Introduction

On August 20th, 2014, nearly 3,800 new students gathered on the University of Pittsburgh campus, each armed with an LED glow stick. At the start of every year, the incoming class tries to break a world record, and the class of 2018 was trying to create the largest torch-lit image formed by people. Their image? A globe. As a powerhouse research institute in a major city, Pitt boasts international connections and study abroad programs in seventy-five countries and every world region; state-of-the-art labs, and professors who are world-class scholars, researchers, and specialists. Through its Innovation Institute and the Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation, Pitt offers two major programs devoted to innovation, where Pitt students have access to everything from basic research to real-world application, development, and commercialization. Programs like Guaranteed Admission, which allows incoming students to lock in admission to one of Pitt’s top professional or graduate schools, and an Honors College that confers a Bachelor of Philosophy degree that stand out to graduate schools are just a few ways Pitt sets students up for success after graduation. Here are examples of how Pitt students earn their reputation for innovative thinking, hands-on experience, and a global perspective.

Student Communities

Audrey Murrell, the associate dean for the undergraduate College of Business Administration, told us that Pitt students “are comfortable working in teams, sharing knowledge with their classmates, actively engaging in our various... student organizations and value what it means to be part of a broader university community.” It’s no accident that Pitt has a number of programs that help cultivate collaborative skills. While these abilities help make fun and engaging learning environments, they are also key to launching a successful career. This
skill set “is an attractive asset for our corporate recruiters who look at students who can balance a strong academic program with healthy involvement in activities outside classrooms,” Dr. Murrell told us. Pitt’s Living Learning Communities and its Outside the Classroom Curriculum help create engaged student learning communities while preparing students for careers in a globally interconnected world.

**Living Learning Communities (LLC)**

LLCs at Pitt allow students to join one of twenty residence halls that are built around a particular theme. Some LLCs focus on student interests and enrichment, like the Global Village, which “helps its community members become more globally educated citizens,” or One Pitt, One Planet, which focuses on sustainability initiatives, including the intersection of sustainability and profit. Other LLCs are built around a particular area of study, such as business and nursing, and offer perks like sophomore and junior resident assistants from the major who serve as guides and mentors. In the Engineering LLC, as well, “dedicated Swanson School of Engineering faculty and staff provide time, attention and resources to help each resident achieve success as a Pitt engineer,” according to the University.

The LLCs are shown to increase academic success, graduation rates, and overall satisfaction. A current student said the program “gives students a chance to build friendships with similar people outside of class but still [live] in a larger community of diverse people.” LLCs make it easy to find study partners, explore a field, and create networks that can come in handy, especially in terms of career development. Having students with common interests in one place also makes it a snap to bring in guest speakers or develop themed events. And being around other motivated students can simply make it easier to maintain your own motivation. Dr. Murrell told us that, for every Pitt student, it’s “a desire to perform well academically that motivates them to hit the ground running as freshmen,” and the Living Learning Communities provide that energy with a direction and purpose. “Students who were early adopters of the opportunity to be part of this enhanced experience and who have taken advantage of curricular and co-curricular opportunities within the residence hall are showing themselves to be top performers among the freshman class,” Associate Dean Murrell explained.

**Outside the Classroom Curriculum (OCC)**

Pitt’s Outside the Classroom Curriculum offers an expansive array of opportunities and experiences divided among ten different goal areas, including leadership, career development, wellness, appreciation of the arts, and others, all with the express purpose of helping students “gain a competitive edge for graduate
or professional schools, internships, and the job marketplace,” according to the university. Students who complete the Outside the Classroom Curriculum by participating in all ten categories are able to graduate with distinction and are eligible for a Pitt Advantage Grant, which provides funding for students to continue “extracurricular involvement in the form of an experiential learning activity such as a study abroad experience, an unpaid internship, or a volunteering project.”

The OCC works under the assumption that 80 percent of a student’s time will be spent outside of the classroom during their undergraduate education and that the school should create out-of-the-classroom experiences and opportunities that complement educational and career goals. For example, to complete the global and cultural awareness goal students must participate in a diversity or social justice program, participate in an international program, and attend a seminar about ecological issues. Dr. Murrell told us that they are discovering how students “are engaging and progressing in terms of key competencies that are developed by [OCC].”

**Pitt’s Global Perspective**

According to Dr. Murrell, one of the most exciting parts of the Pitt Business educational journey is taking students “from the classroom, to the city, to the world.” For decades Pitt has been cultivating international relationships and developing curricula with a global perspective. “Our global focus as a university,” Dr. Murrell explained, “also helps to make sure I have the opportunity to equip students for the real nature of business today, which is global in nature. Teaching at Pitt Business allows me to have a living laboratory that helps students inside and outside the classroom come face to face with real business challenges and the opportunity to apply the knowledge they have gained to solving them.”

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**Study Abroad**

The best place to see this global reach in action is through Pitt’s extensive study abroad programs. With more than 1,700 students in 2015–2016 able to include a study abroad experience on their résumés, Pitt is a global studies dynamo. Its programs are grounded in specific, hands-on study, and they run the gamut from
social policy issues in Cuba to bioengineering a better environment in Brazil. Pitt is practically guaranteed to have a study abroad program for every academic interest and career field. Students can select programs that last anywhere from a few weeks in the summer to a full academic year, but the programs that impressed us the most were the Plus3 Program and Pitt MAP, which show how powerful a truly global education can be.

