Towards Digital Justice: Developing US Citizenship Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) with Immigrants and Refugees

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Our Team

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Project Motivation

This project is an outcome of collaborative work and student outreach projects with **resettlement communities (migrants, refugees, newcomers) in Virginia since 2017**

- Specifically, PI Powell conducted a 3-year pilot study to learn how ICTs reflect community concerns.

While information and communication technologies promise increase democratic participation for vulnerable groups:

- Introducing ICTs into naturalization and other citizenship process might create more barriers than supports to meaningful integration
- The limited design of existing ICTs is based on dominant narratives of integration that amplify existing inequities

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Overview of Blue Ridge Literacy (BRL)

Blue Ridge Literacy through the time

1993
ESOL services were implemented

ProLiteracy

2003
BRL became a Proliteracy member

2014
BRL moved into the main library downtown

STAYING HEALTHY

NORTHSTAR DIGITAL LITERACY

2019
English and Health Liteliracy

2022
English and Digital Litercy

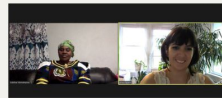1985
Blue Ridge Literacy was founded by two local librarians

2001
ESOL Classes Introduced

2005
Citizenship Preparation Classes Introduced

2020
Online services incorporated

Overview of the US Naturalization Process

But picture this...

We need to know:

1. more about people's experiences navigating this already complex process online,
2. what to do about the challenges PSRs face,
3. AND do something about it!

STEPS TO NATURALIZATION

*These are basic steps. Always contact an immigration attorney for assistance.

1. PREPARE FORM N-400, APPLICATION FOR NATURALIZATION

2. SUBMIT YOUR FORM N-400, APPLICATION FOR NATURALIZATION AND FEES

3. GO TO THE BIOMETRICS APPOINTMENT

4. COMPLETE THE INTERVIEW

5. RECEIVE A DECISION FROM USCIS ON YOUR FORM N-400, APPLICATION FOR NATURALIZATION

6. RECEIVE A NOTICE TO TAKE THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

7. TAKE THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES

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How will we do this?
Methodology for this study

[Participatory action research](#)

- Participatory action research involves **collaboration with the community** (Friedman and Hendry 2019)
  - Such collaboration ensures that community knowledge is included in the design and execution of our mobile application and the website

- This form of qualitative research approach ensures a deeper understanding of various perspectives, cultures, priorities, and concerns of the refugee and immigrant communities in navigating citizenship resources (Mais, 2021; Lehurs 2019; Jones 2016).

- Our goal in using participatory action methods is to ensure **co-creation of knowledge in every step of the research process** and provide ICT infrastructure that creates greater information access and equity to members of the community (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018).

How will we frame this research?
Methodology for Displacement Studies

<u>Critical theories related to displacement studies:</u>
(knowledge justice, digital justice, and epistemic integration)

Knowledge Justice Theory	Digital Justice Theory	Epistemic Integration
Branch of Critical Race Theory	Specifically focuses on digital communication as a human right, elevating the participation of those who are traditionally excluded from computer technology	Counters economic-based definitions of integration
Includes seeing the incorporation of diverse understandings and experiences into governance rulings as a human right		centers migrants' definitions of integration that are often unaddressed by US citizenship practices, and introduces more equitable and inclusive ideas of citizenship in immigration theory
(Leung & Lopez-McKnight, 2021)	(Bucholz, 2020; Potocky, 2021)	(Hester et al., 2021)

Project Overview

In response to issues outlined, this work takes a critical, participatory action research approach to design, develop, test, and provide training in a web application and website that centers the naturalization experiences of PSRs and reimagines digital justice for refugee communities.

