**OPDE Food Truck Final Paper**

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**Timeline**

* Before school year starts (Sept. 21):
  + Buy truck
* Throughout first semester (Sept 21 - Jan 5):
  + Build truck
  + Train students to operate truck
  + Market for grand opening
* February 1:
  + Grand Opening Event
* Second semester (Feb 1 - May 11)
  + Perfect daily operations
  + Students feel confident running truck
* By end of second semester (May 11)
  + Branch out to local consumer market

**First Semester**

Before the semester begins, a used truck will be purchased with some of the grant money. Since the students will outfit the truck to work as a food truck, the truck will only need to be a shell. This will make it cheaper than if we had to buy a truck with all the food truck capabilities in it.

The vocational school students will be responsible for outfitting the truck with the equipment required to operate a food truck. Based on the Rwanda cuisine that our truck is planning to serve, we believe that the truck will need a stove, oven, refrigerator, microwave, heat lamps, and a sink with running water. The money from the grant will supply the students with these necessary utilities to complete the project. OPDE instructors will guide and supervise the students. The students will be incentivized to work because they will be receiving lab and field study credit. Additionally, the students will gain real world experience that will make them more marketable when they enter the workforce. The types of vocations in charge of building the truck include: metal workers, builders, electrical engineers, and plumbers. Each vocation will serve a different role in the creation of the truck.

The metal workers will be responsible for the first portion of the process. First, they will stabilize and reinforce the truck by creating an aluminum frame stable. They will also cut two holes in the truck: one in the wall for the serving window and one in the ceiling for the air conditioning unit. The builders will first insulate the truck. Then they will build cabinets, counters, and tables. Finally they will install all the appliances and equipment. The electrical engineers will do the all wiring at the appropriate stages throughout the building process. The lights and outlets will need to be connected to breakers. These engineers will be responsible for installing the generator and connecting all the electrical appliances to it. The plumbers will have to connect the sinks to the fresh water tank. They will also install the dump valve. The vocational students will be graded based on the quality of their work.

Next, the hospitality students will need to be trained to operate the truck and run the business. Teachers will teach students to drive the truck. Students will learn how to pick up food from OPDE farms. They will learn to judge how much food to pick up from farms based on the day of the week and how much business is projected. Students will be tested on how to work the equipment in the truck. They will learn how to use the stoves, refrigerator, generator, and air conditioning. The students interested in culinary are to be instructed and evaluated on their ability to create the food dishes on the menu. Role-playing will be practiced to ensure respectful interactions with the customer. Students will be taught and tested to work the cash register as well. Finally students will be taught how to clean the truck and maintain it successfully.

The hospitality students will be in charge of the marketing campaign. Before we are able to promote our product, we must first establish who we want to serve. The food truck will appeal to different sectors of the public depending on the season. Initially, the truck will primarily target the University of Rwanda (UR) students. The students will be assigned to research our future clients to discover how best to market to them. Some important things to research about the UR students will be to discover: where they normally eat, what kinds of food they want, where they get their information, if they use social media, and if they listen to the radio. Students will do a more comprehensive analysis. Two findings we predict they will find are as follows.

According to The New Times article, *Why Rwandans love Twitter, Facebook,* social media is being widely used by government officials and institutions to connect with the masses inside and outside of Rwanda. Radio is still regarded as the dominant source of media in Africa and is largely used by Rwandan citizens. The students will also be tasked with researching any competition. They will discover that there are no other food truck competitors but there are small restaurants in town. Their research can inform the team on how best to compete against this competition.

After the students complete their research, they will use it to implement a marketing plan to promote the grand opening event. Overall advertising operations should be up and running 6 weeks prior to opening date. We will leave it up to the students to decide how best to market to students. Some ideas we think may be effective include: radio advertisements, posters and flyers posted around campus, social media marketing campaigns. The real bulk of advertising will come 2 weeks before opening.

Two weeks before opening the advertising campaign will be ramped up. OPDE students will hand out flyers on campus with promotional messages of “free samples.” At this time we also want to advertise through local radio stations in Butare such as *Radio Salus FM*. Public relations is a great source of free publicity and should be used by a business to create goodwill with the community. Because of this we want to send out invitations to local newspapers such as *The New Times* for the grand opening event.

**Grand Opening**

The grand opening will take place on February 1st, 2017, which is at the beginning of the University of Rwanda’s second semester. Students will be given specific tasks to perform before and on the day of the opening. These tasks include: making and arranging decorations, food preparation, entertainment, and serving the samples. The food truck will be parked outside of the National University of Rwanda Main Library (given that permission is granted to park the truck on campus) because it is a central location on campus. The event will begin at eleven AM and end at five PM, so students should be frequenting campus during every hour.

