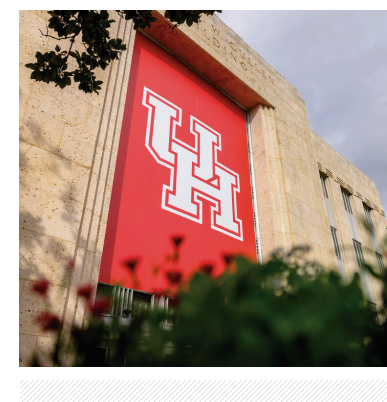


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In 2009, the University of Houston’s C. T. Bauer College of Business (UH) and International University, Vietnam National University (IU-VNU) established a 2+2 pathway that allows students to complete two years in Vietnam and two years at UH. Its success reflects a multi-factor model: structured transfer design and coordinated advising, reinforced by peer and alumni networks that help students navigate transition. Houston, one of the U.S. cities with the largest Vietnamese population adds a long-standing, place-based support layer that students and staff repeatedly described as meaningful. Yet it would be simplistic to view Houston’s Vietnamese diaspora as the sole source of success.^{1, 2}



The program’s success reflects a multi-factor model: structured transfer design and coordinated advising, reinforced by peer and alumni networks that help students navigate transition.

FROM VIETNAM



TO HOUSTON

A PARTNERSHIP PATHWAY JOURNEY

A Holistic Pathway Starting with Community Support

The program’s architecture includes several interlocking components:

Rigorous Admissions and Preparation

A former IU-VNU transfer student who is now a graduate student emphasized that “the bar is much higher for [the] program [compared with other IU-VNU pathway partnerships]... The English requirements are also higher, 7 IELTS.” Students choose UH early in their degree, commit to completing specific coursework in Vietnam, and comparatively meet high GPA and language thresholds. These features may be one factor shaping the strong outcomes described later, though the available evidence does not isolate their independent effect.

Centralized Advising and Clear Pathways

The program administrator and student interviewees highlighted the importance of the predictable course articulation system supported by a coordinated advising network. These include a dedicated academic adviser, career advisers, professor mentorship, and a program partnership coordinator who collectively serve as key points of contact throughout the process. This coordinated, multi-contact support structure aligns with broader retention literature on academic and social integration.³ Interviewees emphasized that this cross-institution support structure helps students navigate transfer questions efficiently and contributes to a smoother transition overall.

Intentional Social and Professional Integration

The program does more than bring students to campus; it plugs them into Bauer’s student societies and career services. One undergraduate IU-VNU transfer student described being introduced to a peer mentor upon arrival and quickly joining organizations that provide “professional competitions, résumé screenings, interview practice—the whole experience.”

Another IU-VNU transfer student highlighted a course called “Connecting Bauer to Business,” which teaches soft skills and career navigation. These formal opportunities intersect with the informal diaspora networks. Students mentioned alumni greeting new arrivals at the airport and creating group chats to share housing tips and celebrate Vietnamese holidays. As one undergraduate IU-VNU transfer student explained, “I was receiving a lot of help from the previous generation.”

One of the telling evaluations of a pathway model is what occurs when standard supports are no longer accessible. During COVID, a former IU-VNU transfer undergraduate student who is now a Ph.D. student at UH described how the program’s informal community infrastructure functioned as a retention and wellbeing buffer: “Thanks to the program, I had an informal network I was able to reach out to... The friends I made I could navigate through the loneliness [with].”



The program does more than bring students to campus; it plugs them into Bauer’s student societies and career services.

Program Outcomes: Evidence of a Multi-Factor Success Model

Prior research suggests that coordinated transfer advising can contribute to stronger student outcomes.⁴ Because the IU-VNU cohort differs from the broader Bauer population, these comparisons are descriptive benchmarks, not causal evidence of program impact. From Fall 2009–Fall 2025, IU-VNU pathway students show higher 1-year retention (96.0%) and a higher average GPA at graduation (3.66) than the overall Bauer population (90.1% retention; 3.315 GPA). At the same time, students who discontinued averaged a 3.70 cumulative GPA, suggesting that attrition is not primarily grade-driven. The current 28 enrolled IU-VNU students also show a strong cumulative GPA (3.64). Taken together, the data suggests a holistic program model in which rigorous entry requirements and early commitment may enhance student success.

Student success may also reflect non-academic factors including centralized advising, peer and alumni mentoring, student organizations, career-focused co-curricular programming, and diaspora-enabled practical support. Future research should use national or cross-institutional benchmarks and longitudinal alumni outcomes to compare 2+2 pathways with similar multi-layer supports to those without them.



By pairing rigorous preparation with intentional belonging and practical onboarding, global pathways can better deliver the outcomes they promise.

From Houston to Elsewhere: Key Takeaways and Transferability

Ultimately, the IU-VNU-UH pathway exemplifies how an international partnership can be designed to connect across multiple dimensions, including academic, social, and professional, rather than relying on mobility alone. Houston’s Vietnamese community is a distinctive place-based asset, and the alumni support it enables provides real emotional and logistical lift, but the program’s results are best explained as a holistic system in which community mechanisms amplify strong institutional design, including clear transfer mapping, a central point of contact, early advising, and active student organizations and career preparation. The data suggests continued enrollment is not mainly driven by grades, since students who discontinued still had strong GPAs, which highlights the need to anticipate logistical, financial, and personal transition factors. For institutions elsewhere, the replicable lesson is to intentionally build social and cultural connection through alumni and peer networks integrated with advising and co-curricular career supports. By pairing rigorous preparation with intentional belonging and practical onboarding, global pathways can better deliver the outcomes they promise. ●

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