2015

A Website to help the International Students Experience (WISE)

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A Website to Enhance the International Students' Experience (WISE)

TEAM MEMBERS
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Project Sponsor: Dr. Amber Hill, International Students and Scholar Programs Director, Global Education Office (GEO)

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Our VCU campus has been steadily expanding its international student population and has become an increasingly global university community. We have identified together with GEO, the need to build tangible resources that can support faculty and staff to more effectively educate our international student population. The creation of online content to be added to GEO's current webpage seems to best fit the existing need. Our project outlines a blueprint for this online content by means of identifying data and resources that should be included as well as determining cost, sustainability and feasibility plans. Ultimately, the goal is to pave the way for centralized online content that can connect faculty and staff with important resources to optimize the academic experience and success of international students at VCU.

QUEST FOR DISTINCTION

VCU's Quest for Distinction goal 1 seeks to ensure "the success of a talented and diverse population". As faculty and staff engage with an increasingly diverse student population at VCU, the creation of this website would serve as a resource to provide faculty and staff greater access to the information they need to guide these students to their achievement of academic success at VCU.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Develop content, features, and guidelines for an electronic resource to improve VCU's faculty and staff competency, awareness, and sensitivity to the diverse cultures present at VCU.
2. Improve the academic experience and success of our diverse student body.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

Our team considered various potential projects before settling on a common goal of enhancing the international student experience at VCU. We realized that getting feedback from someone directly involved in international student matters would be of critical importance to the course of the project. A meeting with Dr. Amber Hill (GEO) resulted in gaining a greater understanding of the needs and goals of GEO, which led us towards developing the idea to sketch a website that would serve as a resource to faculty and staff. Further meetings with Dr. Hill further clarified the goals and helped us to narrow down and prioritize topics of importance.

Our strategies then evolved into learning from other similar websites already available, getting familiar with the content of online resources on the selected topics, and envisioning the best way to create awareness for this need in order to help communicate the importance of the resource.

ACTION STEPS
- Research similar websites already available online.
- Develop, along with our sponsor, of a list of important topics and features that should be included in the website.
- Meet with other VCU faculty and staff who are working on similar International student initiatives, to corroborate our goals.
- Research selected portions of those topics to become familiar with international students' experiences and background.
- Create a survey to be sent to faculty and international students to learn about their perspectives in teaching and learning at VCU.
- Attend GEO's orientation in order to interview international students about their expectations and first impressions of VCU.
- Record and edit videos that will serve to educate the VCU community on incoming international students' perspectives and expectations.
- Create a Country specific rubric that outlines important topics to investigate for each country.
- Summarize our plan of action, or blueprint, for GEO's benefit.

OUTCOMES
Our outcome is a framework outlining content needs and further guidelines for features on a website. This can serve as a central multi-media resource that promotes multicultural awareness inside and outside the VCU classroom. The idea behind our efforts is to provide education for faculty and staff on other cultures. Both sides would be able to learn valuable information about each other (cultural, background, language) and use the information towards enhancing understanding of each other and creating opportunities for improved educational experiences.

SUSTAINABILITY
This project will require resources, as outlined below. Given our desire as a University to increase our recruitment of students from around the world, it is imperative that we also value the importance of training faculty and staff to provide an educational environment that will promote the success of said students. As discussed previously, this project aligns with the vision and goals of our Global Education Office. In order for a project of this type to succeed it is necessary to provide professional development, regular updates and maintenance, cross-functional review and senior level oversight.

We anticipate that in order to ensure the website stays current, maintenance efforts would have to be on-going. We envision a group of stakeholders (possibly the International Student and Scholar Advisory Panel) that would be responsible to vet the information posted and recommend additional information that should be added. Additionally, technical and content based site maintenance would be necessary. This may be done by GEO's Communication and Website development team members.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES
The creation and maintenance of resources for faculty and staff on the current GEO webpage will require the following:
Finances
- Faculty, staff or graduate students who are considered subject matter experts (possibly School of Education or World Studies) will be needed to thoroughly research the literature regarding country specific topics as outlined in the country-specific rubric. Additionally, more general research with regards to topics such as acculturation and multicultural

communication will be necessary. A summer stipend ranging from $2-4K per researcher should be considered.
- Videography experts will be needed to help document and communicate various aspects of the international student academic experience. Alt Lab may serve as a resource.

