Graduate Student Handbook
This packet contains some abbreviated highlights of information that is contained in the Graduate Student Handbook. If you need additional information, the best place to look first would be the complete Graduate Student Handbook, which is available online at: www.ischool.pitt.edu/sisint/documents/handbooks/gradstudenthandbook.pdf

SIS Intranet
- Find information about SIS policies and procedures, your plan of study, and more by thoroughly reviewing our intranet: www.ischool.pitt.edu/sisint/
- Take the initiative in finding answers to questions. For example, instead of asking your advisor “What electives should I take,” first research courses that match your interests and then ask “I am thinking of taking this course as an elective because my interests include…do you think this is a good choice?”
- Be cautious about relying on other students for information about deadlines, rules, requirements, etc. These rules can vary by program, specialty area, residency, citizenship, etc. See: www.ischool.pitt.edu/sisint/ for more information on these topics and more

Student Services
- Admissions, registration, graduation procedures/questions
- Policy issues
- Resource information
- Social, educational, and professional development events outside of the classroom sponsored by Student Services

Your faculty advisor
- A faculty directory is available at: www.ischool.pitt.edu/people/faculty.php
- Which classes would be best/sequencing of classes
- Mentorship, outside the classroom skill development, attending professional conferences, etc.
- See elements of good advising for further details: www.pitt.edu/~graduate/advising.html

University Registrar – www.registrar.pitt.edu/
- Legal proof that you are a student at the University of Pittsburgh
- Legal proof of your grades/academic performance
- Legal proof of graduation

Office of International Services – www.ois.pitt.edu/ (for international students)
- Immigration document issues
- Permission to work while in school (CPT and OPT)
- Guidance on other requirements/needs (health insurance, housing, etc.)

Other University Resources
- Mental health services (stress management, anxiety, depression, etc.):
  The University Counseling Center: www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/ccabout
- Accommodations for short and long-term documented medical issues:
  Disability Resources and Services: www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drswelcome
- Federal, state, and school-based financial aid/support:
  The Office of Admissions and Financial Aid (OAFA): www.oafa.pitt.edu/fahome.aspx
Orientation

Below is a list of things to consider and actions to take either before or shortly after the semester begins. Each section lists important information resources to bookmark and/or check regularly.

Social Media & Email Lists – Used to communicate important iSchool-related dates, news, and more.
- Official iSchool Facebook Page - open to everyone
  - School-wide events, colloquia, interesting articles, etc. (facebook.com/ischoolpitt)
- iSchool Facebook Groups (“Library & Information Sciences - iSchool at Pitt” & “Info Sci and Tele - iSchool at Pitt”)
  - Program-specific announcements, deadlines, events, etc.
  - Students are encouraged to post to these groups ~ this is your tool!
- Official iSchool LinkedIn University page: http://bit.ly/iSchoolLinkedIn
- Official iSchool LinkedIn Group: iSchool at Pitt (School of Information Sciences) - open to students & alumni
  - Interesting discussions, alumni networking, professional job postings
- Email Listservs (Students are automatically at the end of the Add/Drop period.)
  - School-wide events, internship/volunteer openings, scholarship/award opportunities, deadlines, etc.

Pitt Portal – The Pitt Portal aggregates various University-wide systems, resources, and services (my.pitt.edu).
- University Services & Information
  - Make sure you have health insurance
  - Pay your student bill and sign up for direct deposit
  - Access Pitt’s Career Development info and sign up for the career/internship database - FutureLinks
- Visit Student Center
  - Find and know your PeopleSoft ID number, which is your University-wide identification number!!!
  - Register online for courses, review your schedule, verify class meeting rooms and times
  - Update your contact information in the University’s PeopleSoft system.
- My Resources
  - Learn how to access e-books or electronic journal articles from off-campus sites
- Academic Resources
  - Review the Academic Calendars and know the academic deadlines
- CourseWeb Login
  - Familiarize yourself with CourseWeb - the online management system for syllabi, homework, etc.
  - Individual courses will become visible as instructors activate them (usually after the first class)
- Webmail
  - Check your Pitt email account & set up email forwarding service at technology.pitt.edu/

Intranet – Hosts information specific to iSchool policies, procedures, resources, and services (ischool.pitt.edu/sisint/).
- Academic Programs
  - Grading Policy: Make sure you remain in good academic standing
  - Review course requirements and discuss these with your academic advisor
- Academic Policies & Procedures
  - Academic Integrity: Review and understand academic integrity
  - Courses/Registration: Review the instructions for obtaining permission codes and registering for courses
  - University Policies: View the student code of conduct
- Technology@the iSchool
  - Get your PITT computer account
  - Know the iSchool computer lab hours
- Student Services
  - Get your PITT photo ID card
  - All things student life - feedback surveys, public transportation, parking, networking, etc.
The drop/add period typically = the first two weeks of the semester (less in Summer) = your chance to take classes out for a test drive.

my.pitt.edu > Student Center Login (aka PeopleSoft) is the place to search for courses to tell how many openings are left, but our School’s website has a schedule of courses that is easier to browse to see what courses are offered at-a-glance.

