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Complexity Theory: An Approach to Understanding the Weak Relationships between Valparaiso's International and Non-International Student Populations

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The Valparaiso University campus is becoming more diverse as each year passes. The undergraduate population on campus is experiencing a rise in international admissions. Although the University has many recognized student organizational groups, including VISA (Valparaiso International Student Association), these student organizations are failing to connect with one another, which results in a very fragmented student population rather than an intertwined group of young adults. The prior being the case, this campaign directly targets the international student association known as VISA, and is related to increasing student awareness (both international and national) of the VISA organization, their events, and also increasing student participation and membership within the program. This campaign will likely prove to be mutually beneficial to both the VISA program and to all other campus organizations that form partnerships with VISA.

Within the campaign, several questionnaires were circulated to international and national students as well as to key dignitaries within specific and pre-identified campus organizations. With the feedback that was obtained through these questionnaires, plans were formulated to form partnerships with campus organizations, by which VISA and all partnered programs could realize a mutual benefit from the campaign. This benefit included, but was not limited to, increasing publicity and awareness of VISA events during the calendar year. The results of the campaign included the exchange of experiences between VISA and non-VISA organizations on the Valpo campus. The focus groups further confirmed: 1) stereotyping by each group toward the other, 2) the lack of incentive to mix, and 3) the need for leadership to facilitate better understanding and to create opportunities to mix student groups.

Information about the Authors:

One of the group members, Kayla, is involved in VISA, the international student organization on campus. This organization encourages learning about other cultures around the world. She holds the public relations position in the group, so she does a lot of work in trying to attract more students to the events. Therefore, she became aware of a lack of American student involvement in these events, which sparked her interest in this particular campaign. Another one of the group members, Cameron, is an international student from Tasmania who wasn't involved with VISA. This gave the group another perspective as to how and why students do or do not participate in VISA. Michelle is the other group member. She is not involved with VISA, and she is not an international student. Michelle is involved in Greek life, and the group received her perspective on VISA's events.

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