Time and Effort
- GEO already has in place positions in charge of web development and updating. These positions will need to add this portion of GEO's website to their responsibilities.
- Videography expertise and help will be sought from ALT Lab.
- "Expert" faculty and staff will need to agree to serve as liaisons to mentor other faculty and staff who have less experience working with international students.
- There will be a need for quality reviews of the website. As we understand it, this is task that can be given to the International Student and Scholar Advisory Panel that is already in place.

Project Budget

	Item Description	Justification	Cost
1.	Faculty summer stipend- Initial Research	Initial research of country specific content. Required to initially build website.	$4,000
2.	Videography	In case Alt Lab is unable to take on this project, may hire this service. Student Media Center may be an option.	$1,000
3.	Website Creation	Current GEO employee	$0
4.	Website Promotion	Digital and printed media items to be handed out during faculty orientation. Ex. USB drive, pens, bands	$1,500
5.	Ongoing costs	Graduate student researcher stipend ($2000), promotion items, videography.	$3,000
		Total	$9,500

RECOMMENDATIONS
In addition to the technical and artistic aspects of creating a website that is relevant, user-friendly and accessible, it will be necessary to have the website updated regularly and carefully vetted. To this end we propose the development of a process that would ensure that the information shared on the website is accurate, expressed in a respectful and sensitive way, and that it aligns with the goals of the project. In order to achieve that we recommend:
- For the website to be reviewed by a diverse group, involving students and faculty, as well as the compliance office, prior to its initial release and thereafter on a regular basis. Perhaps some type of a Quality Assurance Panel may be formed.
- Pre-test and post-test surveys (as shared by Dr. Hill) to be conducted on a group of the faculty and staff who have utilized the website and compare their results with those of a control group. That would help assess the degree of progress achieved towards global education and cultural sensitivity of the faculty and staff.

FINAL PITCH
VCU was recently featured in an issue of International Educator for leading the way in educating international students. According to the article, VCU currently has more than 1,500 international students studying at the institution. This population is a significant part of the VCU community and represents a rich source of multi-cultural perspectives.
According to the Global Education Office, international students report difficulties related to language barriers, academics, and adapting to cultural differences and struggles of a personal

nature. Educating faculty and staff about potential struggles international students may face will aid in improving the international students experience at VCU. At the same time, such initiative also aims to improve the effectiveness of faculty and staff in their interaction with each student and in their own understanding of the culture.

The current level of resources available to faculty and staff is limited. A website, as described in this report, can serve as an important centralized tool to connect faculty and staff with important resources. These resources have the potential to improve the academic experience of international students at VCU and raise awareness of multi-cultural differences that enhance the diversity of the University.

To keep in line with VCU's Quest for Distinction, it is important to offer our increasing population of international students a place that welcomes them, understands them, and where they can thrive academically. To that end, a website that provides resources to faculty is an important first step to improve the quality and accessibility of resources that support this global medley of students, faculty and staff at VCU.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC RUBRIC EXAMPLE

China

Population	
Major Cities	
Major Religious Holidays observed	
Cultural Preferences and values:	
Punctuality	
Cooperation	
Academic Integrity perspectives	
Plagiarism	
Class Participation	
Conflict Resolution	
Virtual Tour Clip	
CIA World Fact Book link (cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html)	
RECENT News - (RSS feed link)	

APPENDIX B

OUTLINE OF WEBSITE INFORMATION AND FEATURES

General Information
1. Typical struggles and perspectives of international students at VCU. For example:
    a. Short video clips of international student experiences and perspectives.
2. Cross cultural strategies for conflict resolution.
3. Acculturation process information.
4. Frequently Asked Questions and answers initially provided by GEO.

Features
1. Information about specific campus or community resources that might be especially helpful (medical, community engagement, campus engagement, laws, DMV, etc.).
2. Online Quiz to determine one's level of global friendliness.
3. Webinar training on Multicultural Communication.
4. Contact information experienced faculty and staff (Faculty Liaisons) per discipline and/or school.
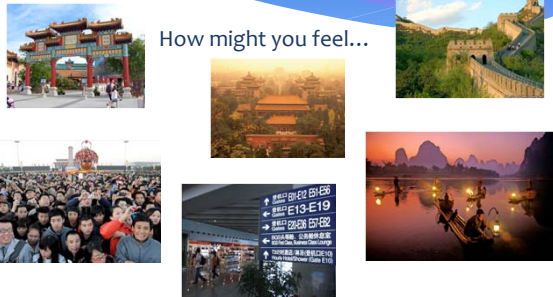
.

