How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to a U.S. art and design school?

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HOW MIGHT WE
SUPPORT CHINESE STUDENTS
IN ACQUIRING THE
INFORMATION NECESSARY
FOR MAKING A SUCCESSFUL
APPLICATION TO AN
AMERICAN ART SCHOOL?

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May, 2017
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SUMMARY

This research focuses on building a platform to support Chinese students in acquiring necessary information for making a successful application to a U.S. art and design school. The methodological framework of the proposed research is developed based on Dr. Min Basadur’s “Simplex Process” (Basadur, 1994) design thinking method, which collects user data through a people-centered design research process. The objective of the proposed research is to support the needs of Chinese students in applying to U.S. art and design schools.

There is a growing trend today with Chinese art students seeking educational opportunities in the U.S., and the number of Chinese students enrolled in arts programs in the U.S has increased remarkably over the past several years. The growing Chinese student community interested in pursuing art and design ensures that the proposed research has a feasible population size to derive valuable statistical insights.

The proposed research methodology utilizes data collection methods to obtain information from Chinese art students in the U.S, as well as study abroad platforms in China. The literature review discusses the main differences between Chinese international students and local students. In addition, the effect of the Chinese Internet firewall is discussed with relevant studies about the academic influence caused by Internet censorship. The proposed research aims to prove the hypothesis with data collected through interviews. The collected data undergoes analysis and synthesis to develop stakeholder maps and multiple personas, thereafter a problem space is established. The developed maps find solutions and then a developed low-fidelity prototype is used to test evaluative and selected functions. The thesis discusses the limitation and scope of the proposed research. The weekly schedule map of the proposed research is attached at the end of the thesis.
01 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Primary Research Question

How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to an U.S. art and design school?

Support:
Develop a platform to assist Chinese students in applying to U.S. art and design schools.

The information necessary:
Information that helps students gain insights about schools, such as curriculum structure, school culture, admission requirements and application processes.

A successful application:
Submit application based on fully understand about personal academic goal, collage requirement and culture difference.
Secondary Questions

What kind of support do Chinese students lack during their process of applying to a U.S. art and design school?

What kinds of information do Chinese students find necessary for their applications to U.S. art and design schools?

What are key steps that Chinese students need to take to successfully complete an application to a U.S. art and design school?
Chinese students in U.S. art and design schools & employment

According to a 2016 report by the Institute of International Education and backed by the State Department, the number of international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities rose about 10 percent between 2014 and 2015. Chinese students make up the largest group of international students in the U.S. at 31 percent of the total. The number of international students in Fine and Applied Arts programs was 56,758, which was 5.8 percent of the total (Turner, 2015.11).

According to a report by the Institute of International Education, the number of Chinese international students in Fine and Applied Arts programs grew from 37,237 to 56,758 in the years from 2010/11 to 2014/15.

Why are there a growing number of Chinese art students coming to the U.S.? The article “More Chinese Students Pursuing Art and Design Dreams in the U.S” points out some reasons (Lu, 2016.3).

First, the competition for top university admission in China is tough. There is always a much larger cohort of competing students compared to the planned number of admissions of each school intake. For example, the undergraduate school of the Central Academy of Fine Art, one of the best fine art universities in China, received more than 25,000 applications in 2015, while the enrollment quota was only 496. The big acceptance challenge caused by the sheer number of applicants makes it’s hard to be accepted by a top Chinese art and design school. Some students, therefore, must choose to study abroad. The article “New ranking of the world’s top art schools” points out that the U.S. accounts for 27 out of the 100 top art schools featured (2016).

In addition, there are a growing number of employment opportunities in art and design. The article of “Job Trends Report: The Job Market for UX/UI Designers” describes that over the last decade, companies like Apple, Facebook, and Square have employed a design-centric ethos to set themselves apart from the competition. As stated by the DMI (Design Management Institute), companies that are known for investing heavily
in design outperformed the S&P 500 Index by 228%. According to DMI, “utilizing top design talent in hardware, software and service interactions help companies grow faster through differentiation and better customer experiences.” As a result, more companies are joining the race and increasing their designed related budgets, in 2015 there were over 150,000 UX design jobs newly listed in the U.S market. (Posted, 2016).

Similarly in China, art and design majored students have a relatively easier time finding high-tech jobs, there are also vast employment opportunities in art and design. Based on the data from zhaopin.com, which is the biggest online recruitment website in China, the number of job vacancies in art design is listed on the second place among all of the job categories. The demand for art and design students in high-tech jobs is expected to continue to rise in the next 10 years. (Qian, 2016). Due to the prosperous job market, today, there are many more Chinese students motivated to study art and design. Compared to China, the United States has plenty of renowned educational resources. Thus, more and more Chinese students are attracted to U.S. art and design schools.

Study abroad platform in China

Applying to a U.S. art and design school is the first key step for Chinese art students who want to study in the U.S. However, acquiring the necessary information to better understand the school is a big challenge for them. Due to the internet censorship in China, Chinese students normally acquire U.S. school information from online resource providers known as Chinese “study abroad platforms”, and there is very little information about U.S. art and design schools on those platforms. Most of the platforms feature only business management, engineering, math, computer science, physics and life sciences related school application information.

Taisha is one of the biggest study abroad platforms in China. Even though art and design is listed as one of the available majors on their website, there are only 9 articles under it. All the articles are broad information or study abroad agency’s advertising, students can hardly find any
useful information. In contrast, there are countless articles and very well established online forums under other majors. Upon contacting the platform with their free online custom service, students are informed that Taisha employees do not have much experience with applying to U.S. art and design schools because of two reasons:

1. U.S. art and design schools have too many majors and the admission requirements are very different;

2. Every student is required to prepare their own portfolio and the platforms do not have teachers who can adequately help them in preparing design portfolios.

Furthermore, New Oriental Education & Technology Group, one of the biggest Chinese study abroad service agencies, have TOEFL, IELTS and GRE English training. These kinds of examinations help students to enhance their language proficiency, including their ability to write a thesis and prepare a personal statement. They have many classes that provide introductions to U.S. liberal arts and science schools, but they are lacking of classes that provide information and support for preparing for application to U.S. art and design schools.

Internet censorship in China

Another big obstacle for Chinese student to acquire information about U.S. art school is the Internet censorship in China. As of September 2015, around 3,000 websites were blocked in mainland China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) under the country’s policy of internet censorship. The Chinese internet cannot access Google, YouTube, Yahoo, GitHub, Dropbox, Vimeo and a lot of essential websites that are used on a daily basis in the U.S. In addition, most application pages of U.S. schools were also blocked, makes online application for Chinese students to become even harder.

To overcome the obstacles resulting from Chinese Internet censorship, Chinese students normally utilize paid VPN services to access information.
outside of their reach. However, most VPNs are not stable and can be closed at any time because it is illegal to use and pay for VPN services in China.

Given the fact that internet censorship in China have made it hard for Chinese student to acquire necessary information to apply for U.S. schools, it is necessary to build a platform to support Chinese students acquiring the information they need in order to apply to U.S. art and design schools.

Research methods and participant groups

A good understanding of the experiences, behaviors and attitudes of Chinese students who are applying to U.S. art and design schools is the first step of conducting the proposed research. In this research, data was collected primarily by conducting interviews.

Given time constraints, four Chinese art students in the U.S. were interviewed and more potential research participants are planned to be involved in future research. Potential research participants include Chinese art students who are preparing their applications, who are already in U.S. art and design schools, members of Across the Divide (Chinese Artists in American Academia), professors from U.S. art and design schools, the official WeChat account of Artist (a WeChat public account, focusing on art and design, with 200,000+ followers as of now) and Artist studio (a small studio...
with services for improving art students’ portfolios to apply to foreign schools). Chinese study abroad service agencies such as New Oriental Education & Technology Group, New channel and Wall Street English are also potential research participant channels.

To gather ideas for idea generation and solution development, guided brainstorming was conducted. Guided brainstorming sessions are a brainstorming method that engage a collective group in generating ideas around a particular subject under the constraints of time. Then, personas are built from the collected data and used as a tool to showcase relevant user features and solutions.

