

# Cultural Spotlight

## Spring 2014

I n t e r n a t i o n a l S t u d e n t a n d S c h o l a r S e r v i c e s

### L u c k o ' t h e I r i s h : S t . P a t r i c k ' s D a y i n t h e U S A

#### In this issue:

St. Patrick's Day	1
April Fools' Day	1
Easter	2
Volunteer Month	2
Earth Day	2
March Madness with Martin	3
English Corner	4
Spring Calendar	4

Each year, millions of people around the United States, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity or creed become Irish – for just one day. March 17<sup>th</sup> marks St. Patrick's Day, a holiday widely celebrated in the United States by dressing in green and drinking beer (also green). The holiday originated in Ireland and is named for St. Patrick, the most recognizable patron saint of the country.

Over the years, St. Patrick's Day in the United States has become a more general celebration of Irish heritage and its widespread popularity resulted in the 1991 designation of March as "Irish Heritage Month." All across the United States there are a variety of events spotlighting Irish heritage, or at least an Americanized version of it. In New York there is a large parade, featuring bagpipers and baton-twirlers. Throughout Boston people celebrate the strong Irish roots in the city by visiting one of numerous Irish pubs. And if you're interested in seeing a very unique celebration of St. Patrick's Day, you're in luck. Just a 2.5 hour drive away in Chicago, the holiday is celebrated with the traditional green beer and attire, but they also go one (large) step further and dye the Chicago River GREEN. Each year, 400 pounds of green vegetable dye is poured into the river, turning it a vivid fluorescent green. It is truly a sight that you have to see with your own eyes to believe.



### A p r i l F o o l s ' D a y

On April 1<sup>st</sup> don't believe everything you hear. New futuristic gadgets being announced by tech companies? Answers to age-old questions suddenly revealed? Wild stories that seem too crazy to be true? That's because they probably are. April Fools' Day is notorious for bringing out the prankster in all of us, and it isn't limited to pranks between friends. Newspapers, television programs and even Google have now gotten in on the fun of tricking unsuspecting individuals into believing their far-out stories.

While the origins of the holiday are not completely clear, the most widely accepted explanation is based on the moving of the celebration of the New Year. In ancient times, and up until a few hundred years ago, the New Year was celebrated in Europe in the spring, generally on or around April 1<sup>st</sup>, based on the Julian calendar. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII ordered that a new calendar, known until today as the Gregorian calendar, replace the Julian calendar. The new calendar moved the celebration of the New Year to January 1<sup>st</sup>. Due to in part to a lack of communication of the new date, and a general unwillingness by some to accept the new date, a portion of the population continued to celebrate the New Year on April 1<sup>st</sup>. These individuals were labeled as "fools" by those who had embraced the new January 1<sup>st</sup> celebration, and became the objects of pranks and tricks played by those who had adopted the new calendar. Over the years the tradition of pulling pranks on people has become more general – everyone is vulnerable. So be prepared this April 1<sup>st</sup> – or you could become the next April fool!





## E a s t e r

Americans always know what holiday is coming up just by walking into any kind of convenience or grocery store-- There's always a wide variety of candy and sweets to show us what we'll be celebrating in the upcoming weeks. Although possibly immune to the sights of boxes of candy that have been on display nearly non-stop since Halloween, you've probably noticed lots of chocolate rabbits lining the shelves in the recent weeks. That's a sure sign that Easter Sunday is near. This year Easter Sunday falls on April 20th.

While Easter originated as a Christian holiday, and is still a very important day for Christian religions, it is also a very popular secular holiday. There are many non-religious customs and traditions associated with Easter, such as the Easter Bunny, Easter Eggs, Easter Baskets, and Easter Egg Hunts. The Easter Bunny is a favorite among children — he is responsible for bringing them Easter Baskets filled with a variety of goodies, such as candy, chocolate, fruit, and perhaps a few toys. Colored Eggs are also an Easter custom—many people boil eggs and use coloring kits to color their own, or, they buy colored plastic eggs. These plastic eggs are often filled with treats and used for Easter Egg Hunts—where adults hide eggs and children run around to find them. The child with the most eggs wins!

Rabbits and eggs have been part of the traditional Easter for many years, even before chocolate versions were available. The rabbit was an ancient symbol of fertility and life, and was strongly associated with Spring, when the Easter holiday has always been celebrated. Eggs are a traditional symbol of fertility and renewal, and are a historical treat for Easter.

For many Americans, Easter is about candy, especially chocolate! 70% of the Easter candy bought in America is chocolate. An estimated 90 million chocolate bunnies are produced each year. How will you eat your chocolate bunny—head first, feet first, ears first, or tail first?

Are you interested in attending an Easter activity with your family? Come to "A Tisket, a Tasket, Make an Easter Basket" hosted by ISSS on April 17 from 6:00pm-7:30pm in room 406 of the Illini Union. For an adult Easter Egg hunting experience try Nite Lite Egg Pursuit XXI hosted by the Champaign Park District (see Calendar of Events page for details and link).



## A p r i l i s N a t i o n a l V o l u n t e e r M o n t h

Volunteering with a community organization is a terrific way to contribute to your community in a positive way. It's also an opportunity for you to utilize any skills you have to help others in need, while meeting new people and expanding your contacts here in Champaign-Urbana, and improve your resume.

