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VOYAGER STUDY ABROAD (VSA) Challenge Instructions



Challenge Presented by: Voyager Study Abroad, USA, www.voyagereurope.com

Webinars: To provide students with an opportunity to learn more about the company and receive feedback on their suggestions, we organize live webinars with company representatives. You can watch pre-recorded webinars with VSA from the last semester [here](#).

Additional webinars with VSA are scheduled for:

- Webinar 1: TBA
- Webinar 2: TBA

You will receive webinar login information a few days before each webinar.

Questions: If you have further questions, please direct them to admin@X-Culture.org. Your questions will be directed to the company representatives.

THE STUDENT TRAVEL ABROAD INDUSTRY

As business and other areas of life are becoming increasingly globally interconnected, the demand for people with international experience is growing. International experience and cross-cultural knowledge is particularly important for young people who are about to launch their careers and whose jobs will likely involve international travel and cross-cultural interactions.

Recognizing the value of and demand for international experience, many universities encourage or even require that their students engage in short-term travel abroad programs, or even spend an entire semester or more studying abroad. Often formally organized international trips or study programs earn students' academic credits, too.

Organizing an international trip, particularly one that involves pre-project training, visits to local business, governmental agencies, meetings with community leaders, and other educational activities is a daunting task. It requires a tremendous amount of expertise and connections that individual travelers or even universities often do not have. To satisfy this need, a wide variety of private student study-abroad agencies have sprung up in recent year. Many of them work closely with colleges and universities to ensure the trip design meets the academic credit requirements.

The services and prices offered by these companies vary dramatically. The market is overcrowded and a simple search for "study abroad" returns hundreds of hits. It is very difficult to make sense of the available options and select the best study-abroad package. Some companies try to invest in developing more interesting and educational programs, but they often have a hard time highlighting their differences and informing their potential customers about their unique propositions. As a result, the competition often revolves around the price point: all programs of equal duration and including the same international destinations looks the same and customers often settle down for lower price not recognizing that the actual program components and the value of the program as a whole may be different and are not always reflected in the price.

ABOUT VSA

Voyager Study Abroad (VSA) is a small student travel company starting its third year as a provider of multi-city, multi-country, summer study abroad programs. It specializes in study-abroad programs that focus more on education and development and less on unstructured fun.

It was founded by Dr. Michael Tyler, an accounting professor for almost 30 years. Mike had several years of experience managing traveling summer study abroad programs for two competitor companies before starting VSA. In addition to Mike, Dr. Reccia Charles, a marketing professor, assists in the management of VSA. She also has several years of study abroad experience. VSA also employs a part-time graphic designer, 10 hours per week that resides in Madrid.

For the previous two summers, 2015 and 2016, VSA has operated just one program – Voyager Europe (VE). This is a one-month program beginning in the month of June. The program participants traveled to Lisbon, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Florence and Berlin. Each year VE included day-trips to several other noteworthy cities. Travel between cities was by plane or high speed train and the accommodations were highly-rated four- and five-star city-center hotels. Unlike its competitors, VE included a full daily itinerary of cultural and professional activities.

Despite spending thousands of dollars on advertising at study abroad referral sites, direct emails to study abroad advisers and countless email newsletters to over 10,000 presidents and officers of university clubs and organizations, the number of participants in 2015 and 2016 did not exceed two dozen.

The program offers much more than its closest competitors and has a lower price. Most students can transfer up to six credits – two courses. However, in 2015 the program only offered one course and 2016 only offered two courses. This is partially due to low enrollment.

In 2015, the program was sponsored by the International School of Management (ISM) in Paris. ISM issued the transcripts. In 2016, the program was sponsored by the College of International Studies (CIS) in Madrid.

Transcripts were issued by Endicott College in Beverly Massachusetts. Endicott is fully accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., (NEASC). CIS has an affiliation agreement with Endicott. VE used a professor from CIS, Guillermo Reher, to teach one of the classes in 2016. Reccia taught the other. Guillermo is very student-oriented and is an expert on Spanish art and history.

The relationship with CIS will continue for the summer 2017. Guillermo will again work with VSA. However, in summer 2017, VSA intends to offer two programs - Voyager Europe (VE) - Madrid, Berlin, Geneva, Paris, Milan, Florence and Barcelona and Voyager Spain (VS) - Madrid, Segovia, Toledo, Bilbao, Cordoba, Seville and Barcelona. Mike will manage VE and Guillermo, VS. Both programs will run from June 28, 2017 to July 28, 2017. From July 28th through August 6th, students can participate in the ten-day Voyager Cruise Program. Voyager Cruise (VS) spends two days in Rome and an eight-day cruise on Royal Caribbean International to Rome, Santorini, Mykonos, Athens and Olympia.

VSA provides a unique learning experience that includes curriculum enhancing cultural-immersion activities and classes taught by excellent professors that travel with the program.