A Website to Enhance the International Students' Experience (WISE)

Created and Presented by
Team GRAMS (Grace's Rams)
Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute Class of 2015

Challenges You May Face...

How might you feel...

First Impressions

What do you remember first impressions of Richmond when you got here?

International Student Presence at VCU

Approximately 1,828 International students
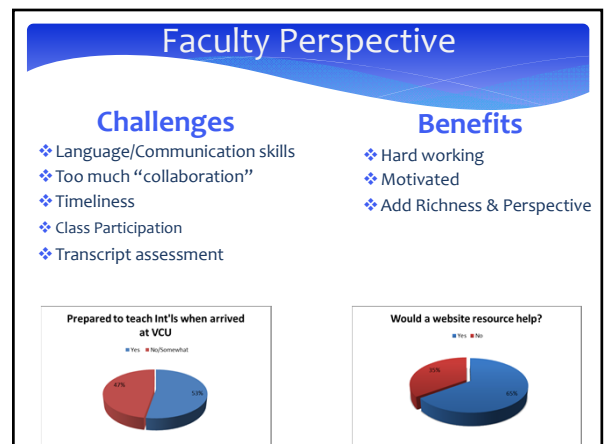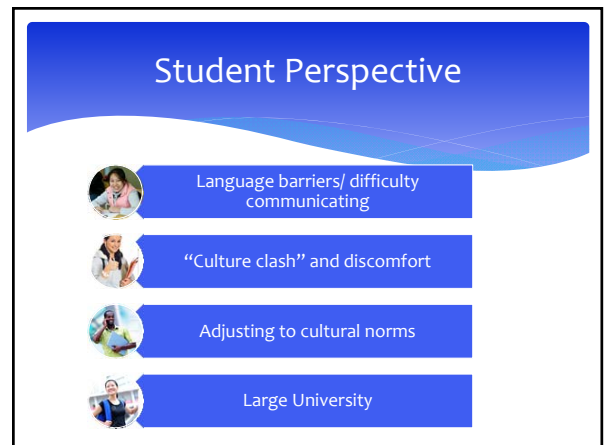
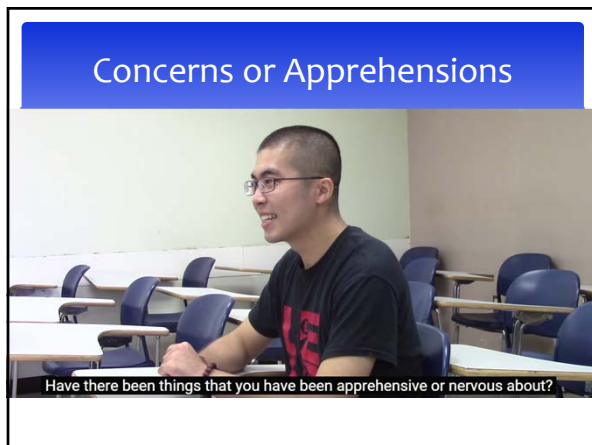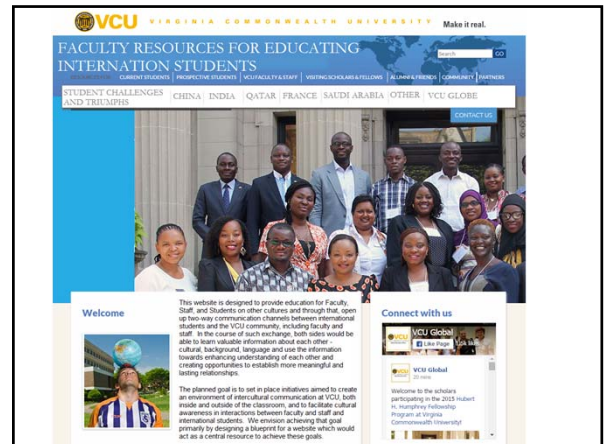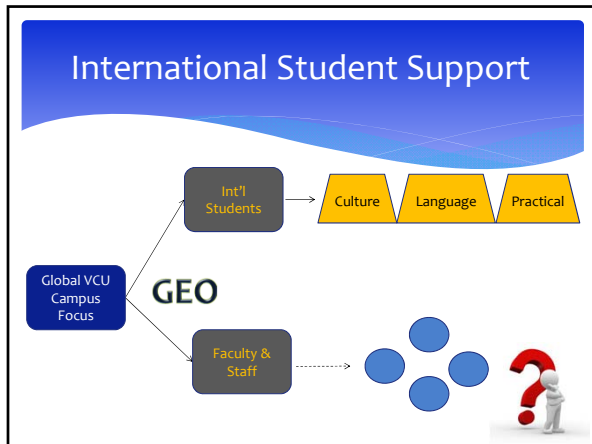112 Countries represented

