its animated medium. Animation has traditionally been labeled a “for the kids”, but *Ratatouille* is a work of art that can be appreciated by any age (and it’s nominated for five Oscars!). Writer-director Brad Bird has really made something special in *Ratatouille*: a warm, delightful movie that is a feast for the eyes, ears, and heart.

*Once*

-*Best Music (Song)*

by Cheryl Gilman, Director, Faculty/Staff Visa Services

Delivered in an utterly natural style, the small Irish film *Once* is the story of a street musician who stumbles upon the support and friendship he needs to transform from an aspiring artist to “the real thing”. Actor/Musician Glen Hansard plays a street musician down on his luck. So down, in fact, that he is forced to give chase to a street dweller who steals his little day’s worth of hard-earned coin. Markéta Irglová plays a young Czech woman who recently immigrated to Ireland. While selling magazines and flowers on the street for a living, she recognizes the busker’s talent and offers him friendship. Despite minimal scripting, the story develops dimension as we learn that each of these characters faces a personal challenge.

It is the give and take of this evolving friendship that is the central fascination of the movie, as much as the music these two create together. Warming to each other in fits and starts, the potential of their complementary gifts is revealed. It is to the credit of Writer/Director John Carney that the unfolding of this friendship never feels forced. Suddenly, we realize we are not watching another hackneyed odd-couple romance. It would be easy for this kind of story to slide into well-worn “Cinderella” territory, through sentimentality and the use of tired conventions. Instead, Carney has avoided such traps and given us a believable portrayal of a precious human experience — those important, unexpected friendships and collaborations that catalyze successful transitions in our personal lives and careers.

*Once* has been billed as a new kind of musical, inheritor to territory forged by “The Commitments” (in which Hansard also appeared). The music that fills the film is convincingly immediate and emotionally powerful. Hansard and Irglová are each talented musicians and songwriters in their own right.

The film is simply but effectively shot and edited overall. Some of the framing is especially thoughtful, adding to the charm of the film, as when we initially see Hansard and Irglová skillfully juxtaposed in close-up as they spontaneously collaborate for the first time. If there is a problem with the way the film was crafted, it is that the handheld camera pushes the limit of tolerable shakiness in a couple of scenes, and some interior exposures are more gloomy than atmospheric.

For most of the film we are investing in Hansard’s journey, rooting for him to get his career on track. We initially see the cheery Irglová as his “helper angel”, perhaps slightly more evolved than him. As the film progresses he is transformed by the right kind of support, becoming able to move on and give back. It is at this mo-

*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.

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ment we see how much Irglová sought healing through helping Hansard, and how much farther she has yet to go. We know instinctively that the story isn’t finished, but it ends at the right moment to leave us satisfied and full of hope.

**There Will Be Blood**
- **Best Actor in a Leading Role**
- **Best Cinematography**

by Michelle Lee, Publications Editor

Making its Los Angeles debut in late December, *There Will Be Blood* opened in limited theaters, quickly winning the admiration and praise of critics, movie-goers, and film societies throughout the nation. Months after its initial release, the film is showing in numerous theaters and has amassed eight Academy Award nominations including best performance by an actor in a leading role, best cinematography, best sound editing, and best picture of the year.

Written and directed by Paul Thomas Andersen, the film has already won several film awards and earned the reputation of an instant classic. Although built on a bleak story, darkly revealed, the visual and aural aspects are beautiful and uplifting. Particularly spellbinding is the film’s score composed by Jonny Greenwood – hypnotic and appropriate alongside the rhythmic oil derricks. Meanwhile, Daniel Day-Lewis develops an all-consuming portrayal of his character through an intense yet seemingly natural performance throughout the film. Additionally, Paul Dano holds his own next to the experienced and accomplished Day-Lewis. And while moments are disturbing and bitter, the scenes are mesmerizing and bewitching, fully illustrating the influence of ambition and riches.

**No Country For Old Men**
- **Best Actor in a Supporting Role**
- **Best Writing (Adapted Screenplay)**
- **Best Directing**
- **Best Picture**

by Ryan McManemin

After a few mild and disappointing comedies (*Intolerable Cruelty*, *Ladykillers*), Joel and Ethan Coen have returned to creating the type of drama they perfected in *Miller’s Crossing* with their stark adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country For Old Men*. With a straightforward plot with minimal dialogue, the film is a powerful story of greed, loss, and fate, incorporating some unforgettable characters and equally memorable landscapes. Though a heavy tone and tempered pace lend a shocking realism to the film’s pervasive violence, the Coens still manage to slip in just a taste of the dry humor their fans have come to expect.

Set in Texas circa 1980, the plot follows the fate of three main characters after a botched drug deal leaves two million dollars up for grabs. Josh Brolin plays Llewelyn Moss, a sympathetic character who initially finds the cash, and goes to great lengths to keep it. Javier Bardem gives a masterful performance as Anton Chigurh, a professional hitman hired to track down Moss and the money, surely one of the most menacing characters ever committed to film. Finally, Tommy Lee Jones rounds out the cast, portraying Sheriff Tom Bell with a sense of resignation and uselessness that makes his story perhaps the most tragic of all.

The film was almost universally praised by critics, appearing in more top ten lists than any other film of 2007, and for good reason. Though the violence and suspense employed didn’t break any new ground, the film explored themes of fate, amorality, and the loss of one’s ideals with a skill and subtlety rarely seen in modern cinema. Beginning and ending rather abruptly, leaving the viewer with a sense that the themes explored are continual and applicable to our world and ourselves. Though definitely not a feel-good story, it is undeniably a great film that will stay with you long after you leave the theater.
International students, faculty, and staff receive awards at the International Graduation Reception and Awards Ceremony