Spring 2024

Culture & Events
Read all about OISS’ latest international events.

Immigration
Learn about the Honor Code, navigate the world of tax filing, gain practical tips to avoid scams, and check out for opportunities for graduating students.

Employment
It’s that time of year! Searching for summer internships, filing for OPT, and taking care of important issues and deadlines. Read through this section on information on employment.

Health & Wellbeing
Whether you are a student or a spouse, life in a foreign country can be stressful and overwhelming at times. Explore these important opportunities for involvement in Houston.

Discover the World
Learn about the vibrant festivities of Lunar New Year, honor the remarkable contributions of women throughout history, and seize the opportunity to uncover exciting experiences Houston has to offer during your spring break.

Announcements
Read the important announcements from OISS, meet the new OISS members, and learn about programs offered by OISS.
Letter from the Interim Director

Dear Rice International Students & Scholars,

Happy 2024!

I hope that those of you who returned to Rice after the winter recess had a relaxing and rejuvenating break, and feel like they’re coming back to a place feeling like home. And that those of you joining Rice for the first time this year find a welcoming, embracing community, where you can make new connections and feel a sense of belonging.

Don’t forget that OISS is here to help you with all of your immigration questions and concerns. Our New Year’s Resolution is to continue to be an accessible resource, and provide you with a lot of different ways to get in touch with us:

- Visit our office in Lovett Hall during our office hours: https://oiss.rice.edu/hours-location
- Email us at oiss@rice.edu
- Call us at 713-348-6095
- Read through our online resources, available 24/7 at https://oiss.rice.edu/
- Engage with us through our Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/oiss_rice/
- Join our virtual or in-person walk-in advising hours: https://oiss.rice.edu/appointment

Wishing everyone a great Spring 2024 semester!

Andy

Andy Meretoja
Interim Director, OISS
International Education Week (IEW-2023) Recap

IEW Photo Competition

By Andy Meretoja

As part of last fall’s International Education Week (IEW) celebrations, OISS hosted the 4th annual IEW Photo Competition, where we received fantastic submissions from incredibly talented international students and scholars. The winning photo, based on votes from the international community, was submitted by Joaquín Zaror Elte, a graduate student from Chile. We asked Joaquín to share the story behind this amazing shot, and share it here in his own words.

“I took the photo during the orientation week on the evening of the OISS dinner. After the gathering, I walked around the campus and found this astonishing, impressive building that I later learned was James Turrell’s Twilight Epiphany Skyspace. There, I took several photos from different angles and spots. I played with the light colors projected on the ceiling during the sunset. Symmetry has always interested me, and I found much of it in Twilight Epiphany. When the OISS Photo Competition was announced, I was doubtful about submitting my work; it was the first time I had ever participated in a photo contest. After considering, I got courage and decided, wisely, to get into the competition.”

"Your work is probably much better than you could ever imagine, so encourage yourself and show it to the world."

– Joaquín Zaror Elte

OISS congratulates Joaquín on his winning photo! If you would like to see more of his work, check out his photography on Instagram @zaror.photo

Here are some additional links of interest:

- [https://oiss.rice.edu/iew](https://oiss.rice.edu/iew) -- To learn about all of our International Education Week activities
- [https://oiss.rice.edu/photo-competition](https://oiss.rice.edu/photo-competition) -- To see all the photos submitted in this year’s competition
- [https://oiss.rice.edu/past-photo-competition](https://oiss.rice.edu/past-photo-competition) -- Photo competitions from previous years
Imagine having to choose just one event from a festive holiday party, a NASA trip, the enchanting Christmas lights, a Museum of Natural Science tour, or an art walk which ends with watching the Sunset Light Sequence.

If picking proved too challenging and you decided to attend them all during the winter break, you were not alone. Nevertheless, here's a glimpse of the highlights so you won't miss a thing:

Our students and friends gathered in their PJs to celebrate the holidays in style and comfort, and conversations with Santa, hot cocoa, nachos, and an afternoon filled with karaoke created a memorable time. Those who explored the Winter Wonderlawn in downtown Houston enjoyed the magical display of lights, festive decorations, and a joyful atmosphere. Some even witnessed a live marriage proposal. Meanwhile, museum-goers learned about The Americas' history from an expert guide, and participants in the Art Walk appreciated the beauty of our campus buildings and public arts.

The most attended event turned out to be the NASA trip, drawing 50 students and families, where the interactive tours and exhibits provided an incredible experience. As one student from Cameroon expressed, 'I enjoyed it because I had only learned about the NASA Johnson Space Centre during my secondary school days. The trip offered me an opportunity to experience life at the Centre firsthand.'