In summer 2017, students share a modern air conditioned university residence with private bath and Wi-Fi for the entire program. This way they can safely leave some of their possessions behind when traveling. They will be served breakfast and dinner daily, have unlimited access to the on premises fitness center and outdoor pool. Travel between cities is by plane or high speed train. In VS, some of the day-trips may be by bus or private coach. All overnight stays for both VE and VS are in highly-rated four-star city-center hotels. Buffet breakfast is included when not in Madrid. Professors travel with students and participate in all program activities. Classes include city-specific activities that enrich the class and make VE and VS unique among study abroad programs.

All our classes meet or exceed accreditation standards in the United States and abroad. Our classes are what truly makes us different from any other study abroad provider. In summer 2017, we intend to offer the following classes in VE:

New Europe - An overview of the historical development of the European political and cultural identity from 1947 to the present. A major element is study of common economic policies, as well as the introduction of the Euro and its impact on global relations. In addition, this course examines the future challenges presented by the growth of the European Union, its stability, and the question of European constitutional and institutional reforms. City specific activities include:

seminars at the Reichstag (German Parliament) (Berlin), World Trade Organization (WTO) (Geneva), United Nations (UN) (Geneva), Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Paris) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Paris).

Art in Society - This course examines the production of art from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. It explores art from a variety of cultures and geographic regions. It introduces students to the conventional designations of stylistic periods, treats major works and artists of these eras, and acquaints the student with the traditional methods of Art History. City specific activities include: study at the Prado and the Reina Sofía (Madrid); the Pergamon Museum and Bode Museum (Berlin); the Louvre (Paris) and Musée D'Orsay (Paris); the Uffizi Gallery and La Accademia (Florence).

Intercultural Communication - This course is an exploration of the interdisciplinary field of intercultural communication. Emphasis is on increasing communicative competencies in cross-cultural settings. City specific activities include: city walking tours in Madrid, Berlin, Geneva, Paris, Milan, Florence and Barcelona; visit to Santiago Bernabéu Stadium (Real Madrid CF) (Madrid); a tapas tasting (Madrid); river cruise on the Seine (Paris); visit to Camp Nou – (FC Barcelona) (Barcelona) and a paella cooking class (Barcelona).

International Business - An overview of the environment in which international businesses compete, this course introduces the student to the impact of culture and political economy on business decision making, the economics and politics of international trade and investment, the nature of the international monetary system, the strategies and structures that characterize successful enterprises, and the special role that each business function plays within a firm operating globally. Unavoidable threats and substantial opportunities exist in the global marketplace. The accelerating process of globalization necessitates international competence. City specific activities include: seminars at offices of El Corte Ingles (Retail) (Madrid); Renfe (Railroad) (Madrid); Autostadt (Volkswagen Plant) (Wolfsburg); Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Patek Phillipe (Watches) (Geneva); Fragonard (Perfume) (Paris); Prada (Fashion) (Milan); Ducati (Motorcycles) (Bologna) and Estrella Damm (Beer Brewery) (Barcelona).

Global Marketing Management - Focus is on the unique problems associated with managing marketing operations across national borders. Topics include: the impact of culture on the global marketing environment; how to identify global market opportunities for an existing enterprise or a new venture; how to apply industry analysis, assessment of risk, and new customer identification techniques in an international context; and how to develop and implement effective comprehensive marketing strategies on a global scale. City specific activities include: seminars at offices of El Corte Ingles (Retail); Renfe (Railroad); Patek Phillipe (Watches) (Geneva); the Autostadt (Volkswagen Plant); Fragonard (Perfume); Prada (Fashion); Ducati (Motorcycles) and Estrella Damm (Beer Brewery).

In summer 2017, we intend to offer the following classes in VS:

Spanish for the Professions - This class focuses on the specific language needs of students according to their areas of study, including health care, business, education and hospitality. Spanish for the Professions is a compact Spanish language course that will focus on the key points of communication. Specific course-related assignments in Madrid, Segovia, Toledo, Bilbao, Cordoba, Seville and Barcelona are included with this class. In addition, students in the Spanish for the Professions Class participate in all activities included with the Culture of Spain Class (see below).

Culture of Spain - Students are introduced to the general historical and social background upon which the complex reality of present day Spain is built. The course will focus especially on the plurality of cultures—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—which constituted Medieval Spain and makes Spanish history so unique. Specific course related activities include city walking tours in Madrid, Segovia, Toledo, Bilbao, Cordoba, Seville and Barcelona; seminar at El Corte Ingles (retail) (Madrid); visit to the Reina Sofia (Madrid); visit to Santiago Bernabéu Stadium (Real Madrid CF) (Madrid); seminar at Renfe (railroad) (Madrid); visit Prado Museum (Madrid); visit Royal Palace (Madrid); a tapas tasting (Madrid); tour of the Cathedral and Alcazar (Segovia); tour of the Sephardic Museum (Toledo); tour of the Cathedral (Toledo); visit to Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao); visit to the Euskal Museoa (Bilbao); visit to the Mosque (Cordoba); visit to the Alcazar (Seville); visit to the Cathedral (Seville); visit to the Bullfighting Museum (Seville); a Flamenco Show (Seville); visit to Parc Güell (Barcelona); visit to the Magic Fountain at Montjuic (Barcelona); visit to the Sagrada Familia (Barcelona); visit to Camp Nou (FC Barcelona) (Barcelona); and a paella cooking class (Barcelona).

