SMUBI

*Saint Mary’s University Breaking the Ice*

*TEAM NO: - 8*

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**General Description**

The project is aiming to provide an effective way of building up a new supporting social network for international students to set up connections with seniors of the same course, alumni, campus and local communities eventually. By establishing new contacts with people, we can provide a smooth transition to international students before their arrival and when they first arrive at Saint Mary’s University/Halifax, and later during the life in Halifax, especially in social aspects. Breaking the ice these days is something one is not comfortable in, or is shy/ afraid of and that person is unable to start a conversation with strangers, so helping them in a way to talk to people sharing the same likes/interests is important.

**Motivation of the Project**

The motivation of the project is that we as international students are from different cultures featured with diverse personalities, who are suffering from different problems in their social lives. There are barriers of languages, social and cultural background, making it difficult to set up new contacts with other people. If we can overcome these barriers, we’ll be able to strengthen the social fabric, or otherwise, people with different cultures won’t communicate with each other leading to a serious social crisis. We are the sufferers, so we have the motivation to make a difference by providing a solution where people will become comfortable to interact with each other.

**Definition of the Problem**

Generally speaking, the problem is that the international students are struggling to establish a new support network to help them deal with academic, emotional, and cultural problems before/after arriving at Saint Mary’s University. The problems of the academic environment, housing, shopping and many other aspects are just the symptoms of an underlying problem which is lack of support and social life. According to a study of more than 43,000 Canadian university students, 66% reported feeling “very lonely” in the past year, 30% felt “very lonely” within the past two weeks and shockingly 44% said they felt “so depressed that it was difficult to function” and they don’t know how to overcome these problems. The situation international students are facing is even worse because of the additional pressure of new language, new environment and lack of friends around them which might lead to social phobia.

**Survey of Existing or Related Problems**

There are common mental health issues related to the problem such as depression disorder, anxiety and bipolar disorders. International students have a relatively high score on depression and anxiety, especially when they feel their academic work is “below expectation” and they can’t share it with somebody who they feel is close enough to them, as they have to both cook food/manage food and handle their assignments. These mental issues lead to negative changes in appetite, sleep, concentration and even suicidal thoughts. In addition, living independently off campus can result in poor management of food, sleep, physical exercise and finance, in turn, creating more mental issues and making them fall into a vicious cycle until a stage where they collapse.

Consequently, academic failures and inefficiency are around the corner. What’s worse, international students from some cultures deem seeking help for mental health problems as “a real taboo”.

There are also downsides for domestic students. According to research, 57% of domestic students don’t have international friends, especially those live with parents. Besides, there are 34% of domestic students who think that international students hinder their learning experience when taking the same courses.

Despite the fact that some social network sites already exist and the universities create different kinds of chat group in apps like Facebook and Whatsapp, students still don’t talk to each other that often, whether face-to-face or on those apps. For example, even gym members who experienced online-to-offline guidance and meet other members in person, they still feel shy and uncomfortable to interact. In a nutshell, there is a phase missing in the whole system, which is ice-breaking and starting a conversation.

**Potential Approaches to Address The Problem**

There are plenty of platforms, apps and website providing contact information and building connections. However, International students still find it hard to set up new contacts through these social network platforms, because of hesitance to initiate a conversation. So we are going to provide icebreaking experience driving online-to-offline journey to build a network of connections between different communities, by matching people of different genders and similar interest not just in one domain, but multiple domains.

We can provide a multifunctional platform to strengthen the connection between international students, Canadian citizens, their seniors and alumni. The users will get points based on making connections/talking to other members and those rewarded points can Sbe redeemed anywhere they want, in turn motivating them to break the ice. Also, this app will consist of referral points, in order to expand the user base.

Such functions can include: helping this connection setting process before their arrival in order to increase a sense of belonging; providing timely dissemination of information of academic events and general information like health insurance to generate a sense of security; providing approaches like open chat group to form relationships within students with same demands in order to start conversations on a common ground/topic; providing approaches to set up one-on-one tutorial, guidance or language partnership; showcasing the existing lives and contacts based on interests or academic fields.

