A CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE FORCE IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

RECIPIENT OF THE 2017 NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Award For Campus Internationalization
University of Pittsburgh

Bringing the World to Pitt Through Global Engagement

Founded in 1787, the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) is one of the oldest higher education institutions in the United States. As such, the university has an impressively long tradition of international engagement. From its creation of its first Nationality Rooms nearly 80 years ago, to its consistent efforts to make global engagement a part of every student’s university experience, Pitt has long been a leader in promoting international engagement in new and innovative ways.

NATIONALITY ROOMS CONNECT LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITIES

Perhaps the most visible evidence of Pitt’s commitment to engaging the world are its 30 Nationality Rooms. Housed in a 42-story Gothic skyscraper known as the “Cathedral of Learning,” each Nationality Room celebrates the heritage of an ethnic or cultural group from the Pittsburgh area. The first four rooms—Scottish, Russian, German, and Swedish—were built in 1938, while the newest—the Korean room—was dedicated in 2015. Local organizations that represent the group are responsible for designing and financing the construction of the rooms. After construction, the rooms are governed by committees made up of members of the local community.

Though the Nationality Rooms certainly attract a lot of interest from outside the university, they are primarily used as classrooms, meeting spaces for student organizations, and for other academic purposes. As Associate Director for International Programs Belkys Torres, PhD, explains: “The heritage rooms are a really interesting connection between the university and local and global communities.”

The committees don’t just fund and construct the rooms—they also finance study abroad and research scholarships to their respective country. For example, communications major Noah Coco received the African Heritage Nationality Room Scholarship for a summer program in Cape Town, South Africa, in addition to studying abroad in China. He says, “There are so many sources of funding and opportunities to study abroad at Pitt that I can go to two countries that could not be much further away from where I am right now.”
CREATING A CAMPUS CLEARINGHOUSE FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

The Nationality Rooms represent just one of the many initiatives overseen by the University Center for International Studies (UCIS), founded in 1968. Due to Pitt’s decentralized structure as a comprehensive research university, UCIS plays an important role as the university’s keystone for global engagement. The center supports university-wide international programming, activities, services, and research across Pitt’s 16 schools and four regional campuses throughout western Pennsylvania. Torres says: “We function independently, and that allows us to make connections and collaborate across schools and disciplines with faculty, undergraduate students, graduate students, visiting scholars, and administrators across all levels.”

UCIS’s portfolio includes education abroad and international student and scholar services. In addition, UCIS currently hosts six area studies and thematic centers, which award a number of undergraduate and graduate certificates highlighting a world region or transnational theme.

Leading the charge for internationalization at Pitt is Ariel C. Armony, PhD, director of UCIS and senior director of international programs. Armony became the university’s senior international officer in 2015, serving as a senior adviser to both Provost Patricia E. Beeson, PhD, and Chancellor Patrick Gallagher, PhD. Armony jokes, “The chancellor likes to refer to me as his ‘secretary of state.’”

Recognizing the connection between the city of Pittsburgh and the rest of the world is central to Armony’s approach to internationalization at Pitt. “We want the world to enrich what we have here at Pitt, and we want to help enrich the world outside of our region. The interaction between the local and the global is very much at the core of the ways in which we conceptualize our role as a global university,” he says.

Provost Beeson concurs: “We say ‘Bring the world to Pitt.’ That means making connections throughout the city and really developing a strong partnership around global issues with our major partners, such as UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center).”

A STRATEGIC FOCUS ON EMBRACING THE WORLD

Following the adoption of a new strategic plan that included global engagement as an institutional priority for the first time in the university’s history, Gallagher gave Armony the mandate to develop Embracing the World: A Global Plan for Pitt, a strategy to achieve the university’s internationalization goals for 2016–2020.

“Our university is committed to growing a global community. These plans underpin our efforts to grow international partnerships and experiences that will widen our reach—and connect our students and faculty members to opportunities across the world,” says Gallagher.