In addition to the activities included above, the programs include travel between cities by plane or high-speed train, first-class accommodations, welcome package (rolling duffel bag, luggage tags, two program t-shirts, CIS I.D., International

Student Identity Card (ISIC), a plug converter US to Europe and health insurance card), welcome orientation, farewell dinner and a professional walking tour in every city visited.

With current pricing, the breakeven point is approximately forty students – 20 for VE and 20 for VS. VC is priced around the breakeven point and is intended to be an incentive for students to participate in the other two programs (VE and VS).

More: <http://www.goabroad.com/providers/voyager-study-abroad>

THE CHALLENGE

VSA seeks help with developing a cost-effective strategy for expanding its market share both in the U.S. and internationally, including:

1. Survey of Key Players

To provide a foundation for your analysis, start with a mini-survey of student friends and/or university study-abroad program administrators and if, possible companies, offering study abroad tours. You can ask for a casual interview, or ask them to complete a more formal survey. The list of suggested questions is provided below.

It would also be an excellent professional networking opportunity for you as it provides a legitimate reason to ask for a meeting with the administrators at your university and possibly business representatives. They will likely agree to a meeting with you and gladly answer your questions. Not only will you learn something new, but will also acquire new professional connections that may come in handy in the future.

Suggested questions for students:

- If you've done a study abroad, describe your experiences...
- Are you considering studying abroad for the first time or again? If so, which country or countries are you considering?
- Have you considered a multi-country program? Why or why not?
- What features/characteristics are you be looking for in a study abroad program? Price? Location? Program? Anything else?
- If you were to go on a study-abroad trip, who will be paying for your study abroad?
- What type of classes do you want to take abroad? Foreign language? Global business? Cross-cultural? Art history? Politics? Or other (please specify)?
- Do these classes meet a specific course requirement at your home university?
- Is study abroad a requirement for your degree?
- Does your university offer study abroad programs?
- If so, what type of study abroad programs does your university offer?
- Are you familiar with private providers of study abroad?
- If so, what is your opinion of them?

Suggested questions for faculty and administrators (try to identify and interview people who have something to do with study-abroad programs at your university):

- Is study abroad required at your university?
- Who is organizing study-abroad programs at your university (an on-campus office or external companies)?
- If students at your university usually go on study-abroad trips using services of external companies, do you have a list of recommended companies? If so, how do you select them? What are you looking for in companies you recommend?
- If students at your university use study-abroad programs organized by on-campus offices, what would it take you to consider outsourcing these services to or partnering up with an external private company?

Survey of the service providers:

Although there are many companies that provide study abroad tours, it may not be easy to interview them. An online search for such companies and the types of tours they offer, prices, locations, and other features could be quite useful. If you happen to be able to get an interview, here are suggested questions:

- How do you promote your services and recruit students for your study-abroad tours?
- Do you partner with universities, or do you offer your tours independently?

- Who usually pays for the tours (students, parents, university)?
- How do you differentiate yourself from competition? What do you do better, and what you wish you could do that your competition does better?

Feel free to ask any other questions that you may inform provide useful information for developing your business proposal.

The more people you survey, the better you will prepare yourself for the challenge. You do not have to conduct an extensive survey. If every team member surveys a few fellow students, one or two faculty members and one or two administrators, plus some searching online, your team will have accumulated enough useful information to better understand how this industry works.

Recommended length in the final version of the report: 2-3 pages, with a table tabulating/summarizing the survey findings (if applicable)

Evaluation:

- 7 - A mini-survey conducted and the results are presented in a clear and concise manner that makes it easy to see how the major types of customers approach products like those offered by your client and make purchasing decisions.*
- 4 – Reliance on secondary data but still a good overview, or original data, but the section leaves out some important elements; too general; too long or too short.*
- 1 – No survey conducted, impossible to figure who the major client groups are, who and how makes the decisions with respect to purchasing products like those offered by your client.*

2. Competition Analysis

Based on your industry survey, provide a comparative analysis of VSA against its competitors, including its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. You may find this [short guide](#) and this 5-min [video](#) helpful. Particularly, focus on the following:

- Strength compared to competition
- Weaknesses compared to competition
- Growth opportunities
- Threats to the current business model

Recommended length: 2-3 pages, preferably in a form of a comparative table or bullet list

Evaluation:

- 7 - Clear and concise review of the industry and insightful comparative analysis of strengths and weaknesses compared to competition, and opportunities and threats. The sources are cited.*
- 4 - A good overview, but leaves out some important elements; too general; too long or too short.*
- 1 - Impossible to figure out what the company does, how it operates, and how it compares to competition.*

3. Market Selection and Analysis

Consider the market characteristics that are essential to the success of your client, focusing on where your customers are (not where they will be going to study abroad). For example, demand for the study-abroad programs may exist only in markets characterized by certain income level, education system, cultural or political environment, geographic location, climate, or other factors.