**Study Methods/Design**

Requirements gathering

* Types of studies:
* Structured interviews
* Questionnaires through offline surveys
* Personal experience as Internal Student.
* Observing how students start the interaction
* Who will be the participant and who cannot be:

Can be:

* International students
* Alumni, Seniors, Staff
* Professors

Cannot be:

* Outsider
* How to recruit them:
* Ask in person
* Post on bulletin boards
* Where the study takes place:
* Saint Mary’s University Campus
* How long each session approximately lasts:
* Initial Introduction for 5-7 Minutes
* Questionnaires 15 minutes Approximately
* How the data will be collected:
* taking notes
* videotape
* offline surveys
* audio record
* Tools/instruments used:
* Questionnaires
* Banners
* Interview questions
* Video/voice recorders
* Offline Surveys
* How/when the informed consent is administered:

**Data analysis**

How you use the data

* The collected interview and questionnaire answers will be summarized and grouped into categories, a video will be annotated and transcribed.
* Collected data will be secured and will not be transferred or exposed to any other organization.
* Audio records will be accessed only by project members and the professor to study the behaviours and feelings of social online and offline activities by comparison. All personal information will be annotated and transcribed and not be exposed to anyone.
* Video footages will be accessed only by project members and the professor to study the behaviour patterns of establishing new contacts and the reactions of different ice-breaking activities. All personal information will be annotated and transcribed and not be exposed to anyone.

**Appendices:**

**Sample question**

Questions Design for New students:

1. Where are you from?
   1. Canadian
   2. International Students
2. Are you an undergrad student or a grad student?
3. What is your major?
4. What’s your SMU email address?
5. Do you live on campus or off campus?
6. How long have you been in Canada and Saint Mary’s University?
   1. Less than 8 months
   2. More than 8 months
7. Have you ever felt lonely or unsupported in your previous school or in the past?

Yes/No

1. Were you comfortable in your home country (If international student)?

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. Do you usually initiate a conversation?

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. Winning a debate matters less to you than making sure no one get upset?

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. People can rarely upset you?

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. It is often difficult for you to relate to other people’s

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. You rarely worry about how your actions affect other people.?

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. I want to expand my social circle with students local or from other cultures

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. I think asking friends the best to solve problems than other ways like Google or counselling.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. There is difficulty in communicating or bonding with students local or from other cultures.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. If so, what do you think is the main reason(s)?
   1. Language
   2. Lack of common topics
   3. Lack of confidence to start a conversation
   4. Lack of chances
2. Did you make any new friend before reaching to Canada? Yes/No
   1. If yes by which source you guys start to communicate?
      1. Social Media
      2. Phone Calls
      3. Offline Meeting
   2. Are those friends of the same gender?
      1. If yes, on a scale of 1-5 how comfortable are you with talking to them?
      2. If no, how many opposite gender friends did you make?

=> 1-2, 2-5, More than 5

1. Did you make any new friend after reaching to Canada?
   1. If yes, how did you break the ice with that person
      1. Initiating a conversation on the Social media
      2. Talking about classroom projects/assignments
      3. Talking at University Events
      4. Meeting them in halifax’s events
      5. Pubs/Coffee Shops/Part Time Jobs
2. If no, how would you like to break the ice with a stranger?
   1. Through casual events
   2. Meeting in a private space
   3. Plan games on the basis of likes
3. When do you feel a bonding with a new friend the most?
   * 1. Have fine together at public space (pubs, movie theatre or parks, etc)
   1. Have fine together in a private space (apartment room or other residences, etc)
   2. Comment on posts of online network sites (Facebook or Ins, etc)
   3. Messages through online chat apps (Messenger or Whatsapp, etc)
   4. Other situations you feel comfortable talking in:(Please write down)
4. What move(s) make you feel getting closer to a new friend the most?
   1. Making jokes about each other (maybe slightly abusive).
   2. Tell each other about personal experiences (include embarrassment).
   3. Physically contact.(shaking hands/hugs/kiss)
   4. Accomplishing a common task.
   5. Other
5. How much time do you spend on social apps a day on average?
6. Less than 1 hour
7. 1 - 3 hours
8. 3 - 5 hours
9. More than 5 hours
10. What do you exactly do on social apps?
11. Searching for new friends
12. Messaging to friends
13. Looking for offline events
14. In what scenario(s) do you want to use social apps the most?
15. When sitting alone and idle
16. When attending some activities (sessions, parties, etc)
17. When necessary (like group assignments, course schedule, etc)
18. I think social apps useful for communications with existing social circle.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. I think social apps useful for establishing and bonding with strangers.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. I want to set up new contacts with newcomers.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

1. If so, what is the motivation to do it.

a) Financial benefits

b) Social responsibility

c) Emotional satisfaction

d) Building confidence

e) Deep dive into previous academic knowledge

Additional knowledge about different nations and cultures

1. How much time a week are you willing to spend on new relations?

a) Less than 5 hours

b) 5 - 10 hours

c) 10 - 30 hours

d) More than 30 hours

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# **Participants Needed for a Course Project (MCDA 5530 UI/UX Design and Evaluation)**

# **Design, Development, and Evaluation of Technologies for Engaging Communities** (SMU REB#: 17-480)

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We are recruiting participants to take part in a research study for the course projects for MCDA 5530: UI/UX Design and Evaluation, under the supervision of Dr. Yasushi Akiyama (Math & Computing Science, Saint Mary’s University).