Plus 3
For any business or engineering student wanting to make a big splash on the international stage, the Plus3 Program is a must. It offers students exposure to a range of developed and developing countries, each with its own unique engineering and business opportunities, and access to industry insiders. “Designed for undergraduate students in the summer after their freshman year,” the University explained to us, “the Plus 3 Program allows students to travel to foreign countries to examine issues related to business and engineering from a global perspective. Jointly sponsored by Pitt’s Swanson School of Engineering and the College of Business Administration, the two-week, three-credit program features industry-specific company tours, Q&A sessions with executives, and academic lectures.” For the 2015 summer session, students chose from studying the smartphone industry in China, automobiles and manufacturing in Germany, development in Vietnam, or coffee in Costa Rica. In the Plus3 Program, students stand at the intersection of culture, environment, history, engineering and international trade in some of the most dynamic and promising world markets. There is no better way to understand the forces that shape globalization than to step into the global marketplace.

Pitt MAP
In contrast to Plus3, in which students take a microscope to a single market in a single country, study in the Pitt MAP program spans three continents during a whole semester. Pitt MAP is designed to be interdisciplinary and incorporates broader topics and different study tracks, making it flexible to accommodate the research and professional goals of any student from conflict resolution to pre-med. A recent semester had MAP students focused on health, migration, and society through study in Spain, Morocco and China.

Prep for Graduate School
Pitt has several ways to help students get a leg up on graduate school—or even get them a guaranteed spot from day one of college. Through the University Honors College, Pitt is the only school in the country to offer a Bachelor of Philosophy, or BPhil, a unique undergraduate degree which is awarded jointly by the Honors
College and a student’s home school. In addition to the requirements of the major, students propose a program of study that must be approved by the university and that culminates in an undergraduate thesis. A BPhil candidate completes an oral thesis in front of a panel of professors, just like a graduate school thesis defense. In fact, the school said that “students should strive to have the same research experience—and produce the same caliber of thesis—as that of a graduate student at the master’s level within your academic discipline.” And there is no better training for graduate school. Mary Ellen Callahan, who graduated with a BPhil in political science and Russian/Eastern European studies, told us that “because of the Honors classes, tailored advising, and the ability to receive a Bachelor of Philosophy degree with an undergraduate thesis, I was much better prepared, and had a more comprehensive education, than my Ivy League peers at the University of Chicago Law School.”

Pitt also offers guaranteed admission to nineteen of its prestigious graduate and professional schools, including law, medicine, and business, through the Freshmen Guarantee. For exceptionally qualified incoming students with a clear career trajectory, Pitt will guarantee admission into the appropriate graduate or professional school when the student is accepted as an undergraduate. That is certainly one way to avoid the nerve-wracking worry of graduate admission four years down the line. Beyond relieving senior year stress relief, the Freshmen Guarantee provides students with a sense of encouragement and reassurance about their career goals throughout their undergraduate careers. Several of the students we surveyed said that the Freshman Guarantee was what brought them to the University of Pittsburgh.

Any Other Guarantees?
Rest assured: Students who don’t plan on attending graduate or professional school don’t miss out on these types of opportunities. Pitt offers an Internship Guarantee to any student who completes the internship prep program. The program isn’t just a hoop to jump through, either. It provides students with invaluable career advancement tools that often aren’t covered in the classroom, including workshops on networking and using social media, mock interviews, and individual appointments that train students in interview follow-up etiquette.

Faculty
With a student to faculty ratio of 14:1, Pitt students get plenty of face time and individual attention from their instructors. Pitt faculty know that “complex issues...are all better understood when we can couple learning inside the
classroom with experiential learning outside of the classroom,” according to Dr. Murrell. One problem that can plague professors, especially ones at a large research institution like Pitt, is how to balance their teaching and research responsibilities. Here’s where the Pitt Business focus on experiential learning and career preparation comes in. Dr. Murrell, who is also an associate dean, explained, “We have a number of faculty who are successful in leveraging what they do inside the classroom with their writing and research interests. The use of experiential learning inside of the classroom is actually supportive of these types of efforts. Faculty are able to utilize case studies or engage students in project work that is related to their research agenda while providing an opportunity for students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world problems.” And at a University where world class research is conducted, getting in on the action is a huge boon. “Thus, there is no need to see teaching and writing and research in conflict…the work of faculty inside and outside of the classroom—or their teaching and research and writing activities—work in synergy.”

Life After Pitt

Pitt counts Nobel Prize winning scientists and Pulitzer Prize winning writers among its alumni, as well as pioneers in nuclear energy and biotechnology. Yet Pitt also has a real penchant for producing entrepreneurs, industrialists and global leaders, like Wangari Maathai, ’66, who founded the Green Belt Movement, or industrialist William S. Dietrich, ’80 and ’84. We had the chance to talk with a more recent alum who is already making big waves. Mark Visco, a 2014 double major in marketing and psychology, is a good test case for what Pitt’s career support can do for its students. Visco explained how Pitt helped him to shepherd his post-graduate entrepreneurial venture into an award winning start-up. First, Visco credits an early marketing internship he had on campus with giving him a leg up in the business and marketing worlds. “I was offered a lot of responsibility,” Visco told us, “which helped me get a paid internship at the biggest ad agency in Pittsburgh.” Then, in his junior year, Visco developed a business idea through the Randall Family Big Idea Contest, which is now run by the new Pitt Innovation Institute. Even more crucial than the 100k in prize money? “The mentoring and business coaching sessions, the practice giving pitches, and the learning experiences in each round of the contest,” Visco elaborated. The business idea that Visco first developed at Pitt is now Suitable LLC, a startup that “helps college students chart a career path to the best internships and entry level jobs upon graduation,” according to the Suitable website. Visco’s startup has worked
with Dick’s Sporting Goods, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the
Community College of Allegheny County’s business program, and now has
developed a pilot program with 300 students at the University of Pittsburgh’s
campus in Pittsburgh, where it all began. Visco told us that there are even current
Pitt business and computer science undergraduates working on his team: “I try
to get Pitt students on my team whenever I can because I want to give back to
Pitt whenever I can.”