Based on your analysis of the market success factors, choose several (2-4) markets that meet your success criteria. A market is generally a country, but it can be a region within a country, or multi-country region.

Based on the comparison, select **one** most promising market that you believe has the greatest potential for your client and provide an in-depth analysis, including the market size, number of potential customers and their characteristics, main competitors and their strengths and weaknesses compared to your client organization, cultural, legal, political, and

economic environments, trade and labor regulations that your client must understand to ensure the success of the product in that market.

IMPORTANT: Make certain to review **only** issues that are relevant for your client's market entry strategy. Do not describe the country in general, but focus on key factors that your client must take into account when offering the product in this new market. Everything you say here must be linked to your recommendations with respect to the product pricing, marketing, and other recommendations that you will provide in subsequent report sections. The focus must be NOT on description but on the analysis. Report only what the client must know about the market to be successful there.

You may also separately analyze the market where the customers are interested in traveling to in terms of its culture, traditions and ways of doing business. Please do NOT describe the destination market from tourist perspective though, but purely from a business perspective: what VSA needs to know about it to organize a successful trip to that destination (e.g., how to interact with local partners, manager logistics and transportation, etc.).

It is recommended that your data are presented in tables and charts and the accompanying text provides further support as needed. Please make sure to cite all of your sources. The more sources, the more credible your analysis. See Evaluation Guidelines below for how this section will be evaluated.

Recommended length: 2-4 pages. Again, do NOT provide a general country description, only the key points about its economic, political, social, and cultural environments that are relevant to your proposed market entry strategy.

Evaluation:

- 7 – The selected market seems promising and the decision is clearly explained. The suggested market is described in sufficient detail and every point is tied to the recommendations in subsequent report sections (not a collection of general facts about the country, but only factors that are really important for this particular product in this particular market)*
- 4- Some of the countries/regions on the short list seem like good markets for the proposed product, but some do not; not clear why these and not other countries were selected. The market description is incomplete or not properly supported. Some of the information is irrelevant and is not used to support recommendations in subsequent report sections.*
- 1 - Clearly poor choice of markets for the proposed product; explanations are not provided or make no sense; information is not used in subsequent report sections.*

4. Decision Makers and Promotion Channels

TV, radio, or online advertising are not always effective and cost-efficient ways to reach the target audience. Please suggest the best way to reach customers (e.g., students) or distributors (e.g., university professors or administrators in the suggested market). Often, the best methods are very inexpensive or even free, such as professional mailing lists, groups on social media platforms, narrowly focused professional newsletters or publications, old-fashioned paper ads on bulletin boards in the areas where potential customers are likely to be, and the like. Of course, media and other outlets may also be effective, particularly given their ability to reach larger audiences. In-person recruitment, sales representatives, or university partnerships may also be viable options.

Be as specific as possible; it is not enough to simply suggest that the product be promoted via social media, professional associations or mailing list, or advertised in magazines or on TV. Make certain your report provides all the necessary information your client will need to know as to where and how to place the ad, how to pay for it, how much it will cost, etc. Best answers will include names and contacts for specific advertising outlets, such as the specific mailing list addresses, websites, TV or radio stations, and any other information the client will need to use the customer-reach channel.

Most importantly, keep in mind VSA is a small company with a very limited budget. Thus, cost effectiveness should be your main concern.

Recommended length: 1-1.5 pages.

Evaluation:

- 7 – Clearly identified the decision makers with respect to the purchasing decisions of products like those offered by your client; clear advice on how to reach them for product promotion purposes in a way that is ethical and cost efficient;
- 4 – Decision makers identified but not precisely enough, ways to reach them appear to be not very cost effective;
- 1 – Not clear who makes purchasing decisions, not clear how to reach these people.

5. Pricing and Service Support

What is the recommended price point and sales strategy in the new market?

Please select one product (study-abroad package) that you believe will be most popular in the proposed new market and recommend how much it should cost there. Provide your recommendations in the local currency first and the equivalent in US Dollars. Use this product as an illustration for the price-point strategy for your client the new market (how much more or less it should cost compared to competition).

Recommend the pricing structure. You may suggest that the product is sold at a fixed price, or consider more creative pricing strategies, such promotional pricing, bulk pricing, loyal customer programs, coupons, financing, pre- and post-payment, referral discounts, and other options that may make the product more attractive to the customers even if the price point does not differ much from that of the competition. This blog and this article offer a good overview of some of the available pricing strategy options.

Recommended length: 1-1.5 pages.

Evaluation

- 7 – The suggested price point and technical support included in the price is supported by analysis of the market and competition; the pricing strategy is creative and it is clearly articulated how this pricing strategy will increase sales; cultural, legal, and political environments are considered and accounted for.
- 4 – The suggestions make sense but are not supported with strong arguments, insufficient details provided; the strategy does not take into account market specifics.
- 1 – The suggestions make no sense, the explanations are not provided or are not convincing, cultural, legal, and economic factors specific to the market are completely ignored.

