Campus Grad Student Founds Global Camera Project

by Mary Susman
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With 300 disposable cameras shipped out this week, each traveling to a different person across the world, a UC Berkeley graduate student is looking for inspiration.

The idea of Common Camera Project is simple: take a photo of something that inspires you and then pass the camera on. The last person to take a photo mails the camera back, and the pictures will be uploaded to a website.

“This was an idea to make something bigger than myself, bigger than the campus,” said project founder Kevin Huynh, a UC Berkeley graduate student in mechanical engineering.

It all started with a class assignment. In fall 2009, Huynh was told to come up with a way to generate $20 million over three years. Huynh thought of disposable cameras.

But although his class moved forward with a different proposal, Huynh's idea did not die. Instead, he reached out to friends and developed his idea.

“It's a good and interesting way to look at people's behavior,” said Vince Law, a recent UC Berkeley graduate and one of 134 financial backers of the project. “People like being part of something bigger.”

Huynh kicked off the project with a $5,000 kickstarter campaign. Although Huynh said he has dreams of something bigger, he has not given up on his original goal of $20 million.

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In fact, Huynh said he spends 30 hours a week working out the details, hoping the extra effort will make the project a resounding experience. With this batch, people can check in a camera and follow its journey online. People can also write stories about the cameras.

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Although Huynh said he has dreams for a coffee table book or an art installation, he is not making any plans yet.

“We want to see what comes back,” he said. “Maybe the more interesting part is the story that people typed about their camera.”

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