Jeff Whitehead, a Pitt alumni who worked in the study abroad office for several years before becoming its director in 2009, explains that the global plan offered an opportunity to take stock of the various international activities the university was already pursuing.
For more than a semester, the UCIS team surveyed staff, students, faculty, and administrators, seeking feedback on where the university should focus its international initiatives. “We made a big point in developing the global plan as a result of a very extensive process of engagement with our campus community,” Armony explains.

Torres adds, “Engagement sessions with faculty, senior leaders, and administrators on all five campuses underscored a need for more robust global operations support, streamlined mechanisms and criteria for developing and tracking strategic international partnerships, and a communication strategy that would connect and inform faculty and administrators across Pitt about their global engagement.”

Students also expressed a need to understand all of the existing opportunities for global engagement on the Pitt campus. The Pitt Global Hub, launching in 2018, will offer students a one-stop-shop for peer mentoring and expert advising about Pitt’s local-global connections.
The ultimate results of the feedback are, according to Torres, “really emblematic of the collective voices and interests of people across our five campuses.” The final global plan has four areas of focus: connecting Pitt’s domestic and international pursuits to create synergies that strengthen its communities, producing globally capable and engaged graduates, creating a global research community that solves global challenges, and developing infrastructure to expand its engagement with the world through global operations support.

In the next year, academic units across Pitt will be asked to align with the global plan as part of their strategic planning process. As part of their annual planning and reporting process, the provost’s office will ask each dean for information on how their school is contributing to the implementation of the global plan.

Many are optimistic that global engagement is now explicitly recognized as part of the institutional mission. “This is the first time in the school’s history where [internationalization] has been a point of focus—for fundraising, programming, recruitment of academics—so it’s a good time for us to be putting a large amount of emphasis on global studies as well as future study abroad and experiential learning pursuits,” adds Whitehead.

**SENDING STUDENTS ABROAD WITH PANTHER PROGRAMS**

The Study Abroad Office has also been central to the institution’s internationalization efforts. Pitt currently sends approximately 1,900 undergraduates and graduate students abroad each year. In fact, around 10 percent of the undergraduate class goes abroad at some point in their academic career.
Over the last decade, Pitt has transitioned from sending the majority of its students abroad with third-party study abroad providers to doing so largely through its own faculty-led programs. “In 2007, about 80 percent of our study abroad participants went through external providers,” Whitehead says. “Now we’ve completely flipped that number on its head.”

Today, only 15 percent of Pitt students studying abroad go through third-party providers, with another 5 percent enrolling in direct exchanges with other universities. The rest participate in Pitt’s own faculty-led programs.

Pitt offers around 350 study abroad options, 100 of which are the faculty-led “Panther Programs,” developed in collaboration with Pitt faculty and the Study Abroad Office. “We credit our faculty—their energy, their enthusiasm, and their creativity—with developing our own offerings,” Whitehead says.

Pitt also has dedicated study abroad managers housed in the Swanson School of Engineering and the College of Business Administration. Both schools have significantly increased the number of students studying abroad over the last few years. Currently, around 45 percent of all engineering students and 50 percent of all business undergraduates will have an international experience before they graduate.

Pitt also administers the Vira I. Heinz (VIH) Program for Women in Global Leadership, which targets young women from Pitt’s four regional campuses and 10 other colleges and universities across Pennsylvania. The program provides $5,000 travel scholarships for female undergraduate students who have never traveled internationally. Around 75 percent of participants are Pell-grant eligible. The program has several components: a predeparture retreat, the international experience, a reentry retreat, and a final community engagement project.

Bethany Hallam, who recently finished her master’s in public health at Pitt, studied in France as a participant in the VIH program during her undergraduate days at Pitt-Greensburg. She says the model provided her with much-needed support: “Before the VIH Program, I never believed that I would be able to accomplish my goal of studying abroad, let alone have the confidence to manage three layovers and live on my own in a studio apartment in the heart of Paris. The VIH mentoring program and predeparture retreat gave me the tools to understand myself and the environment that I would soon be entering.”