We hope everyone had a restful winter break and looks forward to joining us for our upcoming summer events. Stay tuned, mark your calendars, and see you there!
The Honor Code

By Ala Alahmad

Honor Code, two simple words with deep meanings. In academic settings, according to Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, an honor code often plays a crucial role in promoting academic integrity, discouraging plagiarism, cheating and other forms of dishonesty. Simply put, Students and members of the community are expected to uphold the honor code, creating a culture of mutual trust and responsibility. Furthermore, fostering an environment where trust and respect prevail, requires an honor code that emphasizes integrity, honesty and ethical conduct.

Beyond academic contexts, honor codes can also be found in various organizations, societies or even among groups and friends. These codes can serve as moral compass, guiding individuals to make ethical choices and maintain a sense of honor in their everyday interactions. The adherence to an honor code reflects not only an individual’s commitment to high moral standards but also contributes to the overall positive and trustworthy atmosphere within the community. Therefore, institutions with well established honor codes often experience a positive academic environment that minimizes dishonesty and promotes ethical behavior.

Rice university is known to be one of those institutions that uphold high ethical standards amongst students, faculty and employees. Because it is a shared responsibility, Rice university’s honor system was created by its students and faculty (Bridget Gorman, Dean of Undergraduates). The creation of Rice honor code was not only meant to emphasize ethical behavior within the university, but to prepare YOU for life after Rice (Jones 2016).

Finally, remember, honor codes/ethics are a person's concept of right and wrong. However, we do not all share the same understanding of right and wrong. What might be familiar and OK to you, might not be for others. This is why mutual respect is always a safe harbor for those who wants to have a better world.
It’s Tax Filing Season!
Are you Ready?

By Cynthia Evans

It’s that time of the year, and we want to ensure a smooth process for your 2023 tax filing. It sounds like not much fun, but it is a legal requirement for anyone (every international student, scholar, and their dependents) present in the US for any length of time during the last year, whether or not you received US funds.

The deadline for filing your tax forms with the US government is April 15, 2024.

While the OISS does not have a US tax specialist on staff, we have some great resources to help you.

Tax Resources:

- **Sprintax software** is the web-based program that Rice offers to its foreign nationals to assist "non-residents" in preparing their tax forms. The program can also help to determine if you are considered a "resident" or "non-resident" for tax purposes, free of charge. For information on how to acquire the software license, visit [http://oiss.rice.edu/tax](http://oiss.rice.edu/tax).

- **Sprintax webinars** - Sprintax webinars throughout tax season will help explain the US tax system and how to file your taxes. Check out "How to Prepare for the Upcoming Tax Season" at [http://oiss.rice.edu/tax](http://oiss.rice.edu/tax).


- **Still, trying to figure out where to start?** Check out our tax basics at [https://oiss.rice.edu/taxbasics](https://oiss.rice.edu/taxbasics).

Helpful Tips:

- **What is the deadline?** April 15, 2024 - Mail or submit your tax forms on time to avoid financial penalties.

- **Do you have an ITIN or SSN?** You will need an SSN or ITIN to file your taxes. Secure an ITIN or SSN as soon as possible, as the processing time can take months. Remember, all international students who receive financial compensation of any kind must apply for a social security number. See "SSN and ITIN Process" at [https://oiss.rice.edu/tax](https://oiss.rice.edu/tax).

- **No income during 2023?** You may only need to complete the Form 8843. Sprintax software (available in OISS) can assist you with this determination.

- **Did you receive income during 2023?** If you received a scholarship/stipend/paycheck for employment, you may need to complete Form 8843 and Form 1040NR. Sprintax software can assist you with this determination and with completing the forms.

- **Have you received all your tax documents?** Before filing your taxes, make sure you have received all your supporting tax documents from employers, Rice, or other scholarship/fellowship sponsors. Depending on your situation, you may receive one of these documents needed to report your taxes.

- **W-2 form** - Rice employees (including student employees) who receive reportable wages will receive a W-2 to be filed with your tax return. W-2s are available through your iO account after January 31.

- **1042-S Form** - Foreign nationals may receive a 1042-S if they are recipients of tax treaty benefits, scholarships, or fellowships from nontax treaty countries. Your 1042-S form will be available online after March 15 if you have signed up with Payroll's FNIS; otherwise, it will be mailed to your permanent address on file. Check with Payroll for any questions at payroll@rice.edu.

