DUKEENGAGE IN VIETNAM
Building infrastructure and teaching youth. This program is organized by CET Academic Programs in collaboration with DukeEngage.

Dates: June 12 – August 7, 2020
(Dates subject to change up until the point of departure.)

Service Themes
- Community development/outreach
- Health/human services
- Education/literacy

Program Focus
Making an impact in the local community in Quang Tri through the development and completion of a local construction project, ESL instruction to students in grades 8-11, and cross-cultural exchange with local roommates and community members.

Program Leaders
- Savon Jackson, Asia Programs Manager, CET Academic Programs.
- Vu Ho, Resident Director, CET Vietnam. Vu comes from the central highlands of Vietnam, moved to Ho Chi Minh City to attend both high school and college, graduated from the University of Economics of Ho Chi Minh City in 2013 with a BA in finance, and first joined the CET Vietnam team in 2010 as a Vietnamese roommate.
- Peter Nguyen, Program Director, CET Vietnam. Peter received his M.A. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Bowling Green State University in 2011 and his B.A. and B.S. in Sociology and Biology from Shippensburg University in 2009. Prior to joining CET, he served as Global Community Fellowship Coordinator for Via Programs and as Assistant Director of Oberlin College’s Multicultural Resource Center.

Program Overview
On this program, projects are developed in conjunction with local community members and carried out by DukeEngage students and Vietnamese roommates from nearby Hue University. Typically, projects are a combination of activities that contribute to local infrastructure and ESL teaching—a vital skill for advancement in Vietnam. Students promote cross-cultural understanding and exchange through events like the Field Day, community volunteering, and extracurricular activities that supplement ESL classes. The program begins with a short orientation in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnam’s incredible development over the past two decades has exacerbated social and economic inequalities between the country’s urban and rural residents. This lack of opportunity in rural Vietnam has caused an exodus of the young and educated from small towns to metropolitan centers, leading to a lack of investment in social services and infrastructure development in the countryside. Still unrecovered from decades of war, Central Vietnam is an area of particularly high need for development investment. DukeEngage and CET have worked with the community in Quang Tri since 2010 and have developed a trusting relationship with community members that enables student groups to complete meaningful grassroots development work each summer.

Goals for Students
By the end of the program, students should:
- discuss from experience how communication can transcend language and culture
• express comfort working in cultural settings other than their own
• develop a more nuanced understanding of pressing community issues in rural Vietnam
• have pushed their comfort zones through their contributions to the program projects
• better understand the importance of stakeholder engagement in grassroots development work
• comprehend the role and importance of relationships and collaboration in instigating change
• be more capable team members and contributors to group projects
• articulate the ongoing impact and utility of the DukeEngage-Vietnam program to the local community in Quang Tri and in their personal development

Partnership Opportunities
Students participate in various education and infrastructure building projects in rural communities. Projects are selected and teams are determined before students arrive. CET staff meet with Quang Tri community members to learn more about the current community needs and then determine how students can practically assist in sustainably meeting those needs. Each year, the group does one teaching project and one infrastructure project.

Students start at one of several building worksites with their roommates before dawn. All projects are selected in conjunction with the local community and aim to improve local sanitation, public health resources, ease of transportation, or quality of life for local residents. Projects in the past have included:
• A hand-washing station for an elementary school;
• A new, usable toilet for an elementary school;
• Erecting safety structures to prevent injuries from motorized vehicles;
• Paving a road in a remote area to ensure driver and pedestrian safety and improve sanitation;
• Building a basketball court and organizing a community basketball tournament;
• Constructing a public exercise space with modern equipment for community use.

In 2020, students will contribute to a construction project in collaboration with the local Youth Center. The exact project details will be finalized and announced in late 2019.

In the afternoons, DukeEngage participants teach ESL classes to students, typically grades 8-11, in a local school building. Vietnamese roommates act as co-teachers, and together they create unique lesson plans. Class content often focuses on oral communication.

Students participate in various intercultural exchange events that aim to promote international understanding with both the local community and their roommates. Past students have participated in a cultural show that highlights American and Vietnamese culture, facilitated a youth soccer tournament and other sporting events, and organized a fundraiser for local charities.

Students will be required to participate in extensive physical labor during their service work. These tasks could include painting, transporting building materials, pouring concrete for a foundation, cleaning up rivers and roads, and assisting with building construction and restoration. Students should bring clothes and shoes that are appropriate for manual labor. The climate is tropical and it’s often muddy, thus students should dress accordingly. Exact infrastructure and educational projects are determined in consultation with local partners’ needs and thus are subject to change.

Program Requirements
Language Requirements: None, though Vietnamese language skills are a plus.

Coursework Requirements: None (see Curricular Connections below for some suggested courses).

