

## **Second runner up**

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### **Building the future through education**

In fifteen years, cooperative efforts built on trust, friendship and respect between the United States and Vietnam are starting to benefit both countries. In this bilateral relationship, education has become the key to progress in various areas. Our mutual cooperation in education is improving the educational system in Vietnam, awakening Americans to the new face of Vietnam, and also positively affecting all other fields of both nations.

As a student, I have had opportunities to interact with American teachers. At first I was worried that my grandpa would not approve of me studying with American teachers. He was seriously wounded during the war and I doubted that he could ever come to terms with the fact that his grandchild was now being educated by his former enemies. To my surprise and great relief, I learnt that he holds no grudge against Americans. He reassured me, "*The past is now gone and I am happy that they're coming back to reshape this country and educate the new generation of Vietnam.*" And now, for fifteen years, we have worked together to rebuild this country.

The U.S. government has made a great contribution to modernizing the state of education in Vietnam. Despite the demand of qualified human resources for the process of modernization, Vietnam's educational system has been in crisis. According to a review of a report by Harvard University professors Thomas J. Vallely and Ben Wilkinson, "*Vietnam's universities are moribund and the core problem is heavy-handed central control.*" Seeing that the reforms are critical to Vietnam on our way to development, Vietnamese top officials have been aware of an effective shortcut: cooperating with U.S. universities and professors. Currently many plans have been carried out in all parts of Vietnam, including the creation of American style colleges and funding educational exchange programs. Thanks to these new Vietnamese universities that utilize American curriculum and teaching methodology, Vietnamese officials intend that the national educational reform will be implemented based on the U.S. standard system. Another activity we have been engaged in is increasing the flow of Vietnamese students to America through programs like Fulbright and VEF. The number of Vietnamese students attending courses at well-known U.S. universities has been rising non-stop and Vietnam has now become the world's 20th country with its number of students in America. Many graduates are involved in the American way-oriented reforms that are shaping the future of Vietnam.

Since normalization, although cooperation has been promoted in all areas, the image of Vietnam is still relatively poor in American hearts. Americans, especially young people who were born postwar, only know about Vietnam from some short lessons in high school. As a result, many people associate Vietnam with a gloomy country of endless jungles, no cities or prosperity. The wrong beliefs can only be changed if more ambassadors provide a better education of Vietnamese culture, history and business environment and other areas. The ambassadors are not necessarily those in the embassy but they can be ordinary citizens, i.e. teachers and students, who are able to provide a closer look at Vietnam to locals. American teachers who have experience teaching in Vietnam also bring the current face of Vietnam to their family and friends. For Vietnamese students, in the U.S. community, they are Vietnamese ambassadors in holding cultural shows and introducing natives about their traditional customs. In class, better than any

textbook, they contribute to the subject of Asian. While U.S. textbooks stop addressing Vietnam beyond 1973, students of the new generation might fill the gap in the timeline and provide personal knowledge about the modern Vietnam.

As the motive for development, education also has impact on other areas of opportunity. The relations in education have encouraged the development of tourism, business and medicine just to name a few. Thanks to better mutual understanding, American veterans understand that Vietnam has made a dramatic change in the last decades and are coming back to see the transformation in the places where they served . Every year, American volunteer groups teaching in Vietnamese street schools, charity organizations and educating people in remote areas are warmly welcome. During their time here, they may discover some business opportunity, such as a profitable plan for exporting some handicraft to the U.S. For doctors and students coming to provide health care and promote education in poor villages, they can gain new experience about tropical diseases, traditional therapy when encountering cases that are not present at home. This Vietnam experience enriches everyone's knowledge and skills.

All things considered, our mutual cooperation in education has become the key factor in brightening the shared future of both nations. Our growing relationship in fifteen years has shown that we can strengthen the bond and bring huge benefit to the peoples of both countries, if we devote concerted efforts.