While the entire month of April is dedicated to volunteer efforts that improve your community, the highlight is National Volunteer Week, from April 6-12, 2014. This week is about motivating, recognizing, and encouraging people to contribute to and engage in their communities. This is a perfect time for you to contribute to the UIUC campus community or the Champaign-Urbana community in general. On Saturday, April 5, members of the local community and UIUC faculty, staff, and students will work together to start National Volunteer Week, by assembling food baskets for the Eastern Illinois Foodbank . Visit [www.cuvolunteer.org](http://www.cuvolunteer.org) for more information and to sign up. Another great resource for public engagement activities at UIUC is: <http://engagement.illinois.edu/>

## E a r t h D a y

Each year on April 22 people in 190 countries around the world, including the United States, make a concerted effort to take part in activities supporting environmental protection. Earth Day was founded in 1970 at the prompting of Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin, who saw the need to bring environmental issues to the forefront. He proposed a day for a "national teach-in on the environment" and the result was the participation of 20 million Americans on the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, in demonstrations for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Today, Americans take part in a variety of activities to celebrate Earth Day, including cleaning up their neighborhoods and planting trees. For more information on Earth Day activities in Champaign, check out the links on page 4.





March Madness isn't just a phrase the media use to hype an event, it's the actual trademarked alternate name for the NCAA National Basketball Tournament. The NCAA is the organization that coordinates all major sports at the college and university level, and this tournament crowns the best college basketball school in the US. So why is it important and why should you care?

College sports in the US are different to most other countries. They are broadcast on television through huge, multi-million dollar deals. The teams play in huge stadiums and are a major source of revenue for the university. Given that the major sports in the US each have a relatively small number of teams for the size of the country (Baseball- 30, American Football- 32, Basketball- 30), college sports fill the void, giving major sports teams to smaller cities.

College basketball separates itself from both the professional level National Basketball Association (NBA) and from other NCAA sports in a variety of ways. Their rules differ from the NBA slightly, with games played over two halves rather than four quarters, and with different dimensions to the court allowing for slightly easier scoring. But it's their end of season tournament, March Madness, that sets it apart from all other sporting competitions in the US.

Almost every professional level sport in the US has playoffs. This means at the end of the season, the best teams progress to a tournament to determine an overall champion. But in a bid to maximize revenue by ensuring as many games as possible, and in the hope that the better team will progress, most leagues run these games as a 'best of 3/5/7' series. Not March Madness! March Madness employs a very simple single game format. Win, and progress to the next round. Lose, and you're out. No rematches, replays, or series.

This simple, easy to understand format has helped the tournament jump into the mainstream. Prior to the tournament, the bracket is released. Everyone knows which teams play each other, who they would potentially play in the next round, and the next, and so on. Fans fill out these brackets hoping to correctly predict who will progress, and major networks and organizations run contests worth millions of dollars to anyone who can perfectly predict results. The bracket format means that even people who don't follow the sport can make wild predictions, and the single-game format means that these wild predictions can often come true as upsets are commonplace. Las Vegas bookmakers estimate more bets are placed on March Madness than any other sports event, including the Superbowl, and recent polls suggest that US companies could be losing as much as \$200m in lost productivity as workers all over the country follow the tournament and participate in office pools while at work.

No other sport at the college or professional level comes close to this kind of interest from both sports fans and non-sports fans. Professional sports fail to attract non-sports fans as their playoff formats can often be overlong and if you're not invested in a particular team it can be difficult to find a team to support. March Madness fixes both of these problems- the tournament is played over three weekends, and it's easy for a non-sports fan to pick a team to cheer for either based on the college or university they graduated from, or the team they've picked in their bracket pool. Other college sports either don't have a tournament (American football), have a tournament with incredibly complicated elimination rules (baseball), or aren't popular enough to generate mainstream television coverage (volleyball, soccer).

So embrace March Madness! The bracket will be released on March 16<sup>th</sup>, known as Selection Sunday. Unfortunately Illinois are unlikely to qualify this year, but that shouldn't stop you entering into the fun of filling out a bracket and watching the games with the rest of the United States!





## English Corner: Spring is in the air!



Here are some commonly used English phrases including the word “spring”:

*“no spring chicken”*

a person well past youth; an old person

Example: “Alma” is no spring chicken, but she still proudly represents Illinois!

*“spring to life”*

to become suddenly alive or more alive

Example: The campus really springs to life when the weather gets warm.

*“spring to mind”*

to appear suddenly or immediately in one’s thoughts

Example: When international students and scholars need help, ISSS springs to mind!

### Calendar of Events: March-May 2014

March	Event	April	Event	May	Event
15	Chicago St. Patrick’s Day Parade 12:00pm	1	April Fools’ Day	All Month	Bike to Work Month
15-16	Purim (Jewish)	13	Palm Sunday (Christian)	1	May Day
16	NCAA Selection Sunday	14-22	Passover (Jewish)	5	Cinco de Mayo
17	St. Patrick’s Day	18	Good Friday (Christian)	11	Mothers’ Day
17	Holi (Hindu)	20	Easter (Christian)	25	Lailat al Miraj (Muslim)
18	March Madness begins	22	Earth Day	26	Memorial Day
21	Ostara (Wiccan)	25	Arbor Day		
25	Arbor Day	26	Champaign Christie Clinic Marathon		

For Earth Day Events visit: <http://sustainability.illinois.edu/earthweek2014.html>

For Marathon Info visit: <http://www.illinoismarathon.com/>

For Champaign Area Events Calendar visit: <http://www.visitchampaigncounty.org/>

For More Spring Events visit the [Champaign Park District Website](#) or the [Urbana Park District Website](#)