Hallam adds that, as the first person in her family to have a passport, the reentry retreat gave her the opportunity to process her time abroad.

**SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS**

In addition to the robust number of students it sends abroad, Pitt also hosts more than 3,100 international students from 100 countries. The Office of International Services (OIS) provides support to all international undergraduate and graduate students, as well as to around 1,800 employees from abroad. The number...
of international students on campus today is nearly double what it was 10 years ago.

Two-thirds of Pitt’s international student population are graduate students attracted to Pitt’s high-ranking programs in fields such as nursing, law, engineering, and computer and information sciences. At the undergraduate level, they recruit top high school graduates from around the world. “Currently, the university is working toward diversifying the undergraduate international population to amplify the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences in the classroom and on campus,” says Torres.

OIS’s staff and immigration specialists offer immigration advising, as well as run the university’s international student and scholar orientations. In addition to providing direct support to students, OIS also does a lot of campus outreach. Over time there has been a concerted effort to increase services for international students and scholars across the entire institution, especially as the international population has grown, says Genevieve Cook, OIS director.

For international scholars and their families, OIS runs the Experience America program, which is a series of events and activities designed to help them understand U.S. culture. OIS also hosts a workshop series where participants learn about topics such as U.S. politics, the healthcare system, and recommendations for surviving the winter in Pittsburgh.

**INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH GLOBAL TIES**

OIS also works closely with student affairs for much of its programming, in particular the Office of Cross Cultural and Leadership Development (CCLD). Students can, for example, volunteer through CCLD to assist with international orientation. According to Summer Rothrock, the director of CCLD, the office works with
fraternity and sorority life, leadership development, cross-cultural and diversity programming, and student organizations. CCLD also collaborates with the Study Abroad Office and UCIS on social and educational programs for students.

Global Ties, for example, is a program for incoming international freshmen and transfer students that pairs new students with a mentor who helps them adjust to life at Pitt. “We want the Global Ties program to provide a global experience right here on campus for any student who may want it as well as to help integrate our international and domestic students together,” Rothrock says.

Both domestic and international students serve as mentors. Jiahui Wei, a senior science major from China, notes, “I actually got a mentor from Global Ties when I first came here. We became really close friends and then I joined Global Ties as a way to give back.”

CCLD also brings together 50 international and domestic student leaders for the annual Hesselbein Global Academy for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. Students participate in a four-day retreat in Pittsburgh that includes mentoring from professionals in the business, government, and nonprofit sectors.

In addition, CCLD works closely with the Office of Residence Life, which oversees Pitt’s 25 Living Learning Communities (LLCs). Several of these communities focus on themes such as diversity or social inclusion, and the Casa Cultural and Global Village LLCs both have an international focus. Students living in Casa Cultural must enroll in Spanish or Portuguese, and Global Village residents participate in programming that explores global issues.

Assistant Director of Residence Life Philip Badaszewski is also in charge of the Pitt to You initiative, which sent 11 student ambassadors to China during the summer of 2017 to run an orientation for incoming Chinese students. “When everybody is back on campus in the fall, the ambassadors will meet with their mentees,” he says.

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTERS

One of the hallmarks of Pitt’s internationalization is its commitment to multidisciplinary international scholarship. More than 550 faculty members from across the university are affiliated with its various centers, which include four U.S. Department of Education Title VI National Resource Centers: the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS), the European Studies Center (ESC), the Global Studies Center (GSC), and the Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies (REES). As a Jean Monnet European Union Centre of Excellence, the ESC holds the additional distinction of being one of only eight such centers in the United States funded by the European Union (EU). UCIS also hosts the Asian Studies Center (ASC) and African Studies Program (ASP). While the other centers are focused on area or regional studies, the GSC focuses more on cross-cultural themes related to global health, global security, global economy, and global society.

