**Introduction**

When I first started brainstorming ideas for my Senior Honors Thesis Project, I knew I wanted to work with Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS), a nonprofit I volunteered abroad with in Cartago, Costa Rica. When I was in Costa Rica, I worked at an orphanage called El Pueblito and the kids’ stories really touched me and changed my perspective. I knew I wanted to do more for them and more for the organization. Traveling back to the orphanage wasn’t an option for me, but volunteering my time was. I decided to work with CCS to design and create a volunteer handbook that could better prepare volunteers for their experience abroad. When I volunteered, I was traveling alone and I had never been out of the country before. I was scared and nervous, but excited! By using my personal experience abroad, I was able to compile resources and information that would be useful for a first-time volunteer to make the most out of their experience and to make sure they are prepared for working with the children. The final product is a handbook and an accompanying classroom activity bank on Pinterest that can be accessed digitally by CCS volunteers worldwide.

**Challenges Faced**

One of the biggest challenges I encountered was communicating with the nonprofit internationally. When I have worked with clients previously, I have always been able to communicate in person, but all communication with this client had to be online, so this was a new experience for me. When it came to asking quick, general questions about the program, I was able to utilize CCS’s online chat service, but when it came to specifics, I either had to make decisions on my own using my best judgment or I had to plan ahead and be open to waiting for a response from the busy organization.
Another challenge I faced was taking the information I was provided with online, combining it with my experience and my tips, and including researched elements as well. I had to focus primarily on having a voice that was consistent throughout the entire document as well as consistent with the nonprofits mission and brand. If I had access to change the website as well, I would’ve made more changes to the text I was provided with. I had to make sure I was accurately portraying the nonprofit’s branding since it would be representing CCS in the future. If you look at Figure 1, you can see the branding shown on the organization’s website. Figure 2 is a screenshot of two pages of the handbook I designed. As you can see, I kept the color scheme consistent and used similar fonts and layouts as the website. I also tried to emphasize images the way they do on their website.

Figure 1: Screenshot of the home page on crossculturalsolutions.org.
I further analyzed the meaning behind the colors used in their scheme and connected it to their mission. As you can see in Figure 3, their color scheme was fairly optimistic, friendly, excited, and peaceful. CCS’s mission is “to operate volunteer programs around the world in partnership with sustainable community initiatives, bringing people together to work side-by-side while sharing perspectives and fostering cultural understanding.” Their mission, in combination with their color scheme and font choice, helps create the organization’s brand. I tried to carry this branding throughout the graphics and the...
writing as well. Much of my research was done on the nonprofit to ensure that I was accurately representing them. I also looked at other nonprofit’s handbooks for ideas on how to best portray certain components of the handbook.

Finally, another challenge I faced was thinking like a first-time volunteer. My trip was almost two years ago now, so I can’t quite remember all of the aspects I wish I had known before my arrival in Cartago. I was in-country for an extended period of time and have experience traveling now, so it is harder to think back to what I would’ve liked to know at the time. It was easier having an advisor and two readers look over my work since they hadn’t been to Cartago either and could come up with questions.

**Design Plan**

The scope of my project changed greatly over the course of three semesters. Going into the first semester of the project, I had plans to sell my artwork and photography to raise money to buy the orphanage a new playground. I quickly realized this goal was unrealistic and I came up with a new project that was better geared toward my skills and goals. The project continued to evolve as I worked on it. For instance, I considered transforming the handbook into an Atavist site that could be accessed online. Instead, I decided to make the handbook an interactive document in which the volunteers could engage with. For instance, the document links out to other resources and links between sections. There are also interactive graphics, such as the packing list that can be checked off. I decided against the Atavist because the document ended up being much bigger than I expected and making it into a website it wouldn’t have brought much to my project.
Instead, I made the document interactive so it could still be accessed by volunteers online worldwide.

The Future of the Project

I will be sending my project to representatives from the CCS Cartago Home Base so that the handbook can be utilized by volunteers starting this summer. I imagine there being a printed version of the handbook in the Home Base as well as a digital version uploaded to the Cartago profile page on the CCS website. If I had more time, I would like to feedback on the handbook from volunteers who use it and see if it helps them prepare for their trip better. Using their feedback, I’d like to make additional changes.