

Project Proposal

InterNest: Empowering International Students Through a Social Connection and Support App

Shivani Raut, Arun K SOORA, Hymavathi Gummudala, Meghana Darla, Samantha Sanjeev, Sanjana Rajan

Background

International students often face challenges adjusting to a new culture, language, and educational system. Homesickness can be a significant challenge for international students, particularly introverts who find it challenging to express themselves in a new environment. To address this issue, we propose the creation of a holistic mental health and social support app tailored to the unique needs of international students.

Our app aims to go beyond mere combatting homesickness; it strives to create a vibrant and empathetic online community for international students to connect, share, and grow together.

Our app becomes a comprehensive platform that not only alleviates homesickness but also cultivates a sense of belonging and provides valuable mental health support to international students. Through meaningful connections and a rich array of resources, it empowers introverts and extroverts alike to thrive in their new environments.

The app offers features such as personalized matchmaking, real-time chat, cultural exchange programs, and access to mental health resources to create a supportive international student community. The app has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of international students.

Objectives

- **Objective 1:** To foster meaningful connections.

Measurable Goal: To achieve a 30% increase in user engagement through meaningful interactions in the form of comments, messages, and participation in group discussions within the first month of the app launch.

- **Objective 2:** To reduce homesickness.

Measurable Goal: To attain a 20% decrease in self-reported homesickness levels through pre- and post-engagement surveys conducted over a three-month period.

- **Objective 3:** To provide access to professional support.

Measurable goal: To ensure that 90% of users who seek professional mental health support are successfully connected with a licensed therapist or counselor within 24 hours of their initial request.

- **Objective 4:** To maintain a diverse user base, ensuring the app caters to introverts and extroverts alike.

Measurable Goal: To collect user demographic data and conduct surveys to understand user preferences and satisfaction among both introverted and extroverted international students.

- **Objective 5:** To retain users on the app for long term.

Measurable Goal: To calculate the app's user retention rate by tracking how many users continue to use the app after specific time intervals (that is for 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year).

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Scope

The app delivers a host of expected results to enhance the international student experience:

1. **Personalized Connections:** Users can create detailed profiles encompassing their interests, backgrounds, and challenges, resulting in highly relevant and meaningful connections with peers.
2. **AI-Powered Matching:** Advanced AI and NLP algorithms ensure thoughtful matching based on shared interests, cultural backgrounds, and emotional well-being, catering to both introverts and extroverts.
3. **Engaging Social Interaction:** Real-time chat, discussion groups, and stimulating activities encourage social interaction, facilitating the organic formation of friendships and a supportive community.
4. **Mental Health Support:** The app provides comprehensive mental health resources, including tailored articles, videos, and guided meditation sessions, and offers direct access to mental health professionals when needed.
5. **Cultural Exchange:** Users can participate in language programs, attend virtual cultural events, and share their favorite recipes, resulting in a vibrant cross-cultural community that deepens their understanding of different cultures.

The project aims to successfully plan, design, develop, test, and prepare for the launch of the international student mental health and social support app within the specified timeline and budget.

Initiation and Planning Phase (Sep 5, 2023, to Oct 6, 2023):

1. **Planning and Gathering Information:**
 - Conduct surveys and data collection to understand the specific needs and preferences of international students.
 - Determine the key features and functionalities that will best address homesickness and foster a supportive community.
2. **Design and Team Formation:**
 - Collaborate with a UI/UX designer (5k USD) to create the app's user interface and user experience design.
 - Assemble an app development team, including two app developers (20k USD) and an admin (1k USD) to oversee project management and administrative tasks.

Execution, Monitoring, and Control Phase (Oct 7, 2023, to Nov 21, 2023):

3. **Development and Implementation:**
 - Actively develop the app based on the approved design, incorporating matchmaking algorithms, chat systems, cultural exchange features, and access to mental health resources.
 - Continuously monitor the development progress, ensuring that the project stays on schedule and within budget.

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Closing Phase (Nov 22, 2023, to Dec 7, 2023):

4. Testing and Quality Assurance:

- Allocate a budget of 7k USD for rigorous testing and quality assurance to identify and rectify any bugs, issues, or performance concerns.
- Conduct thorough testing to ensure that the app functions smoothly, matches users effectively, and provides a safe and inclusive environment.

5. Final Administration:

- Allocate 3k USD for final administrative tasks, including project documentation, data backup, and preparing for the app's launch.

Time-Period

	Description of work	Start and End Dates
Phase-1	Initiation and planning: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Planning and Information Collection: Conduct surveys and collect data to understand user needs.2. Design and Team Formation: Collaborate with a UI/UX designer and form the development team.	Sep-5-2023 - Oct-6-2023
Phase-2	Execution, Monitor and, Control: <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Development and Implementation: Actively develop the app with features like matchmaking, chat, and cultural exchange.4. Progress Monitoring: Continuously monitor development progress to stay on schedule and within budget.	Oct-7-2023 - Nov-21-2023
Phase-3	Closing: <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Testing and Quality Assurance: Conduct rigorous testing to identify and fix bugs and performance issues.6. Final Administration: Prepare project documentation, data backup, and launch preparations.	Nov-22-2023 - Dec-7-2023

Project Budget

	Description of work	Anticipated Costs
Phase-1	Initiation and Planning of the Project	\$1000
Phase-2	Execution, Monitor and Control	\$31000
Phase-3	Closing	\$10000
	Total-	\$ 42000

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Key Stakeholders

Client	Indiana University
Sponsor	David Francis
Project manager	Shivani Raut
Designer	Samantha Sanjeev
Developer	Hymavathi Gummudala
CEO	Meghana Darla
Administrator	Sanjana Rajan
Quality Assurance	Arun K SOORA

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of each of our proposed objectives are critical to comprehending the effectiveness of our project.

Throughout our project, a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team will diligently track key indicators to assess progress. For user engagement, metrics such as Monthly Active Users (MAUs), average session duration, and frequency of app usage will be monitored using analytics tools, with quarterly benchmarks set for assessment.

Community-building efforts will be evaluated by analyzing user-generated content, including posts, comments, and interactions, utilizing in-app analytics to measure growth over time. To gauge the impact on homesickness reduction, pre- and post-app usage surveys or interviews will be conducted to assess changes in self-reported levels. For mental health support, usage of resources and user feedback on their effectiveness will be tracked, while demographic data on introverted and extroverted users will be collected to ensure inclusivity.

Additionally, user retention rates and factors contributing to churn will be analyzed, and feedback loops will be established to implement improvements based on user suggestions. The success of partnerships and outreach will be measured by the number of partnering institutions and the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Accessibility and inclusivity will be addressed through periodic audits and user feedback, focusing on making the app more accessible to all users.

Finally, user satisfaction scores will be regularly surveyed and tracked over time, with thorough analysis of the reasons behind any fluctuations. Our M&E team will play a pivotal role in using this data to inform decision-making, make necessary adjustments, and ultimately showcase the project's impact to stakeholders. A comprehensive end-of-project evaluation will help us assess the overall success in achieving our objectives and results outlined above.

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Approval Signatures

Shivani Raut

[IU Office of International
Affairs], Project Client

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