Goal

The future goal and eventual outcome of this research is to build a platform that supports Chinese students in making a successful application to a U.S. art and design school. Despite the large number of study abroad service agencies in China, only a handful of them provide relevant consultants in art and design education. Compared to other categories of educational consulting, such as IT or Civil engineering, the cost of consultants in art and design is relatively high. Therefore, the goal of this research is to help Chinese art students successfully apply to their dream schools in the U.S with assistance and support tailor-made to their needs, desires and challenges at a fair price.
03

LIMITATIONS
While the goal of this research is to build a platform to support Chinese students applying to U.S. art schools, due to the highly diversified skill levels and backgrounds of different students, this research will only provide useful information for students to have a better application process, rather than guarantee that the application will be successful.

Another constraint within this research is time. In this research, given the deadline for thesis completion and development costs, only the ideal structure of the platform is proposed and investigated, and a prototype of the solution is presented.
04
LITERATURE REVIEW
Introduction

The population of Chinese international students is growing rapidly. According to the Open Doors report issued by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of Chinese international students studying in the US is growing with a cumulative increase of over 20% year to year. To better understand the need of this group with such a huge number, the proposed research focuses on finding the underlying characteristics of Chinese international students. The research defines Chinese students as an independent research sample, and separates them from the local U.S. students and international students from other countries.

Three main differences between Chinese international students and other students are listed in the following section. The motivations for Chinese students to study abroad are analyzed, relevant researches are reviewed, and findings are summarized. In addition, the effect of the Chinese Internet firewall is discussed with relevant studies about the academic influence caused by Internet censorship.

Differences between Chinese international students and local students

One key element leading to successful research on Chinese international students, is to not assess them based on outdated research about Chinese culture and people, because these students have grown up in a different world than their parents. Towards the end of the 20th century, China experienced "Cultural Globalization" (Keping, 2008), and most of the Chinese international students born during the 1980’s and the 1990’s have been exposed to the cultural globalization in their teenage years. They were nourished with the influence of the western culture while remaining onboard the vessel of traditional Chinese education.

This unique cultural environment contributes to the first important difference between Chinese international students and the local students: They are willing to absorb the merits of other cultures, while they don`t
really know much about foreign education (Zhang and Juan, 2007).

Another important difference between Chinese international students and local students is their different understanding about academic success (Xiang, 2015). Xiang listed a table in his study to state the complex differences in six main perspectives. Different understanding of academic success would certainly lead to different academic motivation and different study methods, which should not be omitted from the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>American Culture</th>
<th>Chinese Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Power Distance</td>
<td>(Schools and teachers provide services helping students to succeed.)</td>
<td>Larger Power Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Academic success is to meet individual’s satisfaction.)</td>
<td>(Students have to follow a good teacher/authority to succeed in academics.)</td>
<td>(Academic success comes from harmonious social relations.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Level of Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>(There are multiple ways to achieve academic success.)</td>
<td>Higher Level of Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Innovative ideas, creative thinking, and learning by doing are valued towards academic success.)</td>
<td>(There is a foreseeable path to academic success.)</td>
<td>(Continuous effort and persistent hard work are valued towards academic success.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity</td>
<td>(Academic achievement of students is measured by their social skills, adaptations, and grades.)</td>
<td>Masculinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(To achieve academic success also means to enjoy a happy life.)</td>
<td>(Academic achievement of students is measured by grades only. Failure in school is unacceptable.)</td>
<td>(To achieve academic success needs diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance, and concentration.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final difference between Chinese international students and local students is the role their family members play during the education process. Studies show that the culture in the US is considered to be based on individualism, while China is considered more collectivist in nature (Hofstede, 1980). In addition, research also indicates that Chinese families tend to believe that education shapes one’s place on the social and economic ladders (Gao, 2008). In fact, Chinese people tend to make great efforts in gathering education resources for their family members, hoping that they could achieve a better place in society in the future. Such eagerness in better educational resources among Chinese family members must be considered when determining what sort of information is needed to be provided on the website.
The motivation for Chinese students to study abroad

Studying in a foreign country is a life-changing decision to make, and various factors contribute to motivate Chinese students to make that decision. For those Chinese students seeking opportunities to study in the U.S., their motivation for studying abroad must be analyzed, since different motivations could lead to remarkable differences in the application process.

There are many factors, such as economic, political or religious considerations, that could play a role when it comes to understanding what truly motivates someone to study in a foreign land. Some researchers categorize these factors into two groups:

1. “Preservation factor”, which reflects the goal of avoiding disadvantageous conditions in the home country;

2. “Self-development factor”, which reflects the goal of pursuing good education and better career opportunities abroad (Chirkov, Ran and Martin 2007).

There are also other researches that have reached similar conclusions. A “push-pull” model was described in another research study, stating that in most of the cases, economic and social forces within the home country serve to “push” students abroad, while the decision as to which host country they will select is dependent on a variety of “pull” factors (Mazzarol and Geoffrey, 2002). When comes to Chinese students, researches tend to describe the motivation more as a self-made decision of Chinese students rather than environmental. Due to the Chinese collectivist culture, individuals are always aware of themselves of being only a part of the society. When faced with obstacles, they will normally resolve complications by admitting the fact that an individual should always adapt towards and obey the norm of the society instead of attempting to rebel it. Thus, when Chinese students seek motivations for their actions, they seek internally for those to motivate them to improve themselves for better adaptation. instead of seeking for motivations that lead them
to change external factors to suit their needs. Professor Li from Brown University has come to a similar conclusion about the self-made decision process of Chinese student based on her understanding of beliefs about learning: “Most Chinese terms dealt with ‘seeking knowledge’ including personal attitudes, purposes, and action plans for learning. Chinese conceptions also emphasized achievement standards of breadth and depth of knowledge, the unity of knowing and morality, and contributions to society.” (Li, 2003)

Seeking for the underlying motivation for Chinese students to study abroad is the key of this research, as the actions made in an international application are always determined by the motivation. Therefore, the process should always start with collecting feedback on their original motivation to study abroad.

Internet censorship in China

In addition to the various differences between Chinese students and students in the U.S., there is also another problem that obstructs Chinese art students from applying for U.S. art schools. The Chinese government’s efforts to inhibit Internet communication prevents a lot of online information from being accessed, and such information is sometimes critical for making online applications.

Most researchers agree that the Chinese government set up the Internet firewall mainly for political and societal issues, such as maintaining local media control (Yang, 2003). However, that doesn’t mean that the Internet firewall has no influence on the academic field. In fact, there is already evidence showing that “several well-known institutions of higher education, including the primary Web servers operated by Caltech, Columbia, MIT, and the University of Virginia were blocked.” (Zittrain and Benjamin). These institutional websites were not blocked mistakenly, they are indeed all part of a plan to prevent unselected culture invasion (Zhang, 2006). Due to these restrictions, it is a common phenomenon that Chinese students face difficulties in gathering the necessary information when
applying to schools in the U.S.

The internet censorship could not be shut down in a short time, so the information gap between US schools and Chinese students could not be narrowed easily. That is also the reason why a website providing comprehensive information about U.S. art and design schools is in demand.
05

RESEARCH PROCESS
In order to conduct research into the motivations and challenges with Chinese students applying for U.S. art and design schools, this research utilized Dr. Min Basadur’s “Simplex Process” (Basadur, 1994) as a methodological framework. Dr. Min Basadur describe the Simplex Process as the following:

"Simplex is an innovation process that harnesses creativity. It consists of deliberately finding and solving valuable problems, and implementing workable solutions that yield changes in the form of new and better products, services and procedures." (Basadur, 1994)

The Simplex Process has eight steps:

Find the problem
Find facts
Define the problem
Find ideas
Evaluate & select
Plan
Accepts/sell idea
Act/produce.

These eight steps can be summed up into three big phases: Problem Formulation, Solution Formulation, and Solution Implementation. The Simplex Process is a non-linear process, and in the practice of this methodology, could be used interatively.

The Simplex Process was selected because of its conciseness and efficiency. Due to the non-linear nature of the process, all eight steps are not necessarily required in solving specific problems. Within this research, only steps one through five were utilized.
DATA COLLECTION
Though there are many design research methods that exist, conducting participant interviews was the main method used to collect data. Interviewing is a fundamental research method that includes direct contact with participants to collect personal information such as experiences, opinions, attitudes and perceptions (Martin and Bruce, 2012).

