Pre-Departure Orientation
for the 2012 Cohort of VEF Fellows and Visiting Scholars

The Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF) conducted a Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) from June 7-13, 2012 for the new cohort of Fellows and Scholars who will begin their academic programs in the United States in the academic year 2012-2013. The 2012 cohort includes 49 new Fellows, who will begin master's/Ph.D. programs, and six new Visiting Scholars who will undertake five- to twelve-month professional development programs.

VEF Fellows, Visiting Scholars of Cohort 2012
VEF Board Chair, VEF staff, and VEF alumni

*2012 VEF Fellows and Visiting Scholars form the three letters **V E F***

The PDO helps the new Fellows' and Visiting Scholars' transition to American culture and life on U.S. campuses.

VEF organized the intensive PDO in two sections:

1. A team-building program that focused on challenging outdoor experiential/learning activities, aimed at allowing the participants to experience unfamiliar/new situations; to think critically and creatively; and to explore new situations with confidence.
2. Formal interactive presentations that dealt with a host of new information that will be useful for their transition into a new academic and cultural environment.

VEF Fellows and Visiting Scholars worked in teams, communicated with each other, and inspired each other while undertaking assigned tasks.

This year's PDO was conducted both in Dalat and Ho Chi Minh City. Commencing with the **team-building activities** held at Tuyen Lam Lake in Dalat, the first two days consisted of outdoor games and activities organized by Phat Tire Ventures, an American company contracted by VEF, with extensive experience providing such training in Vietnam. While engaging in physical activities, the Fellows and Visiting Scholars were able to experience the following challenges that better prepared them for real-life situations in the United States:

- ✓ How to work together and strive for success collectively;
- ✓ How to adapt rapidly to new experiences;
- ✓ How to think creatively and critically;
- ✓ How to deal with new/unfamiliar challenges; and
- ✓ How to manage time effectively.

The Orange Team of VEF Fellows and Visiting Scholars celebrated after winning first place in the boat race.

The PDO experiential activities were organized to give the Fellows and Visiting Scholars self-confidence and simulated situations/issues they may encounter during their transition to a new culture and environment. Activities mirrored conditions in the highly competitive American academic environment that the students/scholars should be prepared for. Team-building exercises break down perceived differences in age, gender, and socio-economic position, so that everyone can learn how to work as a team and contribute to the good of the group.

"Physically and mentally challenging! I did not think I would be that strong! I learnt how to win myself and think outside of the box."

The presentation sessions of the PDO were held in Ho Chi Minh City. VEF invited select Alumni to join this section of the PDO to share their experiences. In addition, representatives from the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City were invited to advise on cultural adjustment and visa application matters.

The dynamic **cultural and academic portion** of the orientation consisted of interactive presentations, lectures, and discussions, which included the following topics:

- Academic life and the U.S. classroom culture (i.e., advisers, campus orientations, course selection, grading, graduate assistantships, language assistance, and planning toward a thesis/dissertation);
- Campus life (i.e., bank accounts, health and well-being, housing, social life, and travel);
- Cultural differences;
- Regulations for J-visa holders and immigration responsibilities; and
- VEF policies.

"The lessons that we learnt will be useful guides for us to solve similar problems in similar situations in the United States."

Below are a few comments made by some of the Fellows and Visiting Scholars:

> *"I did things that I have never thought of before. I am now ready for new challenges in the United States!"*
>
> *"The comprehensive information and new experiences gained during the PDO will be great preparation for my new journey to the United States."*

VEF wishes the new Fellows and Visiting Scholars safe travel to the United States and great success in their long journey ahead.

Please click here to view more photos of the PDO. Please click here to read the articles on the 2012 Cohort of the Fellows and Visiting Scholars as well as on the 2012 PDO.