- **Do you have a tax treaty?** Foreign nationals who have tax treaties should learn the terms of their treaties ([http://www.irs.gov/publications/p901/ar01.html](http://www.irs.gov/publications/p901/ar01.html)). If you have questions concerning benefits you think might apply to you, please inquire at the Payroll office. An ITIN or SSN and additional forms may need to be completed in Payroll to receive those benefits.
How To Avoid Scams!

By Genesis Martinez

While at Rice University our hope is that you will not fall victim to a scam. Unfortunately, scams have risen over the past couple of years and thus has caused people to lose money and share valuable information. Scammers specifically know to target international students and scholars because they believe they are the most vulnerable. We want to help and bring awareness to these scams and provide helpful tips to avoid common scams.

**Beware with emails:** Scammers tend to send emails asking for personal information and use believable email addresses. Please double check who sent the email and if the address looks too good to be true, do not respond and delete the email. Never give personal information via email.

**Beware of Facebook Marketplace:** When dealing with buying items on FB Marketplace please take extreme caution. Never pay someone before seeing the item you will be buying. Never meet up with anyone alone always take someone with you and meet in a public place.

**Beware of unknown phone calls:** Be careful with answering calls with numbers you do not recognize. If you receive a phone call and the person is asking for money or any other personal information, do not tell them. No government or business will be calling you for money or other personal information.

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Hello

DC

○ Dept Chair1 <deptchair59@gmail.com>
To: @drexel.edu

Available, cell phone number?
Best Regards,

Professor & Department Head
Computer Science Faculty
Drexel University

FAKE

"PSA: Don't share money transfer info with people you don't know. All scams."

How To Avoid Phone Scams:

DON’T TRUST CALLER ID

Your caller ID might show a real government agency or company name or phone number. But scammers can fake caller ID. Don’t trust it — even if it looks real.

Here’s what to do:

- Get call blocking apps or services. This will help you get fewer scam calls.
- Only call a phone number you know is real if you want to confirm.
- Report scam calls. Tell the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

Learn more at ftc.gov/calls
Beware of text messages: Be careful with text messages that you might receive from unknown numbers. Scammers like to send messages with links to obtain information from your phone. Do not click on any link that you receive from an unknown number. Block the phone number and delete the message.

Examples:

Beware of online shopping: Scammers sometimes pose as real companies to try and steal your information. They also post ads on social media to make it seem like they are legit. Make sure to always double check the website you are buying from.
Congratulations, Graduates of 2024

By Lanto Hariveloniana

In caps thrown high and big smiles that shine bright, OISS celebrates you – the graduates of 2024. Your hard work, determination, and resilience have crowned you to this amazing moment.

As you embark into a world overflowing with opportunities, remember the lessons learned, the friendships forged, and the support that carried you through as owls. Your journey here is a testament to your boldness and strength.

Embrace the future with courage and vision. Let your passion guide you as you embark on new adventures. The world awaits the mark you will make.

By the same token, to celebrate this major milestone, you are cordially invited to the “Congrats Grad” event at OISS at 10:00a.m.—3:00p.m. on May 2 & 3, 2024. We look forward to meeting you, your family, and friends to share in the celebration!

Congratulations, Owls, on this incredible achievement. Here is to the class of 2024 – may your futures be as bright as your potential!

Graduation is not automatic. Students must formally apply to graduate to begin the graduation certification process. Students are responsible for submitting an Application for Degree reflecting the semester in which they plan to graduate.

To be eligible for graduation, students (undergraduate and graduate) must apply no later than the published Application for Degree deadline listed in the Academic Calendar.

For all students, the Application for Degree process is automated and online via ESTHER.

https://registrar.rice.edu/students/grad-faqs

As a May graduate, are you considering staying in the U.S. and taking advantage of Optional Practical Training (OPT) to gain up to 12 months of practical experience in your major field of study after graduation? If so, the topics on the next page may be of interest to you.
OPT Timeline for May graduates

By Tiying Huang

USCIS can receive your OPT application no earlier than 90 days before but no later than 60 days after your program completion date.

If you are an undergraduate and non-thesis graduate student and you are graduating this May, the earliest date you can submit your application would be February 4th, which is 90 days before the May Commencement (May 4th), but it must be received by USCIS no later than July 3rd.

If you are a thesis/dissertation graduate student, you have 3 options to use as your I-20 program end date when applying for OPT, but make sure you fully understand the pros and cons of these options when making your decision.