The study convened 3 different groups of research participants:
4 undergraduate students;
10 graduate students studying in U.S. art and design schools;
4 faculty members who are responsible for admission;
2 study abroad agencies in China.

Method Description:

The proposed research engages interviewees through a variety of channels. WeChat’s group and friend’s recommendation function have been utilized to find undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty members were recommended by members from Across the Divide (Chinese Artists in U.S. Academia). The study abroad agencies are contacted via the communication means provided by their websites. Each interviewee was notified by an email attached with recruitment material, consent form and interview questions. The interview questionnaire consisted of 6 parts. The first part is an introduction and seeks for the interviewee’s approval to sign the consent form. The second part is the education background of the interviewee. The third part is about the interviewee’s experience of his/her application to U.S. art and design schools. In the fourth part, the interviewee is asked about the challenges faced throughout the application process. In the fifth part, the interviewee is asked about his/her experience and opinion of platforms that support Chinese students to study abroad. The last part of the questionnaire concludes the interview. (Recruitment material email for interviewees, consent form in appendix)
Most of the interviews were conducted over online video calls, due to the interviewees being scattered geographically around the world. The biggest challenge in conducting the interviews was to find a feasible time slot for both the interviewee and the interviewer, as the time difference between both could be as much as 13 hours.

The goal of the interview with the students:

The goal is to learn about their experience in applying to U.S. schools, more specifically on the difficulties they have experienced in the application process, and what kind of support might help.

The interview process and questions prepared for student interviewees are in appendix.

The goal of the interview with faculty members:

The questions are designed to understand the process of admission, how Chinese students are selected and problems they have with admission.

The interview process and questions prepared for faculty member interviewees are in appendix.

The goal of the interviews with the study abroad agencies:

The questions are designed to learn how agencies work, the challenges they face and their means of acquiring school information.

The interview process and questions prepared for agency interviewees are in appendix.
07

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS
Analysis:
Analysis is defined as the procedure by which we break down an intellectual or substantial whole into parts or components.

Synthesis:
Synthesis is defined as the opposite procedure: to combine separate elements or components in order to form a coherent whole.

Persona:
Persona, (also user persona, customer persona, buyer persona) in user-centered design and marketing is a fictional character created to represent a user type that might use a site, brand, or product in a similar way.

After conducting 20 interviews, information from the interviews is transcribed onto Post-its. Data from the same interviewee is transcribed onto Post-its with the same color, and each interviewee is assigned with a different color of post-it. The post-its are then categorized into different clusters as follows: 1. background; 2. education background; 3. reason; 4. goal; 5. information sources; 6. application process; 7. challenges; 8. solutions/ideas. The clusters are deduced based on the interview questions addressed in the previous section.

The Post-it aided categorization procedure helps to review data collected with an understanding of the bigger picture. It also helps researchers develop personas. The development of personas is addressed in detail in the next section.
Data under each cluster undergoes analysis and is later rearranged using the Affinity Clustering method. By using the Affinity Clustering method, a large amount of data is organized into smaller groups with different tags.

The Affinity Clustering narrows down clusters of information by merging clusters with smaller amounts of information together in order to form a larger information cluster. Within the different clusters, some information is repeatedly mentioned by different interviewees, creating patterns of responses. Those patterns become labeled as key insights into the main problem, and key design criteria needed for the solution. Eventually, the Affinity Cluster helps to deepen an understanding of the information collected. A detailed map of how the data was grouped and regrouped is illustrated in the following figure.
After conducting analysis and synthesis of the interview data, different visual maps are created to help visualize and understand Chinese students’ situations within U.S. art and design school application processes.

A stakeholder map is a visual tool that “helps to visually consolidate and communicate the key constituents of a design project, setting the stage for user-centered research and design development” (Martin and Bruce, 2012). In this research, the stakeholder map is used to help visualize and understand how the information is transferred between different roles involved in an international application to a U.S. art and design school.

As shown by the stakeholder map, the Chinese art students that apply to U.S. art and design schools have a rather diverse group of sources to acquire information based on their background.

Chinese students who apply for undergraduate school, and those who apply for graduate school under a different major from their undergraduate school source information from following medium: 1. internet; 2. classmates; 3. friends; 4. family members.

Chinese students who apply to graduate school under the same major as their undergraduate school source information from following medium: 1. internet; 2. classmates; 3. friends; 4. family members; 5. alma mater; 6. alma mater’s teacher; 7. alumnus who study abroad.

The application-related information of the applying student is then delivered to study abroad agency, or directly to the U.S. schools, depending on whether the applicant is utilizing the service provided by the agencies or not. There are two kinds of study abroad agencies in China: larger agencies and relatively smaller agencies. The larger agencies provide a variety of services and are able to help students resolve issues throughout the application process. The smaller agencies focus on helping students develop portfolios, which is rather critical for students applying to art and design schools, where creating a portfolio is one of the most important requirements for admission.

Faculties and advisors in U.S. schools are also reliable sources to attain
**Stakeholder Map**

### Information Source
- Internet
  - Online forum of study abroad
  - U.S. art and design school's website
- Classmates
- Friends
- Family members
- Alma mater
- Alma mater's teachers
- Alumnus who study abroad

### User
- Chinese students who apply for undergraduate school
- Chinese students who apply for graduate school
- Choose a different major from undergraduate
- Choose a same major from undergraduate

### Communication
- Apply school by self
- Go to school
- Go to agency
- Go to school

### U.S. Art and Design School
- Undergraduate school
  - FacultyA
  - Advisor
- Graduate school
  - FacultyA
  - Advisor

### Study abroad agencies in China
- Big agency
  - (Full service)
- Small art and design studio
  - (focus on portfolio)
information about the application process. Chinese students can choose to communicate with teachers and advisers from U.S. art and design schools. However, some of the top ranked schools might not be able to answer students’ questions through e-mails, and the only way students are able to acquire desired advice and guidance is to attend the school’s open house. It is rather difficult for Chinese art students to attend open houses overseas just to gather admission information. Thus, most Chinese students do not communicate much with schools before applying.

Regrouped data is used to construct user images using the persona method. Each persona is developed based on the information collected from interviews. The goal of creating a persona is to look for behavior patterns and themes that constitute commonalities. Three personas were developed from the interview data:

1. Frank Wang, a male Chinese college student majoring in sculpture, and is applying for graduate school of art and design with a major in sculpture.

2. Vivian Chen, a female Chinese college student majoring in communication engineering, and is applying for graduate study at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) for a major in Design for Social Innovation.

3. David Li, a male Chinese high school student who has no relevant major background, and is applying to an undergraduate program at a school of art and design in the U.S.

Finally, in order to get a clearer view of information from every persona, journey maps are created. The journey map is built based on the application process of each persona, and with a focus on the pain points in each application step.
Frank Wang learned a lot about European history and culture at Guangzhou international school during his teenage years, and developed a passion with sculpture. Afterwards, he went to the undergraduate school of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, which is one of the most famous art school in China, and started to learn sculpture, as a sophomore, he participated in a yearlong exchange program at California State University-Long Beach, where he had the opportunity to experience a U.S. school and culture in person.

His goal is to complete master’s in the U.S. and become a sculpture teacher in a college of China.

Frank’s school application process is shown in the map. His first main step is to prepare the material he needs for the application. He does not have problems with this step, because his English is proficient, and he has a decent portfolio. His second main step is to find and select candidate schools. He focuses on the top ten ranked since he has a high GPA and fair curricular record. In addition to art schools in the U.S., he also wants to apply to the University of the Arts London, as he has been dreaming to study there since he was young. However, he has difficulties during the application preparation and submission step. He lacks experience in presenting his works in a design portfolio, and summarizing his art experience in words. Therefore, in order to submit his oversized portfolio and adhere to the maximum file size requirement of the application platform, he has to reduce the image quality of his works. After multiple attempts and failure, he eventually managed to submit his portfolio. Now, he is stuck in the waiting process to hear from the schools he has applied to, which is uncomfortable for him; he does not know what to do other than wait.
The biggest challenge was the portfolio: how to select works, how many works in the portfolio, how to write the description, how to design the portfolio. Do not know how to write the personal statement, it should describe his experiences or the reason he chose the school.