6. Marketing and Branding

Once the potential customers are reached, how should VSA advertise and promote its services in the new market? What should be the message? How should it be presented?

What is the total annual marketing budget to support product advertisement and promotion in the new market? How should your marketing budget be allocated across different expense categories?

If applicable, discuss if the company or its product names or features should be modified to make them more appealing to the tastes and traditions of the consumers in the new market (e.g., does the current brand name has any negative meaning in the local language, is there a need to change the packaging shape or color, or product look or taste).

Then estimate the optimal annual marketing budget and provide a percentage allocation across the different marketing spending categories. For example, you can recommend to spend 40% on trade show events, 25% on social media engagement, 25% on sales incentives (i.e. coupons, contests, giveaways), and 10% on launch party. Please provide detailed calculations for how you arrived at these numbers and why you believe these are the amounts that the company should spend on marketing (why not more or not less). Keep in mind, this is a small company with a limited advertising budget. The best answers will recommend very inexpensive yet effective ways to promote the product.

Many Internet resources can provide guidance on marketing budgets in different countries, one useful resource is provided by entrepreneur.com.

Provide recommendations as to the exact content or graphics used in the advertisement, as well as to the timing and frequency of advertising.

Your recommendations must be rooted into market analysis provided earlier, particularly with respect to the recommended customer reach channels, the cultural, economic, and legal environments of the market.

earlier, particularly with respect to the cultural, economic, and legal environments of the market.

Recommended length: 1-3 pages.

Evaluation

- 7 – The recommended marketing strategy is creative, inexpensive, and effective, the proposed budget and allocation makes good sense and is supported by strong arguments for how this strategy will increase sales; cultural, legal, and political environments are considered and accounted for.*
- 4 – The recommendations make sense but are not supported with strong arguments or do not take into account market specifics.*
- 1 – The recommendations make no sense, the explanations are not provided or are not convincing, cultural, legal, and economic factors specific to the market are completely ignored.*

7. HR

If your strategy requires recruiting personnel (e.g., company representatives, sales agents, volunteers, etc.), provide your suggestions with respect to recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, and compensation.

What are the best ways to recruit and select effective company representatives in the proposed new market? How should they be compensated? Would it be a commission-based compensation, or a different approach would be more effective in the proposed market? How much (or what percent) would offer the optimal cost-performance balance?

Remember that VSA is a small company and cannot afford a large upfront payroll. Thus, a system would be needed that offers minimal or no upfront cost and instead relies on volunteers, after-market commission, or other cost and risk minimization approach.

Recommended length: 1-3 pages.

Evaluation:

- 7 – The proposed strategy is cost effective and will likely allow for recruiting the necessary talent and providing the necessary motivation;*
- 4 – The proposed HR strategy is fine, but not particularly original and may not be very effective;*
- 1 - Clearly poor choice of the HR strategy; or the explanation is very confusing to the point that it's not clear what's being proposed.*

8. Product Design

Any suggestions for further improving VSA study-abroad tours? New locations, new program elements, any other features that would make VSA offerings more competitive?

Recommended length: 1-2 pages.

Evaluation:

- 7 – Many original and useful new features suggested, problems with existing features identified and solutions suggested;*
- 4 – One or very few new features suggested, but their originality and usefulness seems limited;*
- 1 – No new features suggested or the suggestions are not novel or obviously useless.*

OPTIONAL

Real-life test of the proposed expansion strategy: Get a contract in the proposed new market

To make the project more realistic, gain further business experience, and to put to a real-life test the proposed market expansion strategy, X-Culture participants are encouraged to test their market entry proposal by trying to secure a contract for VSA services in the suggested new market [for this trip](#). The contract can be either with individual consumers (e.g., students) or with distributors (e.g., university study abroad officers and staff, college professors or administrators responsible for organizing study-abroad tours for their students, or existing larger study-abroad companies seeking to outsource some of their projects to smaller specialized study-abroad providers).

As a bonus, individuals or teams that succeed at securing a contract will receive the following after-market honorarium:

- \$400 for securing a one-person contract
- \$2,000 for a 5+ person contract
- \$4,000 for a 10+ person contract
- Tuition and Fees for either Voyager Europe or Voyager Spain plus Round-Trip Airfare to Madrid in Summer 2017 for a 25+ person contract

Alternatively, you can choose to receive a discount of \$600 for yourself per contracted person. This option is particularly valuable if you yourself are interested in studying abroad and learning more about VSA business model by assisting the company in organizing a trip and then going on the trip yourself as a trainee and company intern.

The honorarium or travel internship stipend will be awarded after VSA is paid and the contract is executed.

If you would like to try it, please do the following:

1. Find potential buyers or distributors of VSA study-abroad programs in the proposed market.
2. Connect the client with VSA representative.
3. Be prepared to assist in the negotiations between VSA and the prospective buyer/partner.
4. VSA will provide marketing materials and support upon request.