Option 1: Thesis/dissertation defense date (if you register for that term)

Option 2: Thesis/dissertation submission date (if you submit in the same term when you defend and are registered for that term)

Option 3: End of the final registered semester

For detailed information, please see the new section on I-20 end date options at [https://oiss.rice.edu/opt](https://oiss.rice.edu/opt).

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

Your application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the OPT I-20 issuance date.

You are not legally authorized to work until you have the EAD in your possession, and it is valid!

As a student graduating in May, make sure to start the OPT process as quickly as possible to ensure you can get your EAD in time. If you would like to submit your OPT application to USCIS at the earliest allowed date, OISS should receive your OPT request online 1-2 weeks before your targeted date. USCIS processing time is 3 - 3.5 months for most OPT applications.

**NOTE:**

You don’t need a job offer to apply for OPT!

If you’re planning to travel outside of the U.S. during Spring Break, you may need to wait until you return before applying for OPT!

If you’re planning to travel internationally between your graduation and the start of your OPT, applying early gives you a better chance of receiving your EAD before or right around graduation, offering you more flexibility with your travel plans.

For more information, please visit our website [https://oiss.rice.edu/studentwork](https://oiss.rice.edu/studentwork)
Training Opportunities in the United States

By Larissa Romero Valenzuela

The United States allows eligible international students and new graduates the opportunity to gain on-the-job-learning that supplements knowledge gained in their academic studies. To participate in one of the training opportunities for F1 students, an international student does not need to change their nonimmigrant status. Instead, the student must work with their Advisors to ensure eligibility as well as apply for and receive proper authorization. https://www.ice.gov/sevis/practical-training

Practical Training

If you are an F student, you have the option of training in the United States by engaging in practical training during your program or after it ends. Practical training can provide valuable work experience by sharpening and adding to the skills you are learning in school. There are two types of practical training available for F-1 students: Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).

CPT

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a temporary work authorization given to F-1 students to receive training required by a course or program. The training must also be directly related to their major field of study. As defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), CPT is “alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school” [8 CFR§214.2(f)(10)(i)]. The regulations also state that CPT must be an integral part of an established curriculum.

Submit your CPT application to OISS at https://oiss.rice.edu/applyCPT. Applications must be submitted at least one week before the requested start date. Requests with an earlier start date will be rejected.

Types of CPT available at Rice:
- CPT required by a course
- CPT required by a degree program
- CPT required for thesis/dissertation research

NOTE:
If you have 12 months or more of full-time CPT, you are ineligible for OPT, but part-time CPT is will not stop you from doing OPT.

For more information, please visit https://oiss.rice.edu/cpt.
Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a form of training, often paid, that directly relates to your program of study. You can apply for OPT during your program of study, which is known as pre-completion OPT, or after you finish your program of study, known as post-completion OPT. In order to apply for OPT, F-1 students must request approval from their DSO. A DSO makes this recommendation in SEVIS and by endorsing a student’s Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status.” The student must then file the Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization” and supporting documents with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and if approved, USCIS will issue a Form I-766, “Employment Authorization Document.” You cannot begin your training until you receive your authorization from USCIS.

Quick Facts about OPT

- OPT work authorization is available for 12 months.
- You can apply for Pre-Completion OPT during their studies (part-time employment only) or Post-Completion OPT based on a completed degree (full-time employment).
- You must be in the United States to apply for OPT.
- A job offer is not required for OPT application.
- You may accrue up to 90 unemployment days in total during post-completion OPT.
- Employment on OPT must be directly related to student's major field of study and commensurate with degree level.
- Employment on OPT can be paid or unpaid.
- You can apply for 12 months of OPT at each education level, (i.e., you may have 12 months of OPT at the bachelor’s level and another 12 months of OPT at the master’s level).
- Your DSO will provide you with a new Form I-20 that shows the DSO recommendation for this employment.
- Wait to start work until after you receive your EAD.
- While school is in session, you may only work 20 hours per week.

For more information, please visit https://oiss.rice.edu/opt.
Navigating CPT for International Students

By Marjorie Cerejo

As the Spring semester continues, we understand that many international students may have questions about Curricular Practical Training (CPT) opportunities. This newsletter article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of CPT and the steps involved in navigating it.

As an international student at Rice University, you have a great opportunity to take advantage of CPT to acquire valuable work experience and enhance your resume. Here is what you need to know about applying for and making the most of CPT during your time at Rice:

**CPT Eligibility Requirements**

To qualify for CPT at Rice, you must:

- Have valid F-1 status for at least one full academic year
- Be in good academic standing and making normal progress toward completing your degree
- Have a job offer that qualifies as an internship or is an integral part of your curriculum
- Receive approval from your academic advisor and OISS.