The application website had technical issues which made it difficult to submit successfully.

Unsure if there were things to do while waiting.

He did not know how to answer some questions.

The biggest challenge was the portfolio: how to select works, how many works in the portfolio, how to write the description, how to design the portfolio.

Reason and Goal
- Exchange study experience went well, so wanted to come back for graduate school.
- The goal is to get a masters degree, then to be a college teacher.

Information sources
- Likes to listen to English music and watch English-language movies to understand western culture.
- Most information came from online forums, some information from friends.
- Got a lot of useful information from senior student to understand U.S. Art school.
- During exchange study period had a part time job in University of Southern California (USC).

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- Got a lot of useful information from senior student to understand U.S. Art school.
- During exchange study period had a part time job in University of Southern California (USC).

Frank Wang

Education background
- Middle school
- Guangzhou international school, learned European history and culture
- Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts
- Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts with a major in sculpture

- High school
- Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts
- Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts with a major in sculpture

- Undergraduate school
- California State University – Long Beach (CSULB), sophomore
- California State University – Long Beach (CSULB), majored in sculpture

- Exchange study
- Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts

- Graduate school
- California State University – Long Beach (CSULB), majored in sculpture

Reason and Goal
- Exchange study experience went well, so wanted to come back for graduate school.
- The goal is to get a masters degree, then to be a college teacher.

Information sources
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- During exchange study period had a part time job in University of Southern California (USC).
Vivian Chen has graduated from Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications with a major in communication engineering. After her graduation, she got an internship at Baidu SUX. After one year, she planned to pursue a masters in the U.S., given the U.S. education style and suggestions from her family. Her interest is in interaction design, therefore she plans to apply to a U.S. art and design school with a major in interaction design.

Her goal is to complete her masters degree and find a job in the U.S.

Her school application process is shown in the map. Her English is good enough to pass the English test so she does not have to worry about it. Other than that, she has problems with every successive step. She does not have any interaction design-related work experience, nor does she have any experience in preparing school applications. Thus, she has to find an agency to help her. The biggest problem for her is that she does not have any work to present in her portfolio. So, she has to start designing some works with the help from an agency. Another issue is school selection, as she has little understanding about the art and design schools in the U.S., so she is only able to select schools based on U.S. NEWS rankings. She managed to submit her application with the help of an agency, however, it is again difficult for her to find a recommended interaction design professor to communicate with, as her professors from Beijing are oriented in the field of communication engineering. She has also tried to apply for scholarships, but has had no luck in receiving any.

Her application was successful and she was admitted, however, after the semester started, she found the school’s teaching style and curriculum wasn’t quite what she had expected. She has been exhausted in the process of trying to catch up every day, and since then she has lost her interest in interaction design.
**Reason and Goal**
- She likes U.S. education style and is interested in interaction design, so changed her major with her brother and parents suggestion.
- The goal is earn her masters in U.S. and work in U.S.

**Information sources**
- U.S. have a lot of famous schools. She read a lot news about U.S. schools
- Most information from online forums like Taisha and Yimusanfendi
- Some information from study abroad agency

**Vivian Chen**

- **Age**: 27
- **Gender**: Female
- **Location**: New York

**Education and work background**

**Graduate school**
- School of Visual Arts, majored of interaction design

**Internship**
- Baidu SUX, and Opera

**Undergraduate school**
- Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, majored in Communications Engineering

**Pain Points**
1. Did not have interaction design works. She needed to design some works for the portfolio.
2. Less understanding of art and design schools in the U.S. and there is little information on the network.
3. Do not have any experience with interaction design, do not know how to write it professionally.
4. Very hard to find an interaction design professor.
5. Tried to apply scholarship, but was not successful.
6. The school’s teaching style and curriculum were unexpected.

**Stage**
- **English test**
- **Study abroad agency**
- **Find and select schools**
- **Prepare the application**
- **Submit application**
- **Waiting**
- **Get offer**
- **Go to school**

**Application Journey**
1. **Find a study abroad agency**
   - Find a study abroad agency that can help with an interaction design portfolio.
2. **Find art and design schools**
3. **Prepare files for apply school**
   - Prepare undergraduate school transcript
   - Agency help her design portfolio
   - Write personal statements
   - Write resume
4. **Find and select schools**
   - Tried to understand 15 schools, applied to 3 schools. All schools had an online application process.
5. **Understand and select schools**
   - Less understanding of art and design schools in the U.S. and there is little information on the network.
6. **Fill out the application forms**
7. **Submit all files**
   - Submit transcript, portfolio, personal statements, resume
   - Find recommended person
8. **Waiting**
9. **Get offer**
10. **Select one school**
11. **Go to school**

**Age**
- **27**

**Gender**
- **Female**

**Location**
- **New York**

**Education and work background**

**Graduate school**
- School of Visual Arts, majored of interaction design

**Internship**
- Baidu SUX, and Opera

**Undergraduate school**
- Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, majored in Communications Engineering

**Information sources**
- U.S. have a lot of famous schools. She read a lot news about U.S. schools
- Most information from online forums like Taisha and Yimusanfendi
- Some information from study abroad agency
David Li attended high school at a Beijing international school. Driven by the advice from his parents, and the fact that he did not receive any offers from a Chinese University, his goal is to pursue a bachelor’s degree in an undergraduate program at a U.S. art and design school.

The agency helped him to figure out most of the school application requirements, because he used one of the biggest agencies in China, even though the service fee is was very expensive. The biggest challenge for him is to pass the English proficiency test, which is something that he struggles with. He does not have any challenges with school and major selections, as he has no experience with art and design at all. He picks the industrial design major, because he finds it “pretty cool.” He has secured seven offers, but he does not know which one he should choose.

Due to most of the application job was done by the agency, David was not very involved in the application process. So he spent most of his time learning English. His parents complained that the service fee for the agency was too expensive, even for a wealthy family as theirs. However, his parents supported him anyway because they really wanted him to go to college.
Some schools have a lot of campuses, so do not know the differences between different campuses. Never know all 15 schools. He can only apply for a major that does not need a portfolio, such as jewelry design, because he did not have work and experience.

Reason and Goal
- Parental advice and did not get any offers from Chinese university
- Get a university degree

Information sources
- Most information from agency
- Some information from friends and classmates

David Li

Undergraduate school: Arizona State University, industrial design
High school: Beijing International School

Application Journey
1. English test
   SAT, TOEFL
2. Study abroad agency
   Choose Xindongfang English SAT and TOEFL tutoring class, it is one of the biggest English education agencies.
3. Find and select schools
   Find art and design schools
4. Understand and select schools
   The agency recommended 15 schools based on transcripts.
   - Select 10 schools. Select different majors.
5. Prepare the application
   Prepare files to apply to school
   - Agency helped him write personal statements and resume
6. Submit application
   Fill out the application forms
7. Waiting
   Submit all files
8. Get offer
   - Submit transcript, personal statements, resume
   - Find recommended person
9. Go to school
   Select one school
   - Got 7 offers, but did not know how to choose

Pain Points
- He does not like learning English, but did not have any other choice, because he did not get any offer in China.
- The service fee is too expensive.
- Some schools have a lot of campuses, so do not know the differences between different campuses. Never know all 15 schools.
- He can only apply for a major that does not need a portfolio, such as jewelry design, because he did not have work and experience.
Ideation is the process of creating new ideas. It is an essential part of the design process. In the ideation process, ideas that could resolve the current problems were created based on the existing resources. In this research, data collected from the interviewees are analyzed and regrouped in the previous sections of the proposed research. Personas are developed based on the analysis results, and the journey maps revealed the pain points in the international application procedure. In addition, an individual brainstorming about how the pain points could be resolved is presented in this section.

Individual brainstorming is a method used to find solutions for a specific problem by generating a list of ideas effectively. In this research, individual brainstorming is used to generate ideas for solutions to pain points that are revealed in the journey maps.