After VSA gets paid and the contract is executed, the person who facilitated the transaction will receive the honorarium as per the schedule above.

This part of the challenge is **optional** and your team's decision to attempt or not to attempt to get a contract for the client company will not affect your performance evaluation. We encourage you to try putting your ideas to this ultimate test of effectiveness of your proposed market expansion plan. Many business solutions may sound great in theory, but the reality is often much more challenging. Your ability to close a deal will greatly improve your credibility, secure you a post-market commission, and even if you fail to secure a contract, you will still gain valuable business experience in the process.

Report Structure and Formatting Guidelines

Structure:

- Include an Executive Summary (300-400 words, bullet-list format preferred) that provides a short review of your key findings and recommendations. Please remember, the busy company owners and executives will not have the time to read hundreds of the reports, so they must be able to get a quick summary of the content of your report from the Executive Summary. Most managers will make a decision on whether to continue reading the report if the Executive Summary catches their attention. Therefore, make sure this important part makes it easy to see your key recommendations.
- At the beginning of each report section include a bullet list of the key recommendations and figures presented in the section (2-4 bullets, each 4-10 words long). Again, when presented with hundreds of the reports, busy executives must be able to get key figures and recommendations from these summaries.
- The Title Page must contain team number, client company name, names, emails, and countries of residence of all the team members and a short summary (5-15 words) of the role and work completed by each team member. If any of the team members dropped out or did not contribute to the report, please still list them, but add a note “Did not participate” by their names.

Evaluation of the Executive Summary

7 - Short but gives a very good idea about the key ideas presented in the business proposal or corresponding section

4 - Gives some idea about the key suggestions, but some points remain uncertain; a bit too long; not to the point.

1 - Not possible to figure out the key ideas of the business proposal from the summary, too short or too long

Formatting:

- The report must be 20-35 pages (5,000-8,000 words) including the title page, executive summary, and references. Each section should be 1-3 pages long. Generally shorter is better, so be as concise and focused as possible.
- Number all pages in your team report.
- Margins should be 2.5 cm (one inch) at the top, bottom, and sides of the page.
- Font type should be 12-point Times New Roman throughout the report.
- Double-space all body text.
- Indent the first line of a new paragraph.
- The text should be left-aligned.
- All citations used must be cited in the text and in a reference list at the end of each report. In-text citations should include only the name of the author(s) and the date of the publication. Full references should be provided at the end of the report. Please use [APA reference style](#).
- A picture is worth a thousand of words, so use of figures, graphs, pictures, as well as tables is encouraged. It is recommended these are included in the main body of the report.

TASKS AND DEADLINES

Each week, you will be asked to fill out a short survey to report your team's progress, evaluate the performance of your team members and provide other information we need to better understand why some teams perform better than others. Please see the informed consent form at the end of this document for more details.

Important: Participants who receive peer evaluations **below 2.0** (out of 5.0) will first receive a warning. If their peer evaluations stay **below 2.0** two weeks in a row, they will be automatically excluded from the team.

All deadlines are set for 11:59 pm (23:59), New York time.

Important: Occasionally emails with invitations to take a survey are filtered into the Junk/Spam email folder. Please check your Junk/Spam email folder (search for messages with "X-Culture" in subject line) if you don't receive a survey invitation message around the date specified in the table above.

1. Pre-project Readiness Test

Due: Any time before the official project start

Before the project starts, all participants must review project materials and take a Readiness Test. The test will include questions about the project and online collaboration tools, as well as questions about your prior international experience and background. You must successfully pass the Readiness Test (80% or more correct answers) to participate in X-Culture. If your semester starts after the official start of the project or you do not complete the Readiness Test on time for another reason, do so as soon as you can – we will continue adding new participants for about ten days after the project start.

Official Project Start, Teams Formed

Monday, March 6

As long as you successfully completed the Readiness Test, you will receive the names and contact information of your team members on this day. Please reach out to your teammates immediately to establish contact. Introduce yourself, and start working on the project. Students whose semester starts later will be added to the existing teams once their semester starts, so it is likely an additional student may be added to your team in the first two weeks.

2. Establish Contact and Meet Your Teammates

Due: Thursday, March 9

By this date, you are expected to have exchanged at least a few messages with your teammates. If some teammates are not responding, you are expected to send at least three email reminders to them by this date. Team members who fail to establish contact with their teams will be excluded from the project. Once contact is established, please learn as much as possible about your teammates (background, interests, hobbies, interesting facts, etc.). Your communication starts via email, but once the initial contact is established, your team can use any means of communication.

Deliverables: A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to report whether or not you have met all your team members. Team members who fail to establish contact with their teams may be removed from the project.

This and all other weekly surveys will also ask about your fellow team members' performance and other information we need to better understand why some teams perform better than others. Please see the informed consent form at the end of this document for more details.

3. Select the Client Company

Due: Sunday, March 12

By this date, your team is expected to review all available challenges and select your client organization.

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to report the name of your client organization, as well as ask a few questions about your progress so far. We will

also test how much you have learned about your team members, their background, interests, and skills. So make sure to meet your team members and find out as much as you can about their interests, hobbies, skills, etc.