3 expected outputs

Citizenship Application: Mobile-Based Application
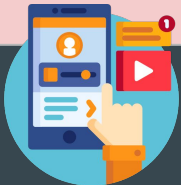
An Interactive website that includes and incorporates more information to support the mobile application

Creating groundwork for larger research and Public Understanding of Digital Justice

Project Overview

4 phases of the project

3 focus groups with 20 participants in all (both PSRs and citizenship literacy tutors)

Phase I: Focus Groups via Asset-Based Approach

2 prototyping workshop sessions with community members; participants collaborate in decision-making for the mobile application and website development

Phase II: Prototyping with the Community

User experience testing with the community

Phase III: User Experience Testing and Assessment

Providing training and launching the website platform

Phase IV: Training and Launching Platforms

Project Updates: Phase 1

3 focus groups with 20 participants in all (both PSRs and citizenship literacy tutors)

Phase I: Focus Groups via Asset-Based Approach

Active collaboration in **3 focus groups with 20 participants** in all
- 3 of these participants were citizenship literacy volunteers
- The other 17 participants were women seeking refuge:
  - All in different stages of the US naturalization process, ranging from not starting an application yet to having citizenship for a few years
  - And from many different parts of the world including Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria. (Farsi, Dari, Hindi, Arabic, English)

Each focus group was from 45 to 75 minutes long

Project Updates: Phase 2

2 prototyping workshop sessions with community members; participants collaborate in decision-making for the mobile application and website development

Phase II: Prototyping with the Community
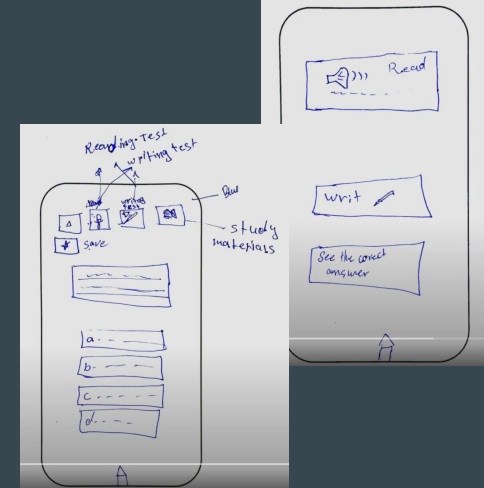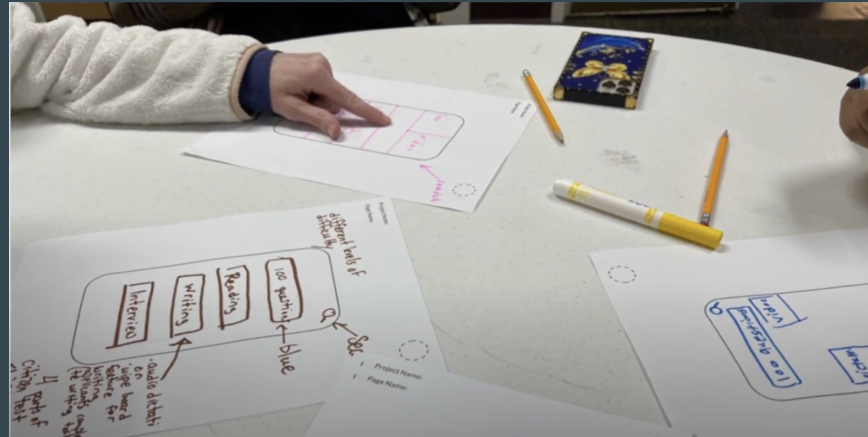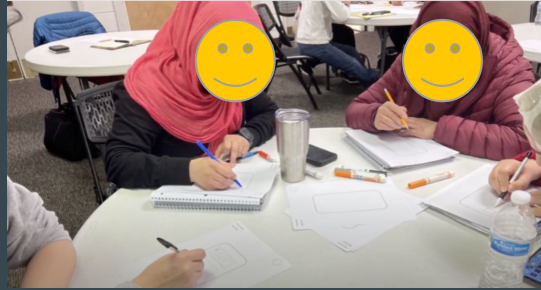
Status Update: Focus Groups and Prototyping Findings

Thinking about these questions:

- What knowledge of People Seeking Refuge (PSRs) is not represented in the US naturalization process and its technological advancement?
- What assumptions about integration are embedded in US naturalization processes, and how do these structural assumptions impact PSRs' agency?

