



—*Personal, Professional, Precise*

## Organization Overview

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ISAT is an International Student Assisting Team, which provides consulting services related to housing, cars and mental health to support current and incoming international student's life in the city of Chicago. ISAT supports international college students go through their challenges and difficulties together, and help them adjust their college lives better and sooner by providing both online one-on-one counseling service and off-line in-person appointment. This team is the first step in developing high quality life ecosystem for international college students

## Our Problem

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Many universities have established OIA (Office of International Affair) to help international students have a better study experience in the United States. However, the services in the international student office are always limited. The main focus is to help international students apply Visa, organize social events and hold study abroad activities. From our customer discoveries, the biggest barriers are the followings:

- 1) Transit and adjust into the local communities: International students often have an imperfect information regarding all spectrums of college life, due to lack of social support since their family and friends are not presented in the States.
- 2) International students are not familiar with the U.S. education systems and are willing to consult to seniors before they attend the universities.
- 3) The majority of the international students cannot attend the Admitted Students' Day or Campus orientation, it is important for them to know the school not only from the website.
- 4) Given some cultural differences and geographical limitation, they always have a hard time find a suitable apartment/dorm. Due to the lack of information and in-person inspection of all the housing, it creates a great barrier for international students to find a proper housing.
- 5) It is also inconvenient for international students to purchase cars in the States since they are not familiar with the local automobile market and bargaining strategies. In addition, the information barriers regarding car insurances and the logistics are also preventing international students from having a smooth transition.

Furthermore, international students especially Asian international students are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, but they don't know how to seek help. A report on a mental health survey of 130 mainland china international students at Yale University showed that 45% of participants reported symptoms of depression, and 29% reported symptoms of anxiety, *but*

**only 4%** of participants reported using campus mental health counseling services<sup>1</sup>. Compared to U.S. university students in general, 12.8% and 13% of U.S. university students reported having been diagnosed with depression and anxiety in 2009 (American College Health Association, 2010). International students are more likely to have mental health problems due to the cultural barriers, language barriers and academic stress. Moreover, research shows that 11% of U.S. students using campus counseling services during 2014 (Gallagher, 2014)<sup>2</sup>. Literatures show that International students are more vulnerable, but are less likely to seek help from school or their family (William, 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

## **Solution**

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ISAT aims to help international students transfer to their universities more smoothly and help them seek professional help when they suffer from mental health problems. ISAT supports international college students in Chicago by providing them with the information and professional services to acquire a high-quality college life.

- 1) ISAT coordinator helps international students to create personalized plans via online chatting platform, based on student's needs and preferences.
- 2) ISAT provides a basic package connecting prospective and current international students with college students (as counselor) to ask for college-related information.
- 3) ISAT provides premium packages. Our current premium services include housing, roommate matching, vehicle purchasing, banking, and free mental health services:
  - a) Housing specialists assist our clients touring houses via skype or other forms given clients' needs
  - b) Roommates matching: Match roommates given clients' preferences and needs
  - c) Car specialists assist clients buying cars, including providing transportation and insight advises
  - d) Banking: Help clients to improve their financial literacy
  - e) Free mental health service: Providing information and walk clients through the process to support them

ISAT also provides job opportunities for unemployed population. We hire local residents who have passion to work with international students, and we will provide training sessions for them to be qualified working in certain services.

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<sup>1</sup> Han, H. S., West-Olatunji, C., & Thomas, S. (2010). Use of racial identity development theory to explore cultural competence among early childhood educators. *Journal of Southeastern Regional Association for Teacher Educators*, 20(1), 1–11.

<sup>2</sup> Gallagher, R. P. (2014). *National Survey of College Counseling Centers 2014* (Monograph Series Number 9V)

<sup>3</sup> Williams, Gwendolyn M. "Understanding the Mental Health Issues of International ..." Accessed May 10, 2019. [http://www.nrmera.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Williams.et\\_al\\_29.2.2018.pdf](http://www.nrmera.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Williams.et_al_29.2.2018.pdf).