Every team member must complete the weekly progress survey.

4. Industry and Competition Analysis (a.k.a. SWOT Analysis)

Due: Sunday, March 19

By this date, your team is expected to conduct a thorough survey of the industry and analyze your client's strength, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. It is recommended that you not only conduct an extensive online research but also try to survey or interview potential partners, clients, or competitors in your area.

It is critically important that your team collects as much information as possible and conducts a comparative analysis of your client vs. the competition. This will provide a foundation for developing effective solutions for the subsequent sections of the report.

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to report the key findings of your industry survey and competition analysis, including:

- A list of main competitors
- A list of company's strengths compared to competition
- A list of company's weaknesses compared to competition
- Opportunities and a brief explanation for why these particular factors could help this particular company grow in the near future
- Threats and a brief explanation for why these particular factors could impede growth of this particular company in the near future

Keep your answers as short as possible, preferably provided in a form of bullet list with 2-5 points each.

Every team member must submit the same text in this weekly progress survey so make certain you all discuss and agree on your analysis conclusions before submitting your work.

5. Brainstorming

Due: Sunday, March 26

By this date, your team is expected to conduct the initial brainstorming of each strategy component. Our research shows that brainstorming sessions work best live (e.g., via Skype), but it is perfectly acceptable if you exchange your initial ideas via email, instant messengers, or any other communication tools.

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to provide a bullet-list of the viable ideas your team has considered with respect to each report section (e.g., all strengths and weaknesses of your client, all new markets you have considered, and so on for each report section).

You will be asked to present all your ideas as bullet-lists, just the main ideas or numbers, no explanations at this point.

Every team member must submit the same text in this weekly progress survey.

Important: you need to submit not *your personal* ideas, but your *team's* initial ideas. So make sure to *collectively* brainstorm your options, compile them, and submit the collection of the initial viable ideas discussed by your team.

6. Initial Decisions and Choices

Due: Sunday, April 2

By this date, your team is expected to make your initial decision and choices with respect to each question.

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to provide your initial suggestions with respect to each report section. For each of these you will be asked to provide only one or a few words, no explanations or details (e.g., Country: Canada; Entry mode: exporting; Price: \$100; etc.).

Your team is encouraged to continue debating your recommendations throughout the project and you can change your recommendations if your analyses suggest a better recommendation.

Every team member must submit the same text and figures in this weekly progress survey so make certain you all discuss and agree on your recommendations before submitting your work.

7. Extended Outline and Explanations

Due: Sunday, April 9

By this date, your team is expected to have a more finished list of your key recommendations with respect to each report section and brief explanations for each of them. You do not have to have a complete report sections yet, only the list of main points you are planning to include in the report (recommendations, reasons, figures, etc.).

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to provide an extended outline of your business proposal. Please include your key recommendations and very short explanations for each of them (e.g., Country: Canada and a short explanation why it is the most promising market; Entry mode: exporting and a short explanation why it is the optimal choice, and so on). Your explanations should be only 1-2 sentences at this time. A bullet-list format is preferred at this time. Focus on listing all key points and recommendations rather than providing detailed explanations.

Your team is encouraged to continue debating your recommendations throughout the project and you can change your recommendations and explanations if your analyses suggest a better recommendation.

Every team member must submit the same text in this weekly progress survey so make certain you all discuss and agree on your extended outline before submitting your work.

8. Rough Draft

Due: Sunday, April 16

By this date, your team is expected to have a very rough draft of your business proposal. It can still be in a form of an extended outline or bullet list, but it now must contain all key points, recommendations, figures, and explanations.

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with your personal weekly survey link. The survey will ask you to provide the initial rough draft of each of the section of the business proposal. It does not have to be a finished report and it can be only a few pages long. The explanations can still be very short, sentences unfinished, references and figures missing, but it now has to start looking more like a report rather than just a bullet list of your key ideas.

Your team is encouraged to continue debating your recommendations throughout the project and you can still change your recommendations and explanations if your analyses suggest a better recommendation.

Every team member must submit the same text in this weekly progress survey so make certain you all discuss and agree on your extended outline before submitting your work.

9. Complete Preliminary Draft

Due: Sunday, April 23

By this date, your team is expected to have a complete draft of your report. It does not have to be a finished report, but it should be as complete as possible, including Title Page and an Executive and Chapter Summaries, and correct formatting throughout the document.

One team member should submit the draft via TurnItIn.com on behalf of the entire team (see step-by-step submission guidelines below). After your document is submitted, TurnItIn will generate a plagiarism report that will show you if any parts of the report have been plagiarized (takes several hours to produce). Usually, up to 20% similarity is acceptable, provided that copy-and-pasted materials are properly referenced. If plagiarism is detected, your team will have until the Final Report deadline (see below) to fix the problem and submit a plagiarism-free final report.

This draft will not be graded and the plagiarism statistics will not be shared with your instructors. This is only for your information. You should continue editing the report until the final deadline and you can still make any changes or additions.