Findings that inform ICT development:

Assumption of **English language literacy and formal education in US history** in the citizenship process, N-400 application, and test preparation resources available to PSRs online

Assumption of **familiarity and comfort with citizenship processes in the US the citizenship process and navigating it online**

Preparación para
el examen de naturalización

Guía de Bolsillo

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

M-1122-S (05/17)

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Status Update: Focus Groups and Prototyping Findings

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Findings that inform ICT development:

- What knowledge of People Seeking Refuge (PSRs) is not represented in the US naturalization process and its technological advancement?
- What assumptions about integration are embedded in US naturalization processes, and how do these structural assumptions impact PSRs' agency?

Other scholars have noted concerns over PSRs' **access to computers** when naturalizing, but this research also highlighted:

- **assumed levels and forms of digital literacy for migrants**

- importance of the **cultural and sociopolitical factors that influence PSRs' interactions with ICTs**.
  - Internet security and liminal legality

Online Filing Benefits

1 Case status alerts and secure messages

See all case correspondence

Check your case status and update personal information

Upload evidence

Status Update: Focus Groups and Prototyping Findings

Findings that inform ICT development:

Expanding on current research, this study shows that **expectations of:**

- formal English and digital literacy
- flexibility with time, money, transportation, and computer use
- and the lack of procedural differentiation based on the diversity and history of immigrant experiences in the US

dominate and serve as <u>cascading and systemic barriers to migrant agency and access to civil liberties</u>
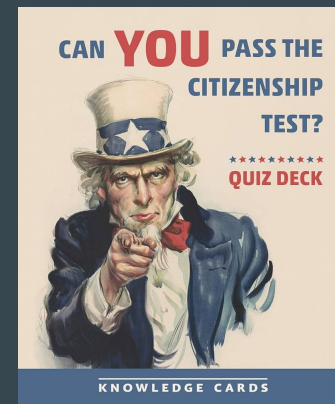
Status Update: Focus Groups and Prototyping Findings

Based on these focus groups and prototype workshops, the main goals (or focus areas) for these ICTs are:

Capabilities for the ICTs based on community feedback:
- Translation and learning resources across modes of communication (text, audio)
- Information on the naturalization process
  - Specific practice and tailored information related to the interview portion
  - Information on what qualifies a person for naturalization
- 100 Questions practice with options to simulate the testing environment
- Links to existing resources in a centralized area
  - Videos to "fill in gaps"
- No personal information required from users (other than state for questions specific to VA, for example)

Continued collaboration through user testing with community-based decision-making
Reliable server

Ideas for future iterations: connecting resettlement services database with these ICTs, providing writing practice, speech to text, recording with accents, translation beyond Google

Status Update: ICT Prototype Development

Mobile Application

In the application, you will find:
- Translation capability and dictionary (text, audio, etc.)
- 100 questions practice (study and test mode, flashcards and Q+A with voice)
- Links to additional resources

Website
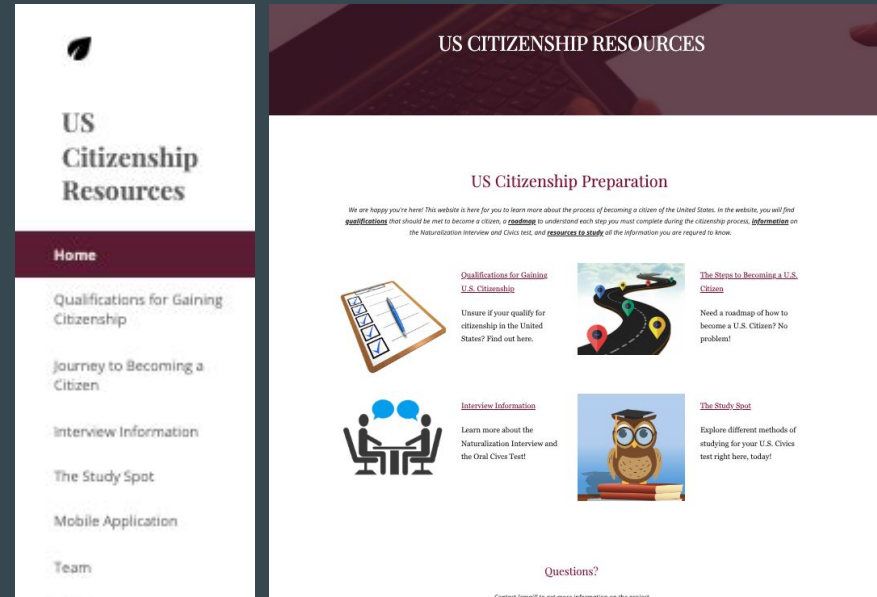
In the website, you will find:
- Citizenship qualifications table
- Citizenship process roadmap
- Information on the Naturalization Interview and Civics test
- Study resources