During ideation, pain points from all the journey maps are gathered together. A minute long individual brainstorm is conducted for each pain point, and the relevant ideas generated are then recorded. A solution map is developed based on the recorded ideas. The ideas are judged based on their practicability for the project. Ideas that can be fulfilled are reserved, and unachievable ideas are deleted in this procedure.

The solution map is designed based on the journey map. The top part indicates the journey, the middle part contains the problem space, and the bottom part lists the solutions. The red points indicate the problems solved and the black points mark the unsolved problems.
Solution Map

Stage: Prepare the material
Study abroad agency
Find and select schools
Prepare the application
Submit application
Waiting
Get offer
Go to school

Application Journey

1. SAT, TOEFL
2. Collect works for portfolio
3. Find a big study abroad agency
4. Find art and design schools
5. Understand and select schools
6. Prepare files for apply school
7. Fill out the application forms
8. Submit all files
9. Waiting
10. Get offers
11. Select one school
12. Go to school

Problem space
- Do not have works for the portfolio.
- The service fee is too expensive.
- Less understanding of art and design schools in the U.S. and there is little information on the network.
- Do not know how to design portfolios. Do not know how to write the personal statement and resume.
- Some application questions how to answer.
- There are a lot of bugs on the application website.
- Very hard to find a good recommended person.
- Unsure if there were things to do while waiting. Tried to apply scholarship but did not get any scholarships.
- Do not know how to choose
- The school's teaching style and curriculum were unexpected

Solutions
- Online service, free or low price service.
- Free schools and majors information, free experience articles, online forum.
- Online personal service of design portfolios and writing.
- Online forum allowing users to ask and answer questions.
- Ask questions on the online forum.
- Find more information to better understand schools
- Better understanding of the schools before applying.
10 EVALUATIVE RESEARCH
In this section, the main function of the information platform which derived based on the solution map developed in the previous section was listed. Function card method was then used to gather feedback about the functions. Function card method is a technique in user experience design. Possible functions was written on index cards, and test subjects then make judges on the usefulness of the function. In this research, three Chinese students who just finished international application process was selected as the test subject. The main functions are as follows:

• Provide tutoring on building design portfolios and writing at a price 25% lower than the existing intermediaries’ agencies.

  - An online tutor is much cheaper than an offline tutor, online service inflicts only 25% of the cost of offline service.
  - Online tutors can provide counseling on design portfolios building and writing.

• Build an online forum that allows the users to ask, answer questions, discuss and share information among themselves. (Free)

  - This function is free.
  - It allows users to ask, answer questions and discuss.
  - Users are allowed to publish non-confidential information regarding their application process.

• Build a platform for users to get a specific tutor to answer their questions at a price. (e.g. every question 50RMB-7 $, or you can make a price by yourself)

  - The student users find the right tutor to answer their question by browsing through their personal statement.

    For the tutor:
  - The platform charges a service fee for each question answered, such as 2$ per question.
  - Once the user marks the answer as satisfied, the money will be transferred to the tutor.
  - If the answer is not satisfied, the user can withdraw the money and provide feedback for the tutor.
  - If the answer is vicious, the user can choose to report the person.
  - The user can vote for the tutor that answers his/her questions.
- Every tutor is allowed to price their own answers.
- New tutors are allowed to provide free answers to build up reputations.

- **Provide application related school information**

- School information
- Majors’ introduction

- **Build an online space for people to share experiences.** (application experience blog, study and living abroad experience)

- This is a free function.
- Students can share their school application experiences, be it a successful attempt or a failure.
- Students currently studying in the U.S. can share schools information, course schedule, American life.

This research did not push the development of the platform beyond the prototype, because there is still a significant amount of tests and amendments to be applied before this prototype could become a product. It is always cheaper and easier to make functional changes in the early development stage than making changes after the deployment of the product.

To evaluate the ideas, 3 participants were recruited based on recommendations from interviewees. Function card work sheets were given to the participants, and they were given instructions on the functions of the prototype, and were allowed to ask questions during the process. The participants graded each function based on their opinion on a scale of 0 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied) and wrote down the reasons for their ratings. Responses to every function were recorded.

Based on feedback from the participants, the dispensable functions are selected with the corresponding reason listed. The function dispensed is the free information about the school.
Function test survey. Please vote for every function card, the more useful the score higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low price online personal service of design portfolios and writing. Service fee are less than 25% of existing intermediaries agencies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online forum allowing users to ask, answer questions and discuss. (Free)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions for specific person, you should pay for the answer. (ex. every question 50RMB-7 $, or you can mark a price by yourself)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free information (schools and majors introduction)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online space for people to share experiences. (application experience blog, study and living abroad experience)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• “Provide tutoring on building design portfolios and writing at a lower price.” Scored 3 points.

Students really need personal service for the portfolio and writing, but online service is not enough as it is not efficient to discuss the problem in detail comparing to face to face discussion. The participants show doubt about providing service with an acceptable level of quality at such a low price.

• “Build an online forum that allows the users to ask, answer questions, discuss and share information among themselves.” Scored 5 points.

• “Build a platform for users to get a specific tutor to answer their questions at a price.” Scored 4 points.

• “Provide application related school information.” Scored 2.3 points.

This particular function scored so badly because of the students’ need for information that can grant them more insights, compared to what is available on the school website. They need more detailed information such as class schedule, each professor's education style.

• “Build an online space for people to share experiences.” Scored 5 points.
CONCLUSIONS
How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to a U.S. art and design school?

Through a people-centered research process, a model for an information providing website designed to support Chinese students making applications to U.S. art and design schools was developed, designed and visualized.

A: Online forum allowing users to ask, answer questions and discuss. (Free)

Many schools in small towns, how about the traffic? Is it convenient for public transport?

Chinese students who apply for the U.S. art and design school

Q & A: Many schools in small towns, how about the traffic? Is it convenient for public transport?

Lee: You’d better buy a car.

Wu: As my experience...

Chen: Which school?

Me: Such as Arizona State University

Sun: No bus!! No subway!! No taxi!! Good luck!

Yang: I suggest you’d better...

B: Online space for people to share experiences/ blogs. (Free)

How about School of Art Institute of Chicago graduate school?

Lee

School of Art Institute of Chicago graduate school

Architecture

Why I chose SVA, Graduate school

As a graduate student at SAIC, you will focus, study intensively, and learn from some of the most renowned faculty in the world. You will develop professional friendships and mentor relationships that will influence you for decades to come. You will have the opportunity to cross boundaries between disciplines. A course in photography could help you to see architecture more clearly. Or an art history seminar could expose you to the alternative peer perspectives of an artist, curator, or therapist...

Lee

I need a tutor counseling my portfolio design and writing.

C: Low price online tutor of design portfolios and writing.

Tutor of apply U.S. Art & Design School

Undergraduate school

Graduate school

Chinese students who apply for the U.S. art and design school

Education background:

Rob

Amy

Life: I have three years experience of ...

Reviews:

Wu: She is good tutor...

Lee: Very good...

Chen: ...

Q & A

Question: Do you know how to...

Answer: Yes, as my experience...

Find and select schools

Function be used: A, B, D

Find and select school should understanding schools first, users can go to the schools’ website get some official information, but they also need more experiences from students and professors.

• Ask question on online forum
• Read blogs about schools
• Find a senior students ask questions

Prepare the application

Function be used: A, B, C, D

Prepare the application is one of the most important steps. According to the research, most students need counseling on design portfolios and writing

• Ask question on online forum
• Read experience blogs
• Online tutor is cheaper than offline.
• Find a senior students ask questions
Function be used: A, B, D

There are many forms that need to be submitted, sometimes there are some problems

- Ask question on online forum
- Read experience blogs
- Find a senior student ask questions

Basic on the tutors' personal statement, students can find a right person, then ask questions for the tutor.

This service is low price or free (e.g., ask one question user should pay 2$ to the platform).

After the user gets the satisfactory answer, this money will send to the tutor.

If the answer is not satisfied, the user can withdraw the money and feedback to the tutor.

If the answer is a vicious answer, the user can report the person.

Users can vote the tutor who answers your question.