The job must be directly related to your major and appropriate for your level of study. CPT can be part-time (20 hours or less per week) during the academic year, or full-time (over 20 hours per week) during winter and summer breaks.

**Finding a CPT Internship**

Rice has great resources to help you find an internship or job that qualifies for CPT:

- Center for Career Development (CCD) has an online database for internships and jobs and it’s called 12twenty [https://ccd.rice.edu/students/jobs-internships/12twenty](https://ccd.rice.edu/students/jobs-internships/12twenty)
- CCD also has many programs for students to assist in resume reviews, mock interviews, career panels, professional communication workshops, career courses, career counseling appointments, and career and personality assessments. [https://ccd.rice.edu/](https://ccd.rice.edu/)
- Career fairs hosted on campus
- OISS - Provides guidance and resources
- Rice alumni network - Leverage connections with alumni working in your field

When searching for a CPT internship, look for positions that provide meaningful hands-on experience related to your studies and career goals.
Applying for CPT

Once you secure an internship offer, follow the steps on the right to get approved for CPT:

If you want to make the most of your CPT internship, follow these tips:

- Update your resume and practice your interview skills before applying.
- Ask your managers for feedback and take on more responsibilities as you go.
- Network and make professional connections in your industry.
- Reflect on new skills you learn and projects you complete to add to your resume.
- Get a recommendation letter from your manager that you can use for future job applications.

CPT internships are a great way to gain valuable work experience while still studying. Use this opportunity to build your resume, explore different career paths, and make important professional connections. With good planning and preparation, your CPT internship can become a significant step on your path towards starting your career after graduation.

Please refer to our website for step-by-step guidance on how to apply for CPT: https://oiss.rice.edu/cpt
Engage in Houston: Discover Volunteer Opportunities
Embracing J-2 and F-2 Visa Holders

By Maria Corcuera

Houston boasts a vibrant community with numerous volunteer organizations and initiatives that welcome individuals on J-2 and F-2 visas. Volunteering allows visa holders to contribute to their community and provides an excellent opportunity to meet new people and integrate into Houston's diverse society. Here are some volunteer organizations and initiatives in Houston:

**Volunteer Houston**
- Website: [Volunteer Houston](#)
- Volunteer Houston is a comprehensive platform that connects volunteers with a wide range of opportunities. The website allows users to search for volunteer opportunities based on their interests, skills, and availability.

**Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston:**
- Website: [Interfaith Ministries](#)
- Interfaith Ministries aims to unite people of diverse faiths for community service and humanitarian efforts. They often have volunteer opportunities in areas like refugee services, Meals on Wheels, and disaster response.

**Houston Food Bank:**
- Website: [Houston Food Bank](#)
- Houston Food Bank is a vital organization addressing hunger in the community. They welcome volunteers to assist with tasks like sorting and packing food, which is a meaningful way for J-2 and F-2 visa holders to contribute to a crucial cause.

**BARC Animal Shelter and Adoptions:**
- Website: [BARC Animal Shelter](#)
- Animal lovers on J-2 and F-2 visas may enjoy volunteering at BARC to help care for and socialize with animals awaiting adoption. Opportunities may include dog walking, cat care, and assisting with adoption events.
Engage in Houston: Discover Volunteer Opportunities
Embracing J-2 and F-2 Visa Holders

Continued
By Maria Corcuera

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Houston:
- Website: [Boys & Girls Clubs](#)
- The Boys & Girls Clubs provide a positive environment for children and teenagers. Volunteers can participate in various programs, offering mentorship and support to young people in need.

Houston Public Library:
- Website: [Houston Public Library](#)
- The Houston Public Library often welcomes volunteers to assist with literacy programs, community events, and other initiatives aimed at promoting education and cultural enrichment.

Houston Museum of Natural Science:
- Website: [HMNS](#)
- Culture enthusiasts may find volunteering at the Houston Museum of Natural Science a rewarding experience. Volunteers can assist with educational programs, exhibitions, and special events.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston:
- Website: [Catholic Charities](#)
- Catholic Charities offers a range of services to those in need. Volunteers can participate in programs such as refugee resettlement, disaster response, and community outreach.