The various centers also do outreach to the local community. Drawing on resources and expertise from all of UCIS’s centers, the Global Studies Center coordinates the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for Global and International Studies, a four-week summer residential program for high-achieving high school students from around the commonwealth. Another initiative run through the African Studies Program is the Model African Union, which provides opportunities for both Pitt students and local high school students to participate in a four-day conference and take part in simulations.

UCIS has a number of other affiliated programs, including the Center for International Legal Education. Every year, the center’s director, Ronald Brand, JD, takes law students to Vienna, Austria, for the International Commercial Arbitration Moot competition. Pitt law students compete against other teams from around the world. Brand uses the competition to recruit talented lawyers from abroad and build relationships with law schools in other countries. “It has become a platform for legal education. We have used it to build legal curriculum in transition countries,” he says.
RECOGNIZING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE WITH INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Through UCIS, Pitt also awards 250 undergraduate and graduate certificates each year in area studies or global studies. Students from any major are able to enhance their degree program by taking courses with an international focus. The 11 undergraduate and eight graduate credentials have been designed to complement students’ existing degree requirements. They also offer an interdisciplinary bachelor’s of philosophy degree in international and area studies, in partnership with the University Honors College.

International advisers help students customize their course plan and study abroad opportunities to maximize their impact. Because Pitt’s general education requirements include nine credits with a global focus, students are able to complete their certificates with an additional two or three classes. Khadija Diop, a film studies major who is completing a certificate in African studies, says, “the certificates help you look at your major through a global perspective and integrate the global aspect into every single thing that you’re doing.”

Environmental studies major Rachel Bukowitz adds that her certificate in global studies has also given her a talking point during job interviews: “As an environmental studies major, being able to say that I learned about sustainable development in the Middle East or water rights in the Gaza Strip has really made me stand out.”

Consul General of India, Riva Ganguly Das, with Pitt Nrityamala dancers.
HELP STUDENTS TRANSLATE SKILLS THEY GAIN FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES. UCIS cooperates with the Office of Career Development and Placement Assistance to promote career integration and hosts an annual conference on its relationship with study abroad for all higher education institutions in a 100-mile radius. Study Abroad Office Director Jeff Whitehead explains: “We have a responsibility to translate what students are gaining, whether in the classroom in their pursuit of a certificate or through study abroad.”

DEVELOP STUDY AWAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. Because some international students face difficulties traveling outside of the United States due to visa restrictions, Pitt has developed an internship program in San Francisco among other study away locations. “We find that the programming we offer in the United States is particularly attractive to international students. It’s an opportunity for students to stay on their current visa and see a different part of the United States,” Whitehead says.

GLOBAL OPERATIONS STREAMLINE ENGAGEMENT ABROAD. As one of the pillars of Pitt’s new global strategic plan, Global Operations covers anything related to inbound or outbound international travel. Denise McCloskey, UCIS executive associate director, and Mark Weixel, director of informatics, have been spearheading these efforts for many years. Ian McLaughlin was recently hired as Pitt’s global operations manager. Faculty and staff can, for instance, go to the global operations website to find out everything they need to know about travel insurance and risk management. “All of these platforms are in direct response to faculty and staff who have been telling us that they wanted to increase their international global engagements. There were way too many barriers or hurdles that they had to overcome in order to do that, and so UCIS developed this global operations support concept,” Torres says.
NAFSA: ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS has championed the cause of international education and exchange for more than 65 years, supporting the belief that students with international experience and a global perspective are crucial to the survival of the modern world. Committed to building the skills, knowledge, and professional competencies of its members, NAFSA strengthens international education’s biggest asset—the professionals who make educational exchange possible. Today, NAFSA has more than 10,000 members from all 50 states and more than 150 countries. Our members share a belief that international education advances learning and scholarship, builds respect among different peoples, and enhances constructive leadership in a global community.


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