Tutors price the answer by themselves.

The new tutor can price free to attract more students.
This research constructs a solution model for an information-providing website designed to support Chinese students in making online applications to U.S. art and design schools. The necessary information needed to make a successful international application was analyzed, and based on the information needed, the basic functions of the information-providing website were identified.

The solution model is designed by using scenarios and is based on simple journey. There are four functions in the model that each depicts four different scenes of how that function works. The features of each function are described on the map.

The high diversity of skill levels and backgrounds of Chinese students makes it hard for them to be categorized and find commonalities. To overcome this problem, several methods were used in this research. At first, interviews were used to collect data from international students. Then, the answers were regrouped under different tags before they were analyzed, and an individual brainstorm took place in order to generate ideas resolve the pain points revealed by the answers. Finally, a solution map that addresses the pain points was developed so that the critical functions of the proposed platform to support Chinese students in their application process are determined.

The population of Chinese international students in the U.S. is growing rapidly, and the need of relevant services is on the rise. The solution model presented in this research works as a guide for constructing an information-providing website. Meanwhile, this thesis also provides a method of researching the need of an international student group.


Design Thinking

Design Thinking is a methodology used by designers to solve problems, and find desirable solutions for clients. Design Thinking draws upon logic, imagination, intuition, and systemic reasoning, to explore possibilities of what could be—and to create desired outcomes that benefit the end user.

“Design thinking can be described as a discipline that uses the designer’s sensibility and methods to match people’s needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable business strategy can convert into customer value and market opportunity.”

– Tim Brown CEO, IDEO

People-Centered Design Research

People-centered design is a rapid and iterative interaction design methodology focused on understanding and engaging individuals in ways that are useful, usable, and desirable.

Institute of International Education

The Institute of International Education is a 501 organization which focuses on International Student Exchange and Aid, Foreign Affairs, and International Peace and Security.

DMI

The Design Management Institute (DMI) is the leading resource and international authority on design management. Founded in 1975, DMI is a nonprofit organization that seeks to heighten awareness of design as an essential part of business strategy. DMI has earned a reputation worldwide as a multifaceted resource, providing the latest thinking, strategies, tools, and training through its conferences, seminars, membership program, and publications.

TOEFL

Test of English as a Foreign Language
IELTS
International English Language Testing System

GRE
Graduate Record ExaminationIELTS
International English Language Testing System

VPN
VPN (Virtual Private Network) is a method used to add security and privacy to private and public networks, like WiFi Hotspots and the Internet. VPNs are most often used by corporations to protect sensitive data.

Analysis
Analysis is defined as the procedure by which we break down an intellectual or substantial whole into parts or components.

Synthesis
Synthesis is defined as the opposite procedure: to combine separate elements or components in order to form a coherent whole.

Persona
Persona, (also user persona, customer persona, buyer persona) in user-centered design and marketing is a fictional character created to represent a user type that might use a site, brand, or product in a similar way.

Affinity Clustering
Affinity clustering (LUMA Institute, 2012, 40): A convergent method used to identify patterns within data. Research participants and/or designers categorize data (usually captured on Post-it notes) by similar sentiment and then create overarching themes for each category.
Email for Chinese students who are preparing their applications and Chinese students who are already in American art and design schools.

Hi.

Are you a Chinese student who is preparing an application or who is already enrolled in an American art and design school? If so, please tell us about your application process?

The purpose of this interview is to study methods of developing a platform that supports Chinese students with the information necessary for completing a successful application to an American art and design school. You must be a Chinese student who is preparing an application or a student who is already in American art and design school.

I am a graduate student from Herron school of art and design in Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, majored in Visual Communication Design.

If you are interested or have any questions, please email me at linjchen@umail.iu.edu.

Please refer to attachment

Thank you,

Linjun Chen

Visual Communication Design

Herron school of art and design

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis
Recruitment material email for faculty admission member

Email for faculty who is responsible for the admission.

Hi.

Are you an American art and design school faculty who is responsible for admission? If so, I sincerely invite you to participate in my interview.

The purpose of this interview is to study methods of developing a platform that supports Chinese students with the information necessary for completing a successful application to an American art and design school. You must be an American art and design school professor who is responsible for admission.

I am a graduate student from Herron school of art and design in Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, majored in Visual Communication Design.

If you are interested or have any questions, please email me at linjchen@umail.iu.edu.

Please refer to attachment

Thank you,

Linjun Chen

Visual Communication Design

Herron school of art and design

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis
How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school?

This document is an interview consent form. You are being asked to take part in a research study to support Chinese students to acquire the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school. We are asking you to take part because you signed up through email for this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how to develop a platform to support Chinese students to acquire the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school. You must be a Chinese student who is preparing the applications or a student who is already in American art and design school.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experience of applying to American art and design schools, the American art and design schools about which you understand the teaching-style and teaching-objectives, how you chose schools to apply to, a description of your application process, what challenges you faced, and how you solved these problems. The interview will take about one hour to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. I hope to learn more about Chinese students who are preparing their applications and students who are already in American art and design schools.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any
questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Cornell University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Linjun Chen (a graduate student from Herron school of art and design in Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, majored in Visual Communication Design.). Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Linjun Chen at injchen@umail.iu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 317-274-8289 or access their website at http://researchcompliance.iu.edu/hs/o/index.html.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____________________________________ Date ___________________________

Your Name (printed) __________________________________________________________________

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____________________________________ Date ___________________________

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.
Interview Consent Form for Faculty

How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school?

This document is an interview consent form. You are being asked to take part in a research study to support Chinese students to acquire the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school. We are asking you to take part because you signed up through email for this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how to develop a platform to support Chinese students to acquire the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school. You must be an American art and design school’s professor who is responsible for the admission.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experience of art and design school’s admissions work, the American art and design schools about which you understand the teaching-style and teaching-objectives, how you chose Chinese international students, how do you think about your school’s application system, what challenges you faced of chose Chinese international students, and how you solved these problems. The interview will take about one hour to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. I hope to learn more about Chinese students who are preparing their applications and students who are already in American art and design schools.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.
How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school?

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Cornell University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Linjun Chen. (a graduate student from Herron school of art and design in Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, majored in Visual Communication Design.) Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Linjun Chen at injchen@umail.iu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 317-274-8289 or access their website at http://researchcompliance.iu.edu/hso/index.html.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _______________________________ Date ___________________________

Your Name (printed) ___________________________________________________________________

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _______________________________ Date ___________________________

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What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how to develop a platform to support Chinese students to acquire the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school. You must be working in a Chinese agency which supporting Chinese students study abroad.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experience of supporting Chinese students study abroad, how to help students chose schools, how many students apply art and design schools, what challenges you faced, and how you solved these problems. The interview will take about one hour to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

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How might we support Chinese students in acquiring the information necessary for making a successful application to an American art and design school?

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Interview Questions for Students:

• Introduction : 3 minutes

1. The Interviewer/observer will introduce themselves and welcome the participant.

2. The interviewer briefly explains the objective of the interview.

3. The interviewer will let the interviewee know that he/she will take notes and record the interview.

4. The interviewer will ask if the interviewee would like to grant the consent by signing a waiver.

5. The interviewer will stress that there is no right or wrong answer, it is more important for the interviewee to answer the questions according to their own experience and opinions.

• Context : 7 minutes

6. Could you describe your education and employment background?

7. Why did you apply to an American art and design school?

8. How much did you know about American art and design schools before you decided to apply?

9. How much did you know about American art and design schools teaching-style and teaching-objectives before you decided to apply?

10. How do you know you are a suitable candidate for American education?

• Touch points : 25 minutes

11. How many schools had you evaluated before you applied?

12. Which are the criteria that you had considered in your evaluation?

13. Did you contact the schools’ professors before you proceed to application?

14. How many schools did you apply to?

15. Did you use the information and services provided by Chinese study abroad service agencies? If the answer is yes, can you please name the one that you find the most helpful? Can you please address in which aspects do you find their service and information provided helpful?

16. How many schools did you apply for online? How many schools did you apply to by mail?
How many schools had you had a face to face interview with?

