

Darsh Wasan Lecture 2011: Future of international students in USA

By **Utsav Gandhi**
CAMPUS EDITOR

The Darsh T. Wasan Lecture was established in 2008 in honor of IIT Motorola Chair and Vice President of International Affairs Darsh T. Wasan's extraordinary contributions to the university over the last forty-five years as professor, provost, dean and chief ambassador. Last year, IIT was fortunate enough to play host to a great personality in the world of climate change research, Susan Solomon. This year's lecture was held on Wednesday, September 7, and was delivered by another distinguished name in the field of education and research, Alice Gast, President of Lehigh University. In a well-attended event, she made some important points about the future of international students in the United States, after decades of leadership in providing world-class education and managing to attract the crème de la crème of talent from around the world into what have today become the best institutions of higher study in the world.

Most of these students have, over the years, stayed on in the country where they received their education and contributed positively to the corporate, academic and entrepreneurial leadership environment in the country. However, today, the world is catching up. Countries are painstakingly trying to notch up their academic institutions so that they can make an honest effort in retaining their own talent and utilizing them for their growth. Gast's talk looked at the changing policies of the US and whether these were efficient in providing the required benefits and opportunities for

those who are debating whether to stay back or go back. Also, the States is now a significant contributor of students going abroad; and this trend is welcome, according to her, as it enables American students to be a lot more world-savvy and gain global competencies.

She spoke of international students who have made a mark for themselves after graduating from American colleges – some, like the one after whom this very lecture is named, have achieved stupendous heights of success they may not have enjoyed had they chosen to go back. Some have become global citizens – working with multinational institutions and making a difference along with leaving their mark on the world map. A select few have gone back with ideas nurtured through an American education and made huge progress in the societies they came from. International students, she said, are a huge boon to any college – they are entrepreneurial, proactive and natural risk-takers. The very plane journey taken to leave the comforts of a homely environment to come a country where literally every aspect of a new lifestyle has to be contended with is a tremendous achievement in itself. American students are extremely fortunate to have lab mates and roommates from cultures they may have never been exposed to before – it really opens their eyes to the outside world in a big way.

After 9/11, the number of admitted students from certain regions of world obviously declined heavily, and they haven't quite caught up yet – many times their rejections are left unexplained. Now, India and China have started to offer increased benefits for US Green Card holders who have chosen to return. Re-



Image courtesy Michael Goss Photography

gional opportunities for higher education have opened up in Qatar, Australia and Singapore – these are closer to home, affordable and increasingly at par with American higher education. On the other hand, student acceptance into the States isn't showing the spark it has

been showing all these years. Delays, denials, inconsistencies with acceptances, transparency and export control regulations all need to be looked into if the United States is to make sure they don't lose out on any more talent who might significantly contribute to the country.

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By **Utsav Gandhi**
CAMPUS EDITOR

Habitat for Humanity is an international organization that serves to eliminate homelessness from the world and provide decent shelter as a matter of conscience and action. To accomplish these goals, they invite people of all ages, including students, to help them build houses for families in need. To date, they have built over 350,000 houses all over the world, providing shelter for over 1.75 million people.

IIT has been actively participating every year in these efforts, responding to Habitat's Collegiate Challenge, and over the last few spring breaks, teams of 30-odd students and staff have worked at sites all over the country - Warner Robins, Georgia; Foley, Alabama; and Oakland, California, to name a few. This past year, our group of 27 students and 5 staff advisers headed to Oakland, CA during the week of March 13, 2011. For four full days, our team worked with the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate on one of their build sites, constructing a home for local families in need. This experience gave the students the opportunity to work with families and volunteers from the local community to assist and help rebuild a small poverty-stricken town. The impact this trip has had stretches beyond just a week of the student's time, but has changed the lives of others for the better. We stayed at a Presbyterian church, often had meals donated from local restaurants, rented cars and frequently drove out to see the city of San Francisco, the Muir Woods, Berkeley and the neighborhoods of Haight/Ashbury, to name a few. It was by

far the best experience of my freshman year, simply because of the time we shared as a team and the difference we made to the community. Which is why I am inspired to be Fundraising Chair for ASB 2012, along with other alum Lisa Kwiatowski (President), Yeamlaksira Worku (Vice President), Gary So (Treasurer) and Maria Martinez (Publicity Chair). In the past, the Office of Spiritual Life and Service Learning was in charge of co-ordinating our efforts, but this year we are an independent student organization, with our staff advisors Betsi-Pinkus Huizenga and Katie Murphy Stetz (Dean of Students).

The trip was partly funded by the SAF; but mostly paid for through fundraising. I clearly remember that besides a little shopping and meals at the airport, I didn't have to shell out any cash during the trip itself. Therefore, all team members are required to participate actively in these efforts - either spearheading them or helping out in their own small ways. It's not much of a time commitment, except for weekly meetings, but every small fundraising effort counts towards reducing our own cost. We don't know yet where we're going this year, though we have to 'bid' for possible site locations from a list of nearly fifty site choices, one or more from each state.

Applications for ASB 2012 are currently being accepted! It is an online application which has to be turned in by September 18, 2011 at 11:59 PM. The link is tinyurl.com/asb2012app

If you have any questions, email us at ash.iit@gmail.com.

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