Courseweb & PeopleSoft! PeopleSoft is the system that tracks your official enrollment and final class grades. Courseweb is used by many instructors as a course delivery system but it is NOT an official record of enrollment or grades.

Some classes are only offered in the Fall or the Spring, others are offered every semester. If you have a doubt about this for a specific class, check with your advisor.

If you find your interests in a specific specialization change after taking a few classes, you can change your specialization and/or your advisor.

You can, with some restrictions, take courses at other universities as part of your degree at Pitt.

Monitored withdrawal = a safety valve if a class becomes too much. This typically can happen up to 11 weeks into the semester (less in Summer).

Full time is between 9-15 credits at the graduate level, 12-18 credits at the undergraduate level. You pay a flat fee for full-time in Fall and Spring semesters, but you pay by the credit in Summer semesters.

Each program has minimum grade requirements, both per class and for your overall grade point average (GPA).

If your degree has electives, you typically will have a list of suggested electives provided by your program, but other options relevant to your degree (in other Schools at Pitt, at other local colleges/universities) would be possible, if your advisor approves. Make sure you document exceptions!

Professional conferences and travel funds – the School has limited funds to assist students, so does GPSG. Doctoral students typically also leverage funds of their faculty advisor. You may also appeal to student organizations for travel assistance.

When we invite employers to the IS Building for sessions, please attend as many of these sessions as you can, even if you are not sure if the particular employer is relevant to your degree; employers are often looking for people with varied skill sets, and you may just fit with what they are looking for.

When you are ready to graduate, you actually have to submit an application to graduate, so don’t forget to do that!

If you do not make satisfactory academic progress (calculated with several factors; for more information see: https://oafa.pitt.edu/learn-about-aid/satisfactory-academic-progress/), your federal loans and aid will be terminated. This may also negatively impact your student status (probation or dismissal from program).
Orientation

School of Information Sciences
Tips for International Students

- **How you are graded** – not all classes have just one end of the semester test. You may be used to having one big test in a subject at the end of the term, and though some of your classes will still be this way, other classes may require many projects and/or tests, quizzes on a regular basis (ex. once a week, every month).

- **How many professors define good work** – You may be used to times where trying to highlight your individual contributions or your unique ideas and getting credit for them would be considered offensive. In this setting, whether you are doing group work or completing an individual assignment, your individual unique thoughts and understanding is what the professor is looking for. Professors want to see critical thinking: having you reach your own conclusions, taking action to participate in the classroom.

- **If you do not identify individual contributions in every paper, project, assignment, program, etc., it can be considered cheating or plagiarism.** This can be particularly confusing because many instructors will assign a mix of group work and individual assignments. Working together and helping each other in group assignments is acceptable, but professors make a serious distinction between helping each other and copying identical work. In group projects, professors will expect each member to contribute to the team but for each individual to play a different role in the project. For individual assignments, you are not allowed to copy your friend’s homework – this is considered cheating. Even if you show your work to someone else and they copy your ideas, this also can be considered cheating. You can discuss the assignment and share ideas together, but your writing and explanation must be your own work and expressed in your own words.

Even if you find it offensive to draw attention to yourself or another individual to give individual recognition for an idea, it is considered cheating if you do not. For example, if you are writing a paper and you use the ideas or the text of another person, you must label that idea as that person’s idea, or the professor will think you are pretending it is your own idea and that you are cheating. Even if there is an idea you are learning that someone else says perfectly, if you include that person’s statement, word-for-word, you must put it in quotations and let the professor know that the other person said it. The professor is often looking for you to demonstrate the idea in your own words or in your own way to prove that you understand it. This Web site offers a quiz that can help you understand what is and is not plagiarism: www.indiana.edu/~istd/

- **How to treat the professor** – Respectfully questioning the professor is OK and sometimes encouraged. In fact, for classes in which you have a participation grade, you will be expected to ask questions, speak your opinion, etc. If you do not, your grade could suffer.

- **How the professor treats you** – You might be surprised at how honest and aggressive some professors might be with you. However, part of their job is to encourage you to think clearly and defend your ideas intelligently and in the face of criticism. It is actually expected for you to be criticized and to learn to stand up to this discourse and to be able to clearly explain and defend your ideas without getting emotional or taking this as a personal attack against you.