17. Can you please tell me about the key steps that you can recall about your application process?

18. How many schools did you successfully apply to?

19. How many offers did you manage to secure?

20. Did you apply for scholarships? Did you manage to get any of them? Would you mind to disclose the amount of funding that you have received?

• Challenges: 10 minutes

21. Can you please address some of the challenges you faced during the process of the application.

22. How did you manage to solve some of these problems?

• Platforms: 10 minutes

23. Did you check any Chinese study abroad service platforms for school relating information before you applied?

24. Did you find any platform that provides sufficient supports as you applied to American art and design schools?

25. To build a platform to support Chinese students applying to American art and design schools, what kind information do you feel it should include to cover the assistance you had been seeking for during your application?

• Thank you/closing: 5 minute

26. Is there anything you want to share about your application process experience that we did not touch upon?

27. Is there any additional comments about the interview?
Interview Questions for Faculty:

• Introduction : 3 minutes

1. The Interviewer/observer will introduce themselves and welcome the participant.
2. The interviewer briefly explains the objective of the interview.
3. The interviewer will let the interviewee know that he/she will take notes and record the interview.
4. The interviewer will ask if the interviewee would like to grant the consent by signing a waiver.
5. The interviewer will stress that there is no right or wrong answer, it is more important for the interviewee to answer the questions according to their own experience and opinions.

• Context: 5 minutes

6. Which school do you work for? Do you know how your school ranks in the U.S.?
7. How many majors are there in your school?
8. What is the percentage of Chinese students enrolled in your school for the last 5 years?
9. How long have you been a faculty member at your school?
10. How long have you been a faculty admission member at your school?
11. What are your responsibilities in your school?

• Touch points: 25 minutes

12. Does your school have a website?
13. Do you think the website provides enough information for students to have a brief understanding about your school?
14. Is the website properly maintained by the IT department?
15. Which are the means that a student can utilize to apply to your school? Can they apply online or by mail? Is a face to face interview required for every applicant?
16. How well do you know about your school application process?
17. Was your school application system designed under the supervision of the school or solely developed by an outsource company?
18. What do you think about the application system of your school?
19. Do you know the percentage of students & Chinese students who successfully submit their
application?
20. Does the art school application system have a survey about Chinese students similar to other non-art schools?
21. Is it common for a Chinese art student to contact you or the school before they apply? Can you please provide a rough annual figure for the number of students that had contacted you and the school?
22. How many Chinese students have successfully applied to your school every year in the last five years?
23. How many Chinese students receive an offer from your school every year?
24. What is the percentage of students enrolled at your school every year? (applied & offered)
25. Can you please briefly explain the student selection process in your school and the key considerations?
26. Can you please briefly address the differences between American and Chinese art students? (Personal statement, resume, portfolio)
27. Are you aware of the large number of study abroad service agencies in China?
28. Are you familiar with them? Do you know what kind of services they provide?
29. How many students apply for a scholarship every year? What is the scholarship application success rate? How much funding do they receive on average?

• Challenges: 10 minutes
30. Can you address some of the challenges faced by you/your school during the process of admission?
31. How have you solved these problems?

• Platforms: 10 minutes
32. To build a platform to support Chinese students applying to American art and design schools, what kind information do you feel it should include to cover to provide essential assistance for student applicants?

• Thank you/closing: 5 minute
33. Is there anything you want to share about your application process experience that we did not touch upon?
34. Is there any additional comments about the interview?
Interview Questions for Agency:

• Introduction: 3 minutes

1. The Interviewer/observer will introduce themselves and welcome the participant.
2. The interviewer briefly explains the objective of the interview.
3. The interviewer will let the interviewee know that he/she will take notes and record the interview.
4. The interviewer will ask if the interviewee would like to grant the consent by signing a waiver.
5. The interviewer will stress that there is no right or wrong answer, it is more important for the interviewee to answer the questions according to their own experience and opinions.

• Context: 5 minutes

6. When was your study abroad agency founded?
7. How long have you been working at the agency?
8. Could you give a brief introduction to your background?
9. What are your responsibilities in the agency?

• Touch points: 25 minutes

10. Does your agency have a website?
11. Does your agency provide English proficiency trainings? What are the admission requirements of your courses? For example, if there is a student with a 2.0 GPA and a TOEFL score of 60 who wishes to apply to a U.S. graduate school, would you accept his/her application?
12. How many students utilized the services provided by your agency so far? How many of them got an offer?
13. What is the percentage of students who applied to U.S. schools?
14. What is the percentage of the students applied to U.S art and design students?
15. How many different kinds of service does your agency provide?
16. How much is the service fee charged by your agency for different services?
17. An art and design student is required to submit a portfolio. Does your agency have professional teachers to support students in preparing their portfolio?
18. How does the agency help students to select schools?
19. How does the agency help students to apply to schools?

20. What is the main difference in the application process for undergraduate school and graduate school?

• Challenges: 10 minutes

21. Are there any particular challenges that you have faced while working for the agency?

22. How do you solve these problems?

• Platforms: 10 minutes

23. To build a platform to support Chinese students applying to American art and design schools, what kind information do you feel it should include to cover to provide essential assistance for student applicants?

24. I hope to work with the agency to build a platform to support Chinese students applying to American art and design schools. Are you interested in this? If yes, you can email me later, I can send you a detailed plan.

• Thank you/closing: 5 minute

25. Is there anything you want to share about your application process experience that we did not touch upon?

26. Is there any additional comments about the interview?
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* tool for interview (Agency)
Interview Broad Data Notes

High school of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts

Undergraduate school in The Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, sculpture

Sophomore exchange student to CSULB

Graduate school California State University – Long Beach (CSULB), sculpture

Cousin study in America

Like Western Education

Information from cousin first

Like listen to English music, watch TV series and movies, through those understand Western cultural.

From seniors got informations to understand U.S. Art school

Exchange study period have a part time job about translate in University of Southern California (USC)

Exchange study period to learn some schools, UC Irvine (UCI), UCS

Exchange study period feel very good, plan to came back read master.

USC 1/3 Chinese students

UCS also have a lot Chinese students, but not like USC, because the location not in big city

Applied University of the Arts London-Chelsea College of Art and Design (UAL)

UAL have admissions meeting in Guangzhou, this is a very good opportunity to better understand school

I am very good at face to face interview

I am not good at mail my work to school

Got an offer from UAL, after got the offer applied CSULB

CSULB’s instructor is very impressed with me
I got 60% scholarship

I also applied Chicago Art Institute, Yale but do not got an offer

Two years master school fee about $1,5000, 30 credit

The master is a three years program, but he only used two years

IELTS test only, do not take TOEFL

IELTS also can apply U.S. schools

Do not need GRE

Applied all schools by himself

Most information from friends, senior from The Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art and some online forum

Applied 5 schools

Got two offer, UAL and CSULB

All 5 schools application are online

UAL can show your portfolio on the interview

Do not have Skype interview

have a lot challenges

every step have problems

The biggest challenges is design portfolio

Do not know how to select works

Do not know how to there should be have how many works in portfolio

Do not know how to write the describe

Do not know every schools style

Do not know how many pages in the portfolio

Do not know the portfolio size

Do not know how to write Personal statement

Do not know PS should write how many words
Do not know PS is a article to describe himself or why he choose the school

There do not have agencies focus on art and design at Guangzhou in 2013

He tried contacted one agency, but they do not have any experience about apply art school

His friends told him agencies are very expensive

He is not very rich, do not want to waste money on agencies

Most agencies focus on STEM in 2013

All schools apply information from friends, schoolmates, search online and teacher from Guangmei

He really need a platform to get information about apply school

If I can ask questions on the platform free or charge a little money it would better

Even on the platform only senior students answer questions, I would like ask questions on the platform, because he also got information from his senior students not from professors

CSULB Design have 10+ major, Fine art 20+ major

Undergraduate school have 100+ students

Graduate school have 40+ students

There have 2 Chinese students in graduate school

There have 6 Chinese students in graduate school

Now more and more Chinese students choose CSULB

The instructor was very impressed with me so give me scholarship when I was an exchange student

There have 1 Chinese professor in art school

Through the apply process, there have a lot bugs on the apply website

If the website have error only can wait

Websites error waste me a lot time, because I really do not know what can
I do, also do not know how to connect the website IT help office