Afghanistan China Ethiopia Saudi Arabia

VCU's Quest for Distinction

The process of implementing the Quest for Distinction has distilled three overriding institutional global goals:

* Improve the **recruitment and retention of international students and scholars**
* Increase the **global engagement of VCU students and faculty**
* **Expand VCU's global footprint** through our research, teaching, and community engagement

International Student Support

Global VCU Campus Focus

GEO

Int'l Students → Culture | Language | Practical

Faculty & Staff

FACULTY RESOURCES FOR EDUCATING INTERNATION STUDENTS

CURRENT STUDENTS | PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS | VCU FACULTY/STAFF | VISITING SCHOLARS & FELLOWS | ALUMNI & FRIENDS | COMMUNITY | PARTNERS

STUDENT CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS | CHINA | INDIA | QATAR | FRANCE | SAUDI ARABIA | OTHER | VCU GLOBE

CONTACT US

Welcome

This website is designed to provide education for Faculty, Staff, and Students on other cultures and through that, open up two-way communication channels between international students and the VCU community, including faculty and staff. In the course of such exchange, both sides would be able to learn valuable information about each other - cultural, background, language and use the information towards enhancing understanding of each other and creating opportunities to establish more meaningful and lasting relationships.

The planned goal is to set in place initiatives aimed to create an environment of intercultural communication at VCU, both inside and outside of the classroom, and to facilitate cultural awareness in interactions between faculty and staff and international students. We envision achieving that goal primarily by designing a blueprint for a website which would act as a central resource to achieve these goals.

Connect with us

VCU Global — Like Page

VCU Global 20 mins

Welcome to the scholars participating in the 2015 Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program at Virginia Commonwealth University!

Concerns or Apprehensions

Have there been things that you have been apprehensive or nervous about?

Student Perspective

- Language barriers/ difficulty communicating
- "Culture clash" and discomfort
- Adjusting to cultural norms
- Large University

Student Perspective on Faculty

What about impressions of professors?

Faculty Perspective

Challenges
- Language/Communication skills
- Too much "collaboration"
- Timeliness
- Class Participation
- Transcript assessment

Benefits
- Hard working
- Motivated
- Add Richness & Perspective

Prepared to teach Int'ls when arrived at VCU
- Yes
- No/Somewhat

Would a website resource help?
- Yes
- No

Slide 1

FACULTY RESOURCES FOR EDUCATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Search [GO]

RESOURCES FOR | CURRENT STUDENTS | PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS | VCU FACULTY & STAFF | VISITING SCHOLARS & FELLOWS | ALUMNI & FRIENDS | COMMUNITY | PARTNERS

Classroom Contrast

* Deeply respect professors
* Not encouraged to ask questions
* Exams- Memory tests
* Few tests

* Intellectual Challenge OK
* Learner Centered Trend
* Exams: Critical Thinking focused
* Frequent tests

Slide 2

FACULTY RESOURCES FOR EDUCATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Search [GO]

RESOURCES FOR | CURRENT STUDENTS | PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS | VCU FACULTY & STAFF | VISITING SCHOLARS & FELLOWS | ALUMNI & FRIENDS | COMMUNITY | PARTNERS

China

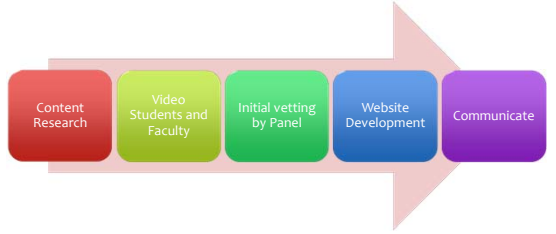| Population	
Major Cities	
Major Religious Holidays observed	
Cultural Preferences and values:	
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Cooperation	
Academic Integrity perspectives	
Plagiarism	
Class Participation	
Conflict Resolution	
Virtual Tour Clip	
CIA World Fact Book link (cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html)	
RECENT News- (RSS feed link)	