Brief Mobile App Walkthrough:
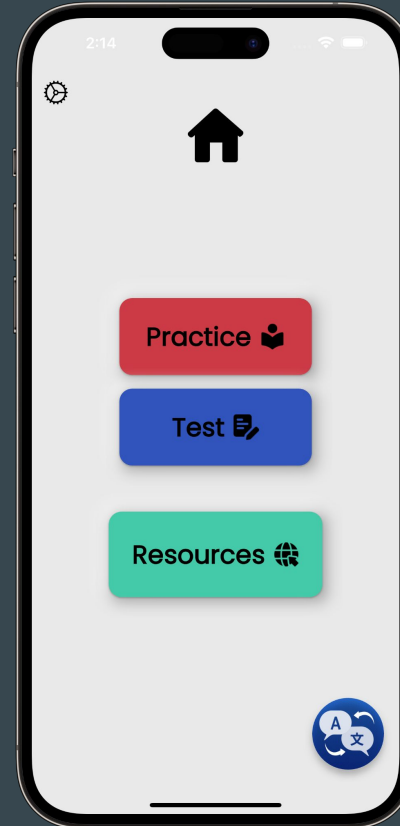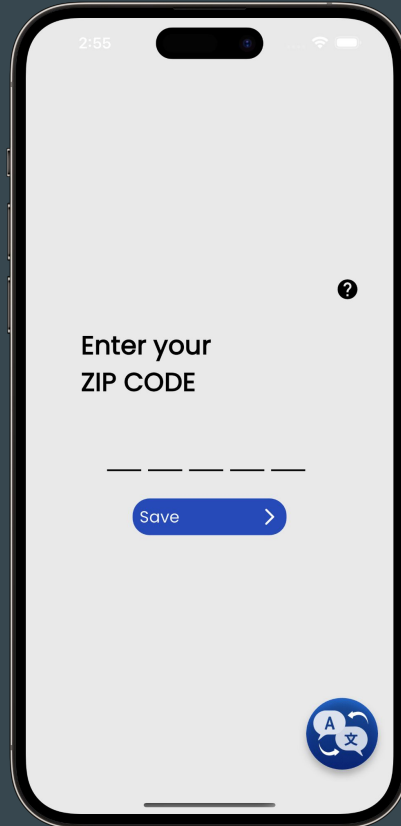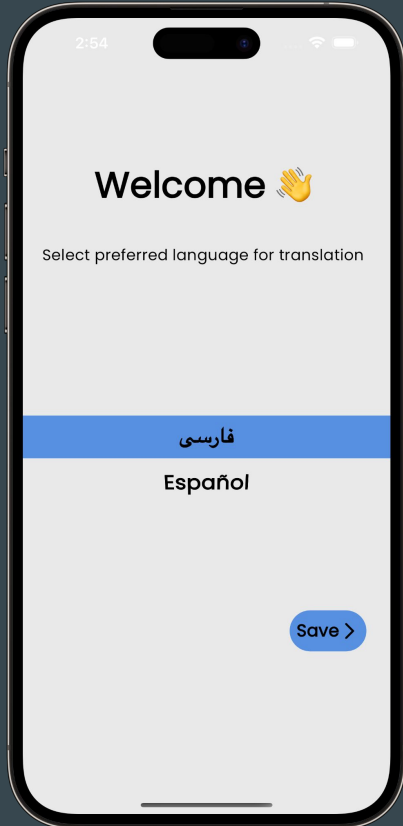
Mobile App Prototype Overview:
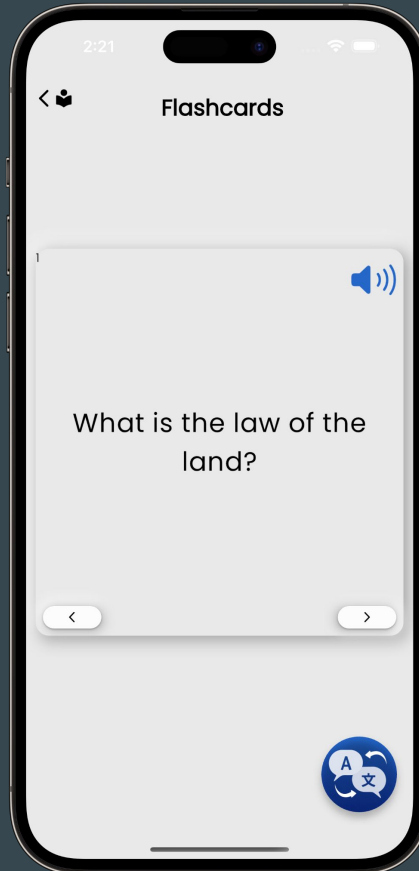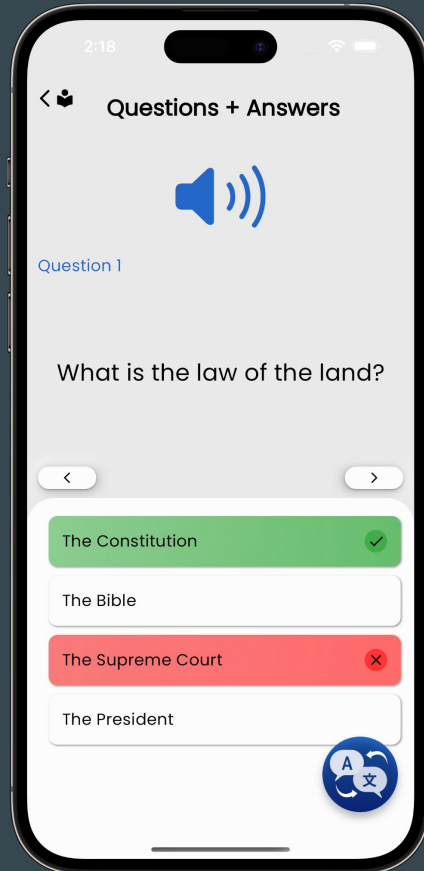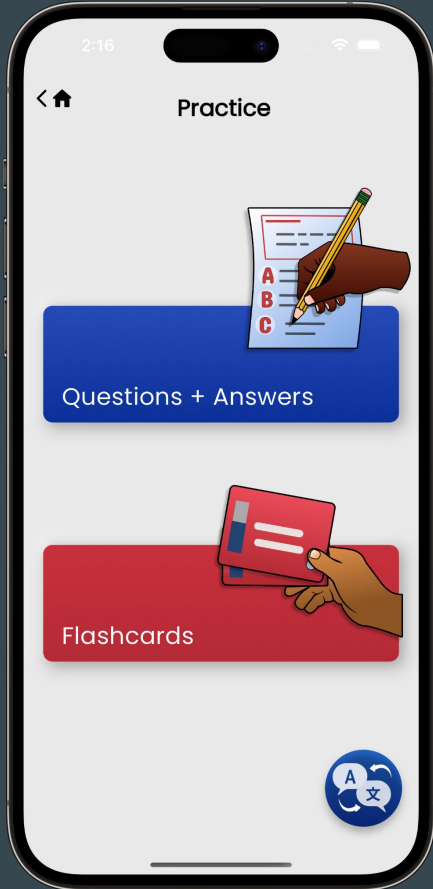
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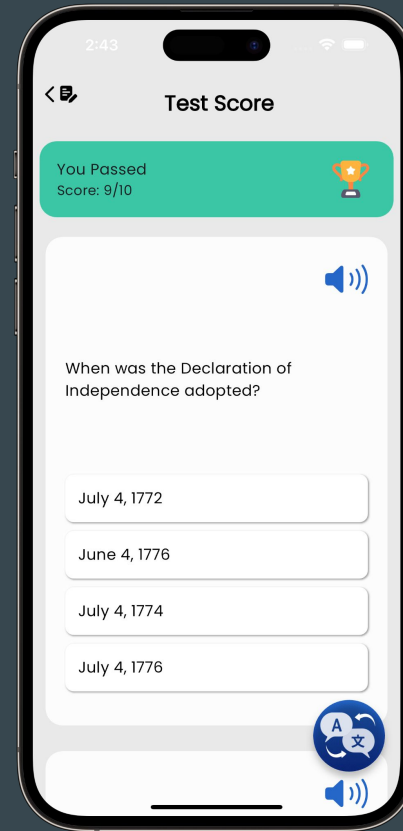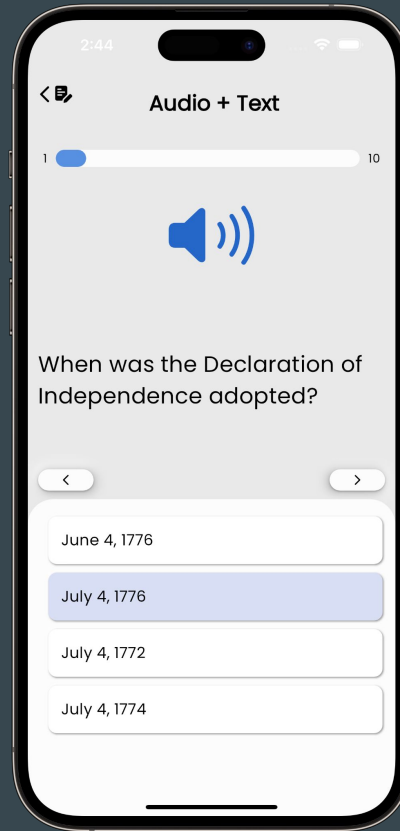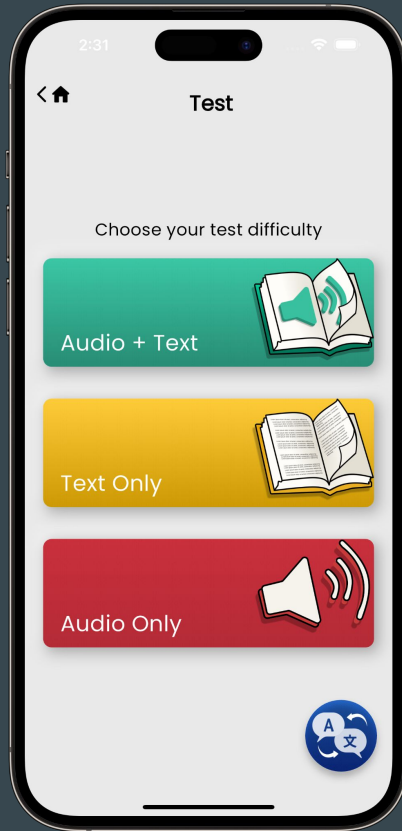
Project Updates: Phase 3

User experience testing with the community

Phase III: User Experience Testing and Assessment

Users were shown the app prototype. Then they were given a chance to interact with it and provide feedback of their experience.

User Feedback:
- Some user groups found the translate feature hard to understand.
- Excited to see app in production.

Considerations:
- Revise how we develop the user interface to best suit our users' needs

Project Updates: Plans for Phase 4

Training Materials for the Website

Providing training and launching the website platform

Phase IV: Training and Launching Platforms

Next Steps

Lessons for Displacement Studies: *Chapter for Critical Displacement Studies Reader*

Continued research and publications will expand ideas about PSRs contributions in the US and envision how migrants' knowledges and literacies can be more justly incorporated into US citizenship practices.

The value of critical theory and specifically digital justice and epistemic integration theories

How critical approaches to displacement studies can be community-engaged through participatory action methods *AND lessons learned from this project*

How centering the knowledge of PSRs in naturalization discourses helps envision alternative imaginaries about what significant integration and knowledge justice mean for all immigrants

Taking back the application for doing user experience testing with the community

Phase III: User Experience Testing and Assessment

Providing training and launching the website platform

Phase IV: Training and Launching Platforms

Plans for future ICT development beyond this prototype

Thank you!