United Way of Greater Houston:
- Website: [United Way](#)
- United Way collaborates with various organizations to address community needs. They offer volunteer opportunities in areas such as education, financial stability, and health.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Before volunteering, J-2 and F-2 visa holders are advised to contact organizations directly to inquire about specific requirements and available opportunities. Additionally, it is essential to clarify any organization-specific policies regarding volunteer eligibility.

Not all unpaid opportunities qualify as volunteering; some may be considered as unpaid work, which would require authorization.

In case of any doubts, consulting the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (OISS) is recommended.

For more information, please visit [https://oiss.rice.edu/volunteering](https://oiss.rice.edu/volunteering).
Lunar New Year!

By Tiying Huang

The Lunar New Year marks the beginning of a new year based on the traditional lunar calendar, and is the most important holiday for billions of people around the world. It is widely celebrated in several Asian cultures with different names and traditions across the globe. Some of the most common names are Chinese New Year, Spring Festival, Seollal in Korea, or Tết in Vietnam. It is a time for reunion, gratitude, and hope. Some common traditions and customs for Lunar New Year include home cleaning and decoration, family gathering, feasts, dragon and lion dances, fireworks, temples visits, ancestral rites, and the giving of red envelopes for good luck.

The date of Lunar New Year varies yearly. It usually falls on the first new moon that occurs between late January and mid-February. In 2024, it occurs on Saturday, February 10, marking the Year of the Dragon, which is considered a symbol of strength, courage, prosperity and good fortune.

Fun Facts

- Lunar New Year celebrations typically last for 15 days.
- Throwing out the trash or cleaning on the first day of Lunar New Year is believed to dump and wash away your luck and prosperity!
- Certain foods like dumplings, fish, rice cakes, and sugary food are considered good fortune for the coming year.
- “Nian”, a monster in folklore, comes out of hiding place and attacks people and animals during Lunar New Year. Fireworks, red items (e.g. red lanterns, red couplets, red clothes, etc.), and lion dances are said to scare him away.
- It is believed that cutting your hair during the first month of Lunar New Year would bring harm to your maternal uncles.
- When giving red envelopes as lucky money, the amount should generally be an even number, with exception of “four”, which sounds like "death" in some Asian languages, such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese.
Women’s History Month

By Celina Silva

OISS wishes to spotlight notable figures who have contributed to societal advancement in light of International Women’s Day on March 8, 2024. Women have proven their rightful position as power players in STEM and continue to do so. We are taking this moment to reflect on astounding accomplishments made by women from different cultural backgrounds like our international Rice family. Happy Women’s History Month!

Kalpana Chawla was the first Indian woman astronaut to go to space in 1997. She immigrated to the U.S. in the eighties to continue her education in Aerospace Engineering. Shortly after earning her PhD, she began working at NASA and logged a total of 30 days in space during her career. In 2003, The Space Shuttle Columbia Disaster claimed all seven lives of astronauts aboard STS-107, including Chawla. In her honor, The Kalpana Chawla ISU Scholarship was established in 2010 to support Indian women in international space education programs.

Marie Curie was a Polish-French scientist and the first woman to win a Nobel prize. She won her first Nobel Prize in 1903 for her collaborative work with her husband in the field of physics and was awarded her second prize in 1911. They found that the mineral pitchblende was more radioactive than uranium and concluded that it must contain other radioactive substances. From it they managed to extract two previously unknown elements, polonium and radium, both more radioactive than uranium. In 1920 she founded the Curie Institute in Paris and the Curie Institute of Warsaw in 1932 which are major medical centers today.

Francisca Nneka Okeke is a Professor of Physics from Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. She earned her Ph. D. in Ionospheric Geophysics from the University of Nigeria and is the first female Dean of the university’s Faculty of Physical Sciences. In 2011, Okeke was inducted as a fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Science and received the L’Oreal UNESCO for Women in Science Awards Laureate for Africa and Arab States (2013) for her studies contributing to climate activism. During her academia tenure, she advocated for women scholars and established gender inclusivity with her department. Her research interests advanced the fields of geomagnetism, atmospheric physics and climate variability which have made her a pioneering woman in STEM.
Spring Break Trip!

By Fabiana Santos

Spring Break is March 9th to March 17th and we are already very excited about it! Spring break is one of the most anticipated breaks, especially in States with a harsh winter. That’s not the case in our beloved Texas but after a mildly cold January and February studying hard the break is extremely welcome and well deserved.

Prices go up on spring break, and airline tickets and hotels will probably be more expensive than usual. Plan and try to find good deals but if you must stay in Houston you are not out of luck, the city offers a lot of free opportunities for fun like museums, parks, sports, and is a place of diverse food. Take a look here.