However, it is strongly encouraged that you submit as complete a document as possible. You will be able to submit your draft and check it for plagiarism **only once**, so the more complete the draft, the less the chance that the final report will contain plagiarism.

Also, **every team member** will be asked to submit your usual weekly progress survey. A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email with the usual questions about your team.

10. Final Report

Due: Friday, April 28

By this date, your final report must be submitted via TurnItIn.com (see Submission Guidelines below). Please note, the plagiarism statistics for final reports will be generated by TurnItIn and shared with the instructors, but the plagiarism report will **not** be shared with the students.

Only one team member must submit the final document via TurnItIn.com on behalf of the team.

11. Post-Project Survey

Due once report submitted, but no later than: Sunday, April 30

A few days before the deadline, you will receive an email invitation with a link to your post-project survey. This is the **most important** survey.

The survey will ask about your experiences in X-Culture and evaluate the performance of your teammates. Your answers are extremely important and will help us improve the project in the future.

Every team member must complete the survey.

Submission Guidelines

The report draft and the final report documents must be submitted via www.TurnItIn.com. Only one team member must submit the documents on behalf of the entire team. The team member who will be submitting the draft and final report must follow these steps:

Part 1. Create a TurnItIn account (time required: 60-90 seconds).

1. On www.turnitin.com and click on the link "Create Account".
2. On the next window, under the "Create a New Account" heading, click on the "Student" link.
3. Enter the Class ID. Note the Draft and Final report submissions have different Class IDs:

Report **Draft** Class ID: **14827361** (password **xculture**)

Final report: Class ID: **14827366** (password **xculture**)

Note: if you already have a TurnItIn account, simply log on using your "old" login information, click on the "Enroll in Class" tab on the top, and repeat step 3.

Part 2: Submitting the paper (time required: 60-120 seconds)

4. Once the account is created, you can log into your account. Your home page will list your classes.
5. Select the correct class and click on the "Submit" button.
6. Choose Single File Upload. **Make certain the file name only contains your team number (e.g., "123.pdf")**
7. Click on "browse" to locate the paper saved to your computer.
8. Click on the file and click "open".
9. Click the "upload" button at the bottom.

Click "submit" to confirm your submission. Once the submission is finalized, you will see "Your submission was successful" on the top of the page. If you wait a few hours, you will see your "originality report" that shows how much and what parts of your report have been plagiarized.

Consent to Act as a Human Participant

Project Title: International Student Collaboration Project: Dynamics and Performance in International Virtual Teams
Project Director and Principal Investigator: Dr. Vasyl Taras.

One of the requirements of your International Business course is to complete an international collaboration exercise. You will be teamed up with several other students who are enrolled in similar International Business courses at universities around the world. Working as a team, you will be required to develop a business plan for an international company.

To help you better understand and interpret your experiences and to give you a chance to compare your own experiences with those of other students participating in the exercise, data about your prior international experiences and perceptions about international collaboration will be collected before and after the exercise. In addition, you will be asked to provide peer evaluations once the project is over, and the quality of the team reports will be evaluated by the instructor. A summary will be presented to you at the end of the project, so you can see how your experiences compare to those of other students, how attitudes and perceptions about international collaboration have changed, on average, over the course of the project, and how team composition and prior international experiences tended to affect group dynamics and performance.

Once the project is over, all personal information will be deleted from the dataset, and the data will be completely unidentifiable, making it impossible to match responses with the names of the people who provided them.

Most of the data will be collected online. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished, so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

The risks associated with your participation in the study are minimal.

Please note the data collected during the project may be used for the purposes of research, the results of which may be published in scholarly journals. Any publication will contain only a general summary of the results. No personal information will be reported or shared.

Because your performance in the exercise is counted towards your course grade, the research project is treated as one of the required course exercises/tests. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time. Your grade in the course will be adjusted accordingly, just as it would if you chose not to write a test or complete a homework assignment. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in an unidentifiable state.

While participation in the project is required as part of your course, it is your right to disallow the use of the de-identified data you provide for research-related purposes. If you do not object that the data you provide during the project can be used for research-related purposes, and the results of the study can be disseminated through scholarly publications, keep this consent form for your records. If you object to the use of the data you will provide during the course project, please indicate so at the bottom of this form. Return the form to your instructor, and your data will not be used for any research-related purposes. The results of the study based on the data you provided will not appear in any resulting publications. Your decision to allow or to deny the use of the data you provide during the project for research related purposes will have no effect on your grade.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Vasyl Taras who may be contacted at (336) 256-8611 or v_taras@uncg.edu.

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

For a copy of the approval letter from the Office of Research Compliance of the Institutional Research Board, please visit www.vtaras.com/11-0260_IRB_Approval.pdf

I do not grant the right to use the de-identified data I will provide during the project for research-related purposes or disseminate the data through a publication in scholarly journals or in any other form. I understand that my decision to not allow the use of the data for scholarly research will have no effect on my course grade.

Name: _____

Signature: _____