**Purpose of the study.** The goal of this study is to gather information regarding the technology designs that will strengthen the “social fabric.” A social fabric” is a metaphor for how individuals interact with each other within a community. Frequent and positive interactions create a tight weave to create a strong ‘social fabric’ that can withstand the weight of a challenge. The looser the connections a community has, the looser the weave and the greater the likelihood that the fabric will break. The basis of such designs is a careful understanding of the particular needs and requirements of the individuals involved.

**Study.** The study will consist of 2 phases: In the 1st phase, we will conduct a survey by means of interviews, questionnaires, and user observations, to collect data about common issues that the individuals face. Each study session is expected to last 5 to 90 minutes in the 1st phase. The 2nd phase will be usability studies, either individually or in a focus group setting to evaluate our proposed solutions. You will be asked to perform certain tasks and to answer questions regarding the usability of our new technology. Each study session in this phase will last 30 Minutes.

**Participants.** Our group is seeking if international students/ Canadian students experienced problems in breaking the ice to participate in our study. Although you may not be eligible for our study, you may still be eligible for other group projects that you may be interested in. Thus if you are interested in connecting with other groups, please contact the course instructor (Dr. Yasushi Akiyama, Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca) to find out about the other group projects.

**Date & Location**. All studies are expected to take place either on or near Saint Mary’s University campus, on your site, or in the form of online questionnaires. These sessions will take place between Feb 28th, 2019 and April 2nd, 2019.

**How to participate.** If you think you might be interested in participating in our study or would like more information, please contact (Talwinder Saini:- [Talwinder.saini@smu.ca](mailto:Talwinder.saini@smu.ca)), ( Aditya Tandon:- [Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca](mailto:Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca)), or the course instructor (Dr. Yasushi Akiyama, [Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca](mailto:Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca) ). We may have a few questions to help determine whether you would be eligible to participate in our study (or possibly other groups’ studies).

Thank you very much,

*Principal Investigator:* Supervisor: Dr. Yasushi Akiyama

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Devvrat Deshwal-A00431503([Devvrat.Deshwal@smu.ca](mailto:Devvrat.Deshwal@smu.ca)) NS, B3H 3C3, Mob no-902-420-5072

Manoj Morishetty-A00432854([Manoj.morishetty@smu.ca](mailto:Manoj.morishetty@smu.ca) ) Email: [Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca](mailto:Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca)

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**MCDA 5530 Course Project**

### **Design, Development, and Evaluation of Technologies for Engaging Communities**

**SMU REB # 17-480 (SMU REB File Number)**

**Group Members:**

***Aditya Tandon, Talwinder Saini, Manoj Morishetty, Jiye Wang, Devvrat Deshwal***

**Instructor/Supervisor: Dr Yasushi Akiyama**

# **Mathematics and Computing Science**

## **Saint Mary’s University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3**

#### **Phone: 902-420-5072; Fax: 902-420-5035; Email address: yasushi.akiyama@smu.ca**

**INTRODUCTION**

We are conducting a research study as part of a graduate-level course MCDA 5530 UI/UX Design and Evaluation, under the supervision of Dr. Yasushi Akiyama (Mathematics and Computing Science). Our group consists of 5 MSc students. We have no financial interest in conducting this research study. You are being invited to participate in this study, which is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience.

**PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH**

The goal of this study is to gather information regarding the technology designs that will strengthen the “social fabric.” A social fabric” is a metaphor for how individuals interact with each other within a community. Frequent and positive interactions create a tight weave to create a strong ‘social fabric’ that can withstand the weight of a challenge. The looser the connections a community has, the looser the weave and the greater the likelihood that the fabric will break. The basis of such designs is a careful understanding of the particular needs and requirements of the individuals involved.

**WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?**

You can participate in this study if you are a Student/Professor or an Alumni at Saint Mary’s University. Although you may not be eligible for our study, you may still be eligible for other group projects that you may be interested in. Thus, if you are interested in connecting with other groups, please contact the course instructor (Dr. Yasushi Akiyama, Yasushi.Akiyama@smu.ca) to find out about the other group projects.

**WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

Each study will consist of 2 Phases: In the 1st phase, we will conduct a survey by means of Interviews, Questionnaires, Survey and users observations, to collect data about common issues that the individuals face. Each study session is expected to last 5-20 minutes in the 1st phase. The study sessions will take place in Saint Mary’s University campus. You will be asked about issues that you may face in daily life, such as *“Is there difficulty in communicating or bonding with students local or from other cultures?”, “What move(s) make you feel getting closer to a new friend the most?”, “In what scenario(s) do you want to use social apps the most?”*

You may also be invited for the 2nd phase, which will be a usability study, either individually or in a focus group setting to evaluate our proposed solutions. You will be asked to perform simple tasks, such as “Please use this app/system,” and to answer questions regarding the usability of our new technology designs, such as “What did you, or did you not like about our app/solution?” Each study session in this 2nd phase is expected to last 15 minutes. You are welcomed to participate in either one of the sessions or both.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?**

Although you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, the goal of the project is to develop approaches/tools which will have direct long-term benefits for Undergraduate International Students. You will also have the opportunity to give feedback on these new approaches/tools so that we can improve its functionality/service performance that may benefit you and people in the community in the future.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?**

The study will be conducted in an environment that is comfortable to you. Very minor fatigue associated with the general use of digital tools is expected. You might also feel a slight discomfort in performing tasks that you may not entirely be familiar with and answering questions that you may not know the answers to or feel uncomfortable to answer. If you feel uncomfortable with performing any tasks or answering any questions, or do not wish to answer questions for any other reasons, simply let us know and we will not proceed with those tasks and questions. We are only concerned with the evaluation of our own system, and not your ability to perform tasks or answer questions.

**WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION AND WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO IT?**

We are collecting your feedback regarding your experience, and your opinions about the existing and our new approaches to address certain issues that may be observed. Your confidentiality will be of the utmost importance. The study will be conducted by one or two of our group members, and potentially with the presence of one or more of support staff from your organization/institution in order to ensure the safe environment for you. While this may not allow for the complete confidentiality or anonymity, the sessions will only be attended by you, our interviewers, and the staff member(s) with your approval. We will use numbers for any reported data instead of real names, no identifying information will be used in any written, verbal, or presented information without your permission. The study session may be recorded and transcribed, with anonymous code numbers. The recording will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

The collected raw data may be accessed only by our group members and Dr. Akiyama. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this study, we plan on sharing the summary data and results with our peers in the course and potentially at an academic conference. The summary data will not contain any personal or identifying information. The raw data will be kept and maintained by our group members for this academic year. You may ask to receive the results of this study once completed.

**HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, your data will not be used in the subsequent analysis and will be destroyed (note that once your data is included in the study analysis, it cannot be retracted). Should you wish to withdraw, you can contact us or Dr. Akiyama.

**HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? (OR HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

If you have any questions, please contact either the principal investigators Talwinder Saini, Jiye Wang, Aditya, Devvrat Deshwal, Manoj Morishetty by [Talwinder.saini@smu.ca](mailto:Talwinder.saini@smu.ca), [Jiye.Wang@smu.ca](mailto:Jiye.Wang@smu.ca) , [Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca](mailto:Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca) or the course instructor Dr. Yasushi Akiyama at [yasushi.akiyama@smu.ca](mailto:yasushi.akiyama@smu.ca). If you are interested in our Project and would like more information about it, Please contact- [Talwinder.saini@smu.ca](mailto:Talwinder.saini@smu.ca) , [Jiye.Wang@smu.ca](mailto:Jiye.Wang@smu.ca) , [Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca](mailto:Aditya.Tandon@smu.ca) for further discussion.

**Certification:**

The Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at [ethics@smu.ca](mailto:ethics@smu.ca) or 420-5728.

**Signature of Agreement (Participant’s copy):**

**Course Project (MCDA 5530)**

**Design, Development, and Evaluation of Technologies for Engaging Communities**

**SMU REB # 17-480 (SMU REB File Number)**

I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Participant

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Name (Printed) :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Day/Month/Year)

Principal Investigator

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Name (Printed) :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Day/Month/Year)

Videotaping and audio recording:

I have read the explanation about this study and understand that the study session will be videotaped (with audio) for the analysis purposes. I hereby consent to have myself videotaped (with audio) during the session. However, I am free to withdraw from the videotaping at any time during the study session.

Participant

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**Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.**

(Participants must be provided with a copy of the signed Informed Consent Form.)

**Signature of Agreement (Investigator’s copy):**

**Course Project (MCDA 5530)**

**Design, Development, and Evaluation of Technologies for Engaging Communities**

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