If you want to go on a road trip, the Texas Hill Country is a great option. A large area not far from all the big Texas cities, the Texas Hill Country can transport you back in time with quaint little towns. Enjoy scenic drives, caves, wineries, hikes, historic sites, and beautiful fields of wildflowers, including the Texas Symbol Flower, and the bluebonnets. Here’s a guide to start your journey. Some travel blogs can give you a good inside scoop. I like LoneStar’s and Jasmine’s.

Pack your hiking shoes and comfortable clothes, and do not forget your cellphone charger.

Be safe, and have fun!
As part of our green initiatives, OISS periodically highlights members of the Rice international community who have a passion for the environment. This semester’s international environmental superstar is Aanchal Thapa, a senior from Will Rice College, who we had the pleasure of interviewing for this OISS Spring Newsletter.

**Thank you for being an International Environmental Superstar, Aanchal! Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

I grew up in London in the UK for most of my life, but I was born in Nepal and I spent my early life there so I can speak Nepali conversationally. When I was in high school I toured Rice for a NASA-related trip and that's why I applied here! I'm currently a senior here and I'm majoring in Biosciences, with a focus and interest in the environment and ecology. I'm involved as the environmental committee head at Will Rice and aside from that I like dancing with BASYK and Kasama on campus.

**You are an EcoRep for Will Rice College. Could you briefly explain what that means?**

There are two roles that the EcoRep serves at their residential college. The first is to create events and engage the student population with sustainability initiatives or encourage sustainable thinking and behaviours. The events we plan are either something we decided would be beneficial for our college or are advised to be run by the Office of Sustainability. For instance, around Halloween, we held an EcoKITQ where people in our college painted bricks that now decorate our pollinator garden. We also set up a composting station for people to throw their waste from pumpkin carving. These events are planned and executed by the environmental committee at Will Rice and that's where the second part of the EcoRep role comes in. I am responsible for meeting with the committee every other week and ensuring that we are hosting events and generating new ideas to engage our community.
What made you want to become an EcoRep?
I studied abroad in Costa Rica last summer on a program to learn about the environment and sustainability which inspired me to take action. I knew a friend that was an EcoRep and after learning about what they do I thought it was the perfect avenue to advocate for sustainable living on campus.

What are some things that we can all do on a personal level to be sustainable and environmentally friendly?
One thing that is unique to life on campus is composting! Sadly around $444 billion worth of food is wasted annually and thanks to our partners at Moonshot you help bring that number down by throwing food waste in the servery’s composting station, lined with a green bin bag. This diverts food waste from landfills as it gets converted to good quality soil, recycling the nutrients in the food! You can even compost in your room by taking the Composting Quiz and getting your own trash-can-sized composting caddy.

Rice has announced plans to be carbon neutral by 2030. At the same time, we have a strong commitment to international education, which by its nature includes quite a bit of international mobility and travel (both from a professional perspective as well as international students and scholars simply wanting to travel occasionally to visit family back home). Could you share any thoughts you have on how we can expand international education in an environmentally conscious way, when international travel is a necessary part of the equation?
It would be absurd to prevent travel when people want to see family during the break or for some sort of a meeting but what we could do is educate people. International travel may be unavoidable in a situation like this but individual actions from something small like turning lights off to something much stronger like advocating for better environmental policies would ensure that our Rice community as a whole is striving for sustainable standards.

Thank you so much for your time and thoughts Aanchal!
To learn more about EcoReps, please see https://sustainability.rice.edu/ecoreps.
To read an interview with our previously highlighted International Environmental Superstar, Dr. Zhuoya He, please see the Fall 2022 issue of the OISS Newsletter: https://oiss.rice.edu/news

Do you know an International Environmental Superstar at Rice, who is passionate about environmental issues either through work, research or volunteering? We would love to interview them for our next highlight feature, so let us know at oiss@rice.edu! It could be you!!
Meet Our New Team Members!

Hello! My name is Britteny Nash and I’m an International Department Coordinator at OISS. I’m a native Houstonian, born and raised, but I lived in Paris for two years while studying for my Master’s Degree in International Relations and Diplomacy. My favorite hobbies include traveling abroad, collecting fountain pens and ink, and watching Formula 1. Go McLaren! As a former Literacy Coordinator, I’m looking forward to immersing myself into the world of academia at Rice University.