- **Concerning equality in the classroom and speaking up** – All students are equal in the classroom and so are expected to participate equally. There are expectations for all students to be honest, open, and direct in the classroom (in terms of asking questions and participation). The instructor wants to hear each student’s individual opinion equally to make sure every student understand the material and can talk about it intelligently. If you are shy it would be a useful challenge for you to try to speak up in the classroom to practice becoming comfortable with speaking in from of groups of people. However, if you are extremely nervous about speaking up in front of a group of people, you could also try to meet the professor during her/his office hours.
Confidentiality – The University is not allowed to share your records with anyone from the outside without your permission. We cannot tell your families or employers your grades without your permission. Health records are even more protected and private – anything you tell your doctor or counselor stays between you and them. What this means is that if you are having problems of any kind that are interfering with your school work – whether you have a health problem, are suffering from depression, are having money problems, or just cannot manage your time – your advisor and the members of the student services staff hope that you will trust us enough to share this information with us so we can help you. By law we keep whatever you tell us confidential and do not share it. It is not considered shameful to share this either – if you feel we would be able to help you, you are encouraged to share this type of information with us.

You have an academic advisor. What does that mean? Your advisor is usually a professor who knows a lot more than you do about what you are studying. They should be used as a guide, but they don’t want you to come to them and say “tell me what to do.” They want you to take responsibility for your own courses/independent studies/research, come up with your own choices and decisions, and ask for their advice. For example, when asking your advisor questions:

- Instead of saying “what courses should I take?” you should look up what the requirements are, pick classes that interest you and relate to your plans and fit with the requirements, and then say “here are the courses I plan on taking and here is how I think they fit in with my long term plans. Do you have any suggestions for changes I could make to this schedule or do you think this is reasonable the way it is?”

- Instead of saying “should I take an independent study?” You could say “I am interested in researching [insert topic], and I looked on the School’s Web site and saw that your research interests are related to this area. Do you have any projects I can work on that are related to this interest that I have?”

- Instead of saying “what internship/practicum should I do?” You should look for internships that interest you first, identify them (and apply) and then tell your advisor “Here is the description of an internship that interests me. I have applied for that internship, and I think it fits with my studies because [reason]. If I complete the internship application and the immigration paperwork necessary to do this, will you approve this internship?”

- In general, what the examples above mean is that your faculty advisor and school staff are here as resources for you, but you need to take the initiative; you will need to identify deadlines, plan things in advance, complete forms yourself, etc., but when you do these things, the faculty and staff will do everything in our power to help you with them.

English is expected as the language of learning in all classes – Your professors will be communicating knowledge to you of complicated concepts in the information sciences. Since language, culture, and non-verbal communication are all related to each other, the fullest understanding comes when everyone is communicating through a common language, culture, and set of non-verbal behaviors. That context for you is U.S. English. You will be encouraged to use U.S. English as much as possible – when speaking to your professors, when speaking to each other, when working on group projects together. It is our hope that by doing this you will begin to learn the culture and non-verbal communications that go along with the language and this will help maximize your learning in the classroom. If you took the English Language Proficiency Test and placed into an English language course, please take that placement seriously – it is there to help you! Additional resources for English assistance: www.eli.pitt.edu/
Health care is required and can be very expensive in the U.S.
OIS provided you with the information necessary to identify your options (www.hr.pitt.edu/benefits/student-in), however, since there is no one best officially recommended choice, it would be good to talk to other international students now to see which plan they selected, why they selected it, and what the benefits and risks are of the plan they chose.

Setting up appointments and being on time
It may have previously been normal for you to go many offices (doctor, dentist, and university administrators) and just walk in and see someone there without planning in advance. Some offices are like that at the University of Pittsburgh, but many offices require you to schedule an appointment in order to have someone help you. If you do schedule an appointment, the expectation is that you show up for that appointment at the exact time it was scheduled. For example, if you schedule an appointment for 10:30 a.m., you should show up at that time. If you show up even 10 minutes late (10:40 a.m., for example), the appointments are often scheduled so close together that they would not have enough time to see you and you would need to reschedule your appointment.

How our school will share information with you electronically
- Information Science & Telecommunications FB group: www.facebook.com/groups/isandtele/
- Library & Information Science FB group: www.facebook.com/groups/LISpitt/
- School of Information Sciences FB page: www.facebook.com/ischoolpitt
- LinkedIn University page: bit.ly/iSchoolLinkedIn
- LinkedIn Group: https://www.linkedin.com/grps/iSchool-Pitt-School-Information-Sciences-41203
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/iSchool_Pitt - feel free to use #ischools and #Pitt or tweet @iSchool_Pitt
- We will send information to your Pitt email address regularly as well. It is your responsibility to check your Pitt email account regularly.

Tipping
Many service-oriented professions in the U.S. (waiters, waitresses, those who carry your luggage at airports and hotels) have low salaries but make their money based on how well they serve you in the form of tips. It is expected when you go out to eat, get your hair cut, stay at a hotel, have someone help you with your luggage at the airport, etc. that you give a tip to the person helping you if the service was good. For luggage the tip usually is only a few dollars, but for a haircut or a restaurant the tip is usually a minimum of 10% of the bill if the service was acceptable and up to 20% if the service was great. In rare circumstances where the service was absolutely terrible it is acceptable for you to show your displeasure by not leaving a tip. However, if you forget to leave a tip and the service was good, then you would be accidentally communicating that the service was terrible when in fact it was not.