## **Progress to Date**

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ISAT grew and created out of our four founder's personal experience as international students studying in the U.S. colleges and universities. Since this project started in Winter of 2018, ISAT's founders have made considerable progress in developing the platform. ISAT has its own websites and email list nearly complete the work will soon began to implement. The team has also conducted customer interviews with several mental health providers, international students on campus, Chinese Student Association and International Student Advisory Board. The team has undertaken market and legal research to ensure that ISAT provide quality services to international students. We have spoken with Career Advancement at the University of Chicago, Office of International Affairs, Center for Identity and Inclusion, and School of Social Service Administration for promoting our platform.

## **Next Steps**

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We plan to have a fully functional platform by October of 2019. We plan to run a pilot program in three universities in June of 2019: The University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and University of Illinois at Chicago with a demonstrated interest in serving international student population. The pilot program will provide two main components:

- 1) Testing our product offering operation
- 2) Conducting first hand customer feedback and results further improving our services.

As we use feedback from this pilot program to further refine and improve ISAT platform, we will begin more expansive marketing efforts in order to attract more international students.

## **Team members**

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Great startups succeed because they have people who know the industry, the trend, the competitors, the marketplace, the customers, the vendors and investors, and the product they sell. Our team has all the qualifications for being the right team to launch this business. 100% of the teammates are from the international student community, and we are passionate about social justice by pursuing our social missions from personal experiences of knowing the industry.

**Yewen Zeng** is a second-year graduate student at Harris School of Public Policy, and she has strong backgrounds in Cost and Benefits Analysis to assist the organization on budgeting and accounting tasks. With her data analyst skills in Public Policy, she also has intensive work experience in one of the largest commercial banks in China to analyze data from 1000+ private business clients and manage relationships with wealth managers and high-level private business clients. During her work at Deloitte Consulting, Zeng developed further data analysis, business management, and operational skills. Zeng will expand and utilize her educational background

with work experience to operate daily functions, organize and coordinate fundraising activities, prepare grant proposals, and maintain donors' relations as grant director and financial officer.

**Tracy Gao** serves as a legal attorney in our team providing legal consultations, preparing claimers and exclusion documents, and other legal services five hours per week. Tracy is a University of Chicago School of Law alumni, and she is now working at Quinn Emanuel LLP as a licensed associate. Her past work experience in the United Nations and J.P. Morgan Investment made her a great candidate for this position, and she is willing to volunteer and work with us without pay.

**Jiyang Li** is a second-year graduate student at Harris School of Public Policy studying Finance and Risk Management. She has a background in risk management and business operation with startup companies, and Li will oversee the business administration as executive director.

**Shuying Chen** is a second-year graduate student at SSA School of Social Service Administration. Chen has worked closely with clients suffering from mental health issues for two years. She serves as a mental health support program director providing clinical advice to staffs, Chen oversees staff training programs to ensure staffs are able to provide quality services to international students.

**Jenny Wang** is a second-year graduate student at SSA School of Social Service Administration. Wang worked in Chicago House in 2017, the largest LGBTQ NGO in Illinois providing housing and employment services to clients with HIV+/AIDS within the LGBTQ community. After working with LGBTQ youths and adolescents, Wang realized the gap between the current service provider and potential market needs. Serving as a career advisor at Career Advancement in the University of Chicago, Wang has engaged and helped more than 300 college students through employment services. In this team, Wang serves as a social support program director providing housing and career specialist services operation.

## **Advisors**

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**Bridgette Davis** Prior to earning her master's degree in social service administration, Bridgette worked in charter and traditional public schools in Atlanta and Chicago for eleven years. She taught both middle school and high school, served as a Dean of Instruction for the Noble Network of Charter Schools, worked as a program director for both Teach For America and One Goal, and managed a school-based college counseling team aimed at attaching high school graduates to four-year college and other meaningful post-secondary opportunities. Bridgette's experiences in supporting students from underserved communities during the onset of adolescence through their transitions to adulthood informs her research interests. Her research interests include urban education, transitions to adulthood, homelessness, post-secondary education organizations, community colleges, and policy advocacy in the education sector.