Slide 3

General Information

- Acculturation
- Webinar Training
  - Multi-cultural communication
  - Conflict resolution among different cultures
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Guide for resources available to students

Slide 4

Other Features

- Online Quiz
- Faculty Liaison connections
- Message Boards
- Faculty panel discussions
- Student Perspective Videos

Slide 5

Website Creation and Promotion

Content Research → Video Students and Faculty → Initial vetting by Panel → Website Development → Communicate
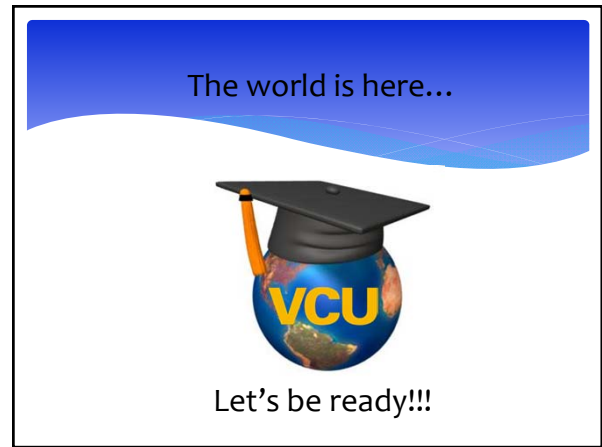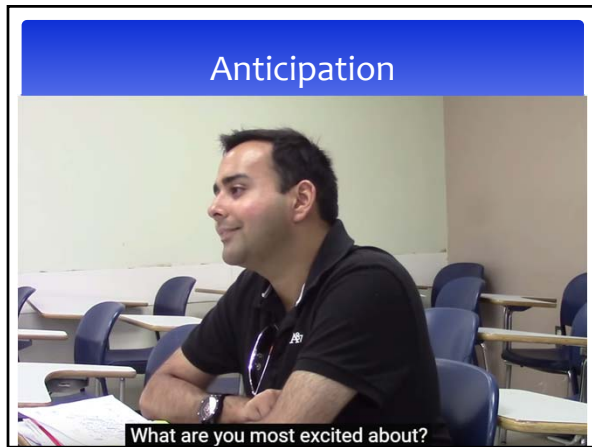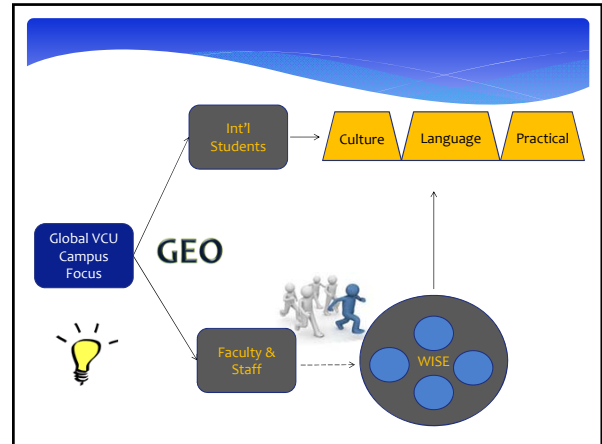
Slide 6

Website Promotion

Global Zone events/communications

TalegIAM

New Employee Orientation

Laminated cards

GEO current email to include a link

Faculty & Staff

Globe stressballs

Sustainability

- Maintenance
- Enhancement
- Quality control
- Growth

Anticipation

What are you most excited about?

The world is here…

Let's be ready!!!

Thank You

- Dr. Amber Hill, International Students and Scholar Programs Director, Global Education Office (GEO)
- Yilan (Annie) Gao, China programs coordinator, Global Education Office (GEO)
- Guofang Wan, Director of Graduate Studies
- Molly Ransone, Assistant Director ALTLab, Learning Media Innovation
- International Students:

Minh Ho	J. Abraham Lopez
Nosaisha Hamader	Rohan Mathuv
Walter Anyanwu	Harini Pallikarana Tirumala
Darli Aung	Xiueu Zhang
Wei Yang	Ao Gao
Sirah Yoo	Shim Na Young
Yaqoub Alqallaf	Fahed Balam

Photo/Video Credits

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