Read graduate school in Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-ARC)

Architectural design

Central Academy of Fine Arts read undergraduate school major of architectural design from 2009-2014

Worked at Zaha Hadid Architects in Beijing from 2014-2016

Has been to Germany for 3 months

European design schools are expensive

European schools are more traditional

American schools are more diversified

SCI-ARC is one of the best school in architectural design

Zaha Hadid Architects is very good company but bachelor degree is less competitive on work, so read a graduate school is better

Zaha died in 2016, so he give up keep working in Zaha Hadid Architects

Before apply school, most information came from teacher, senior students and friends

Central Academy of Fine Arts’s teacher have a lot experience of abroad schools

SCI-ARC have a lot alumnus from Central Academy of Fine Arts

Middle school is international school, we learned some western history and culture, but more understanding of Europe

SCI-ARC’s education style similar of Central Academy of Fine Arts’

SCI-ARC is exactly the same as your own imagination

SCI-ARC’s education style is very flexible, learning atmosphere is very good

There totally have 45 students, 14 Chinese students

I also applied Columbia University, also have some alumnus at there
Alumnus told him Columbia University is traditional education style, SCI-ARC is better

SCI-ARC have a lot teacher from South America, at first can not understand what they said, but now can understand

I applied 6-7 schools, choose top 10

I find a agency, Xindongfang, also payed 3000$, but did not use them service, because they do not have enough experience on it.

They wrote letter of recommendation, PS for him, written very badly

Letter of recommendation he did not use because recommended person’s English very good, they do not like use the agency’s

He wrote PS in Chinese, XDF help him translation

XDF is one of the best English training institutions

He did not contact school before apply

6 schools are online apply, only Columbia University should mail portfolio

SCI-ARC have skype interview

He got three offers, SCI-ARC, Rhode Island School of Design and University of Pennsylvania

Do not have any scholarship

If Rhode Island gives full scholarships I will consider come there

Do not have very big challenges on apply, because I have enough works

Most information from school’s website or Baidu, Google search

Most time focus on TOEFL and GRE

Develop a platform is a good idea

This platform should have information of design portfolio

This platform should have majors ranking

This platform should have employment direction

Information needs to be accurate
If this platform only have senior students or RA, TA answer questions, maybe I will not pay for this platform, only read the free information.

If this platform have professors on it, I will use it.

SVA, Graduate school, Design for social innovation.

Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, undergraduate school, Communications Engineering.

Internship, Baidu SUX and Opera.

Because of interest in art design so changed major.

Her brother in Australia, but there do not have good school.

U.S. have a lot famous schools.

Before apply do not have enough information about U.S. art and design school.

I like U.S.'s education style.

I tried understand 15 schools, applied 10 schools.

I took some class about apply school in a small studio, the teacher is Tsinghua University's professor.

There only have class, only teacher how to write PS.

Also have another studio teacher how to design portfolio.

Two classes every week, they only give some suggestion.

9 schools are online apply. Purdue should mail portfolio.

Do not have any scholarship.

Got five offers SAIC, IUPUI, Purdue, SVA and Arizona state U.

The biggest challenge for the application process is the portfolio, because changed major, do not have very good works.

Designed 5 works for apply school.

Yimusafendi, Taisha forums.

Did not contact school before.
Do not know have open day

25-6 Chinese in her major

Almost have 1/4 Chinese students

All classes at night because all teachers have job

Ohio state university, undergraduate school, Mechanical Engineering changed to industrial design, because at beginning she do not know what she want to learn

California Institute of the Arts, Graduate school, three years 90 credit, Interactive Design

Most information from internet.

Some information from friends and classmates

The most important condition is location because she thought it is easy to find a good job in big city.

Schools’ ranking is also very important

She did contact school before apply

She applied 7 schools in top 10 schools

She got 6 offers, only did not got offer from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)

She forgot others, only remember SVA, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and University of California, UIUC, UW, UCSD

She never contact any agency

All schools are online apply

She got 50% scholarship from California Institute of the Arts

The biggest challenge is choose school

Because apply school do not have so much time, so choose schools very hurry

Did not well understand all schools she applied

She think Comprehensive institutions is better than Professional
institutions

Comprehensive institutions can learn more knowledge, such as marketing

Professional institutions have a lot limitations, can not learn enough knowledge

Professional institutions, the choice of course is extremely limited

Any big challenge is portfolio, she do not have very good works of Interactive Design, only have industrial design works

The Slidroom's space is very small, really do not know how to design the portfolio

She apply 7 schools only use one portfolio

I designed my portfolio reference to example portfolio from the RISD website

Some schools have themselves online forum, such as UW.

Big schools' website have rich information resources, the online forum can help her a lot

California Institute of the Arts graduate school of design only have three majors, totally only have about 100 students, 30-+ students every year

California Institute of the Arts do not have any online forum now

Last year have a lot Chinese students, almost 2/5

There have 10 Chinese students in her class, totally 40-+

She did not have the test of TOEFL and GRE because she read undergraduate school in U.S.

If there have a platform support students apply school she will be used

Really need a platform do introduction about the schools education style and object

She is very disappointed of her school now, there only have mini projects, she do not like it

Completing a real big project is better than making ten mini virtual projects
This is last year for her she is very lazy on study because she really do not want to keep doing the mini virtual projects.

She also talk with some students from other schools, every students have problem of education style.

Find a suitable school is very very important.

Wechat group is not necessary because do not have so much useful information.

I support you to build a platform for it.

For this platform, I think online forum is very necessary, it should be have some open questions can discuss.

Experience article is very useful.

Articles about process guidance.

Targeted issues. such as my self's portfolio problem, I should find sb answer my question. One on one service.

If students do not have portfolio and works, how to quickly design the portfolio.

I do not like schools open day and I do not suggest students come there because school have themselves objective, they want to more students, so they alway like have a workshop, only introduce the school, they do not introduce the detail of learning schedule.

After got offers, I choose this school because this school this the best one in my offers, it have scholarship and have a very good location.

Most study abroad agencies are very expensive.

V5 have three kinds of price services. 4500$ -writing, 7500$ -writing and part of portfolio & 10000$- writing, portfolio, transcripts and apply (Full service).

More and more students have enrollment in China, such as SAIC, SVA, CCA…

SVA is very easy to apply.

SVA is a very famous school but this school reputation is particularly bad in
China now

Most students can not get scholarship

We have more than 200 students applied undergraduate school in U.S. last year, but only have 8 students got scholarships

We have more than 60 students applied graduate school in U.S. almost half students got scholarships.

There are basically no schools asking for mailing now

Students in the application process, each step will be have problems

The biggest problem is portfolio

Most apply for undergraduate students do not have works before

Most students apply for graduate students do not have good works. Because they changed the major or they did not study hard in undergraduate school

Some students the already have a portfolio but the do not know how to choose works and how to design the portfolio meet the requirements of each school

Also have some students they do not have objective to study, the reasons for their study abroad are the parents' request.

Different students need different service

It is skillful to apply for a school

Students choose a right agency is very important

A right agency will help students a lot.

We have about 300 students this year

Some of them already got one or two offers before February 14

More and more students choose U.S. art and design schools, because the job situation is better than Europe

Most students pay attention to school rankings and geographical locations

Most students like west of U.S. because the weather is good and also have a lot famous schools
Most students do not focus on the learning goal before the apply
Most students do not well understand U.S. art and design school’s education objective
As agency we focusing on help students do apply for schools
If students need us help them choose school, we usually follow the TOEFL score and GPA, assess the level of students suitable for the number of schools ranked
Most students apply 5-10 schools
Almost every student can get an offer
There do not have any platform focusing on support art and design students study abroad.
Some students use Zhihu, Douban can find some useful information but really not enough
If you develop a platform it is a very good idea
This platform should have senior students answer questions and share experiences
Especially their schools’ education objective and suggest about portfolio
There would be many students to use it
For the fees, it can be voluntary reward, paid for answer questions
Voluntary reward is very popular in China now. If somebody write and share them articles on public platform, reader can voluntary reward.
Website bugs
IT help
Data Analysis

Interview