**Kate Schechter** Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Rush Medical College

and a faculty member at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. Over the past twenty years, Schechter has served on the faculty of the Institute for Clinical Social Work as Chair of Conceptual Foundations and as a member of the IRB, and has lectured widely and taught numerous courses at Rush, at Loyola University Chicago, and at the University of Chicago, where she has also been a Field Instructor and Faculty Field Partner in the School of Social Service Administration. She directs the Chicago Center for Contemporary Psychotherapy, where they train and supervise postgraduate clinical fellows in the practice of relational psychotherapy, and she is the author of the award-winning 2014 book from Duke University Press, *Illusions of a Future: Psychoanalysis and the Biopolitics of Desire*, a historical ethnography of psychoanalysis in the United States.

**Symone Simmons** Assistant Director at the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) at the University of Illinois at Chicago providing guidance on educational workshops and departmental assessment and evaluation. Dr. Simmons serves as an admissions Counselor & Pre-Collegiate Program Coordinator for gifted and talented students and students of color at Iowa State University, and Educational Program Specialist for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Program at Georgia State University.

## Our Ask

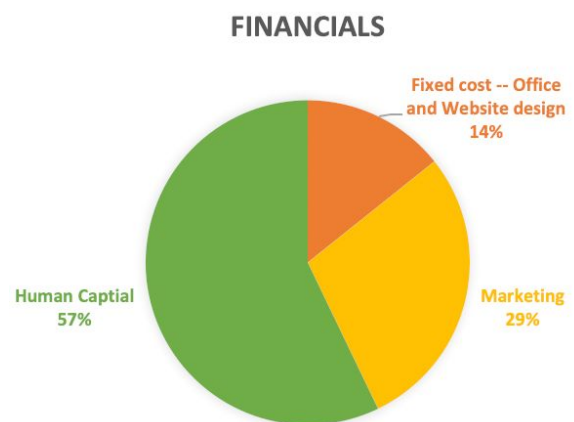
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In line with these goals, we are asking for \$28,500 in order to fund our initial launch. This ask will allow us to: (1) complete our website design, (2) allow us to reach out to major international agents (which provide college preps for international students) to acquire a stable clients source, (3) build our networks to locate and hire our supply side (for senior members of universities). This cost will allow us to develop ISAT and build it into a quality services provider to better serve the needs of international students.

## Financials

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ISAT operates at a two-sided market; therefore, it is essential for us to hire/provide enough counselors and reach to as many clients as possible. As a result, our biggest cost is upfront to build the connection initially and open up the market. As the networks and channels become stable, we can operate in a relatively low marginal cost.



Expenses : The majority of ISAT costs will be incurred upfront as we complete the platform and to connect both counselors and clients. Marketing and human capital would be the biggest cost upfront along with others:

**Fixed cost -- Office and Website design:\$10,000** We plan to rent an official office place at a startup incubator which is normally at a relatively low price per month. This would allow us to have a place to meet with our counselors and also would serve as a office place. Meanwhile, a website would serve as a platform to help clients better utilize our services.

**Marketing:\$20,000** In order to better serve the goal, we need to reach out to international students, so they can have more options and better information when they make a decision regarding either housing or any other services they may need. Our marketing cost will allow us to reach to different individuals through highly targeted social medias like wechat or line which are unique to different nationality students. It would also allow us to reach out to many agents that currently are working closely with international students for college prep -- this could be a potential major channel for marketing and would allow us to obtain a stable clients.

**Human capital:\$40,000** In order to accommodate the clients' needs and pair with them to a specific counselor, as well as to provide a premium package services, we need additional staffs with different focuses. Coordinators are the "front-desk" personnels to initially ask for clients needs and pair them with a different service counselors. Specialists are who specialize in one area like housing or cars to serve the premium package buyers. Also, case manager is the person who manage each cases and make sure clients are satisfied -- in additional to serve the mental health referral needs as well.

After the initial setup, ISAT is enabled to operate at a relative low marginal cost, and can be self-sustainable in the future. We offer our clients the best possible services at a relatively low cost.