Greetings. I’m honored to introduce myself as the new Senior International Advisor at OISS. My name is Ala Alahmad, and I bring a humble experience in international students’ advising to add to the wealth of knowledge that OISS has. Having worked in various capacities within the international field, I’m passionate about fostering cross-cultural understanding and supporting the academic journeys of international students. My commitments to providing guidance and creating a welcoming environment aligns seamlessly with Rice University’s dedication to Excellence and Diversity.

I look forward to collaborating with the vibrant community at Rice and contributing to the success of our international students. Together, let’s embark on a journey of academic and cultural enrichment.
OISS is once again inviting all international female students, scholars, and spouses to our monthly gatherings starting in February!
Join our International Ladies Network to have lunches, develop friendships, share customs, fun activities and learn about each other!

For more information, please see https://oiss.rice.edu/international-ladies.
English & Culture Classes for Spring 2024

By Ailyah Banks

As we usher in the freshness of spring, we are excited to announce our upcoming English and Cultural classes for the Spring 2024 semester. These classes offer unique opportunities to enhance language skills, build connections, and foster cultural understanding.

Advanced/Intermediate English Conversation
Join our Advanced/Intermediate English Conversation class to refine your language proficiency. Engage in intellectually stimulating discussions, polish language nuances, and connect with like-minded individuals. This class is tailored for those seeking a higher level of linguistic mastery.

Beginning English Conversation
Embark on your language-learning journey with our Beginning English Conversation class. Perfect for newcomers and those looking to establish a solid linguistic foundation, this class focuses on essential vocabulary, basic grammar, and practical communication skills. Develop the confidence to express yourself in English.

Let’s Chat
Let's Chat provides a unique opportunity for students to practice conversational English in a relaxed and supportive environment. Engage in friendly discussions, share experiences, and enhance your conversational skills. This class is designed to boost confidence and fluency in everyday English conversations.

Important Dates
For detailed class schedules, dates, and information on how to sign up, please refer to the attached flyer. We encourage all interested members to take advantage of these enriching opportunities and join us in the Spring semester. We look forward to an inspiring and language-filled semester ahead!
JOIN THE 2024 UIO ADVISORS TEAM!

WHAT IS UIO? Undergraduate International Orientation (UIO) is a mandatory orientation program for international students coming to Rice on F-1 and J-1 visas. The program will cover F-1 and J-1 visa regulations, the role of OISS, and onboarding.

WHEN IS UIO? August 16–18.

WHAT DOES AN UIO ADVISOR DO? Acts as a social facilitator and activity leader during UIO activities. Guides and advises on U.S. culture and life at Rice. Provides logistical support during UIO. Selected applicants must be back at Rice on August 12 for training.

WHO CAN APPLY? Undergraduate international students who will not graduate before December 2024.

WHEN WILL BE THE INTERVIEWS? The interviews for UIO Advisors will be conducted in late February.

DEADLINE TO APPLY: February 10, 2024

HOW DO I APPLY? Complete the online form by https://forms.gle/vVYHMBKSSUzK54vw6

QUESTIONS? Email Marjorie Cerejo marjorie@rice.edu.

IBP VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We are seeking current international graduate students who are committed to helping us welcome our incoming international graduate students prior to and during Graduate International Orientation (GIO-2024).

WHAT IS IBP?

The International Buddy Program (IBP) at Rice is a joint effort between the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and Graduate Student Association (GSA) to better serve the incoming international graduate students prior to and during the Graduate International Orientation (GIO-2024). Incoming students who sign up for IBP-2024 will be matched with a returning international graduate student volunteer to have a smoother transition to Rice. The student volunteers will exchange contact information and provide resources on international transition, academics, etc. for the incoming students.

REQUIREMENTS
- Must be a current graduate international student
- Must be available for 3-4 hours per week in the summer and fall of 2024

BENEFITS
- Leadership
- Public Service
- Positive Impact
- Socials, events, and more!

REGISTRATION
- Must attend the mandatory Training Session on May 21 or May 22
- Registration for participation is available after attending Training Session only.
Success

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.

~Winston Churchill

The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. ~Vidal Sassoon

Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm. ~Winston S. Churchill

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome. ~Booker T. Washington

The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. ~Franklin D. Roosevelt

Success is not just about making money. It's about making a difference. ~Unknown

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. ~Eleanor Roosevelt

Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it. ~Henry David Thoreau

OISS Glossary!

Ever get confused with all the different terms used in regards to your immigration status? Take a look at our OISS glossary!
https://oiss.rice.edu/glossary