Personal Qualities: Students are assessed based on the degree to which they meet the following criteria. Not all criteria must be met, but a strong candidate will have a combination of most of these attributes:
• Flexibility and high tolerance of ambiguity;
• Experience building or teaching;
• Experience volunteering, especially with building and/or teaching projects;
• Interest in Vietnamese culture and language;
• Experience volunteering and/or traveling in a developing country;
• The ability to work well on a diverse team; and
• Willingness to work in physically demanding environments.

Program Details
Description of Community: Students will begin the program with a short orientation in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Students will then relocate to a rural area in the Central Region where they will continue orientation and conduct their project work. One of the areas hit hardest by the Vietnam War, Quang Tri is still recovering from the effects of Agent Orange and decades of poverty. Quang Tri has a tropical climate and hilly terrain.

Housing and Meals: Students will live in guesthouses with Vietnamese roommates who will also participate in all aspects of the program. In both Ho Chi Minh City and Quang Tri, all students live in the same guesthouse, which offers simple but comfortable rooms. Air conditioning, hot water, western-style toilets, and internet are available throughout Ho Chi Minh City but are less commonly found at the program site in Quang Tri. For example, students usually wash clothes by hand, have irregular access to the internet, and experience occasional power outages.

Living with Vietnamese roommates provides DukeEngage students with a unique perspective on contemporary and historical issues in Vietnam. Students engage with local development issues by participating in projects that aim to benefit the community. Students will perform physical labor for the majority of the program and thus should be in good physical health. Students must know how to ride a bicycle. Participants must also be amenable to frequent scheduling changes. It is expected that students actively practice and improve communication skills with the Vietnamese people.

Students will primarily eat as a group, and should expect to eat traditional Vietnamese food: pho (rice noodles, thinly sliced beef, and beef both), vegetables stir fried with sauces over rice, small portions of cooked meat over white rice or rice noodles, etc. Students will also have opportunities to purchase food from vendors selling local fruits, Vietnamese sandwiches, and various stir-fry dishes. Due to the high level of physical activity and the limited availability of more diverse food options in the program location, students are encouraged to practice flexible eating habits. Cooking for yourself, vegetarian diets, and severe allergies may be difficult to accommodate.

Health Note: Shellfish and soy are common ingredients in the local cuisine. Ready, nearby access to treatment for travelers experiencing a severe allergic reaction to this and other food(s) may be limited at this program site. Students who are considering applying to DukeEngage-Vietnam should review these facts with their families and medical providers before applying.

In rural Vietnam, most students will travel by bike and on foot to the worksites daily and must be comfortable riding a bicycle for up to 30 minutes each way. When biking, all students are required to wear a bike helmet. Students are prohibited from riding Vietnamese motorbikes (mini motorcycles).

Internet connections in Vietnam can often be spotty, so students should take this into account when considering their communication and social media habits.

Local Safety, Security, and Cultural Norms: If you have special needs related to health, cultural, or religious practices, please contact the DukeEngage office, dukeengage@duke.edu, to discuss whether or not your needs can be reasonably accommodated in this program.
For information related to how your religion, race, sexual/gender identity, ability or other aspects of your identity might impact your travels, we recommend starting with the Diversity, Identity and Global Travel section of the DukeEngage website.

We encourage students who have questions or concerns about health or safety in international programs to check Duke’s International SOS (ISOS) portal for relevant information.

Reflection and Enrichment: Your site coordinator will lead weekly reflection sessions in which you and your local Vietnamese roommate will be expected to participate. During these sessions, students may reflect on what surprises them about their environment, discuss their experiences interacting with the local community, and share thoughts on personal challenges and solutions. More details will be provided during on-site orientation.

Students will participate in service projects all morning and afternoon. Many evenings and some weekends may include other activities, teaching preparation, or group discussions. In general, students will have limited free time to pursue independent activities. Lunch breaks and “downtime” are typically spent interacting with local community members. Students may spend their free time getting smoothies, playing soccer with local students, or traveling with their local Vietnamese roommates during available weekends.

Curricular Connections
Courses on Southeast Asian culture or history, specifically Vietnam, as well as education and international development may be of interest.

More Information

- 2019 group blog: https://dukeengage.duke.edu/blog/?prog=dukeengage-vietnam-blog
- 2019 group Thank You video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Lezv9tI2t0
- 2018 group blog: https://dukeengagevietnam2018.wordpress.com/
- 2017 group blog: https://dukeengagevietnam2017.wordpress.com/
- At Home in the World, by Thich Nhat Hanh. A selection of Zen teachings and autobiographical stories written by a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist. Thich reminisces about his childhood in rural Vietnam, his initial years as a novice monk, and his experiences as a writer during wartime.
- Catfish and Mandala, by Andrew Pham. A young Vietnamese-American sets off on a bicycle voyage around the Pacific Rim to better understand his cultural identity and explore his ancestral fatherland.
- CET Academic Programs website: https://cetacademicprograms.com/programs/vietnam/