All of OPDE’s students will be invited to perform their talents during the grand opening. There will be a schedule of performers throughout the entire event, including musical acts, dancing acts, and whatever other talents students want to perform. This accomplishes two goals. First, the live entertainment will attract attention to the event which will create new customers. Second, other OPDE students feel involved in the food truck project. Third, students will be able to publicly display their talents.

The food truck will be passing out very small, free samples at the event. The point of these samples is to employ the reciprocity theory1. It is important that the free samples are prepared carefully so that they taste good or else the students will not be inclined to purchase food from the truck in the future. This relates to our food quality moderator2, which implies that the students will not come back to the truck if the food is not good quality. The truck will be serving all the normal menu items during the event so students can become comfortable with the menu. Lastly, students will see other students attending the event, or hear that their friends stopped by, which will likely lead them to go check it out. Students will also hear about free samples and conclude that it must be worthwhile to stop by for a free snack. We are hoping that social proof3 will motivate more customers to visit our truck on the day of the event.

**Second Semester**

We will continue to maintain and develop our food truck business throughout the spring semester. The food truck will be supplied by produce from OPDE’s farm, located in close proximity to the vocational school. The farm features over 400 banana plants and a large rice paddy field and should be able to provide the truck with plenty of food. However, it is possible that the students will add a menu item that contains produce not grown at OPDE’s farms or that the demand for the food truck will be too great for the farm to keep up with. In this case, the students will turn to other local produce vendors such as Faucon Supermarket located in downtown Butare. The students will travel with the food truck to the OPDE farm each morning to pick up the food for the day.

At the beginning of the food truck program, one vocational school instructor will be working in the food truck at all times to oversee the operations. Two students can work along side of the instructor in the truck for two hour shifts at a time. Students will rotate their shifts throughout the day, but the same students will work on the truck for the entire semester. In addition to students working during shifts on the truck, two students will be needed to pick up the food from OPDE farm in the morning and five students will be needed prepare it before the truck opens for business. These additional jobs and a rotational job assignment will allow several hospitality students to be training on the food truck at once. The food truck program will aim to employ the senior most students at OPDE’s vocational school to give them experience right before they head out into the workforce.

The food truck will start out largely managed by the vocational school instructors, but transfer to the control of the students as their skills and the program improves. By March 31st, control of the daily operations should be completely given to the students and instructors should no longer accompany them on all trips. This will allow 3 students to be working on the truck at once and increase the amount of time students can spend working on the truck. Hospitality students working on the truck will receive field study credit for their semester of work.

Any maintenance the truck needs will be done by vocational students whenever the truck needs it.

The students will continue to adapt the food truck and daily operations based on observed consumer preferences. The location, menu, and marketing campaigns will all be adapted based on what they observe to work and not to work. The adaptive nature of the food truck and its daily operations will prompt student to continually sharpen their skills while increasing the success of the food truck and revenue for OPDE.

**Sustainability**

Once the truck is open for business, it is important to strategize in order to keep the business viable. An important fact about the market is that the students at the University of Rwanda are not always in school. This is why a food truck is such a useful tool in market strategy, it can follow potential customers to where they are. This will require trial and error but once school is out of session May 11th, the food truck can move around and market in new regions. By having the food truck in only certain areas at a time, the element of scarcity4 comes into play. A food truck marketed as “only here today!” sparks interest in customers who are uncertain whether or not to try out the new business. The time constraint raises the odds that customers will purchase from the business.

It will be important to keep track of monetary reports to decide what is working and what is not. If the food truck is losing money, strategies will be outlined to reevaluate overall process and identify the problem in terms of product, price, promotion and place.

It will also be important to sustain a continuous cycle of students training students. Older students will take on leadership roles as they train younger students how to operate and maintain the truck.

**Evaluation**

The business will have to assess and modify operations according to collected feedback throughout all of the implementation stages. Evaluation of the skills that the workers obtain will be collected at the end of every semester and feedback will be welcome throughout the entire operation.

An assessment of student’s vocational skills at the end of every semester will evaluate the success of the one of the objectives of the food truck: build vocational skills for the students. Therefore, the first assessment will take place at the end of the first semester of the food truck’s opening. Both the students who worked on the food truck will take the assessment as well as the other half of the OPDE students who did not help with the food truck. The results from this data will show whether or not the students who worked on the food truck had a more effective mode of learning compared to the students who did not participate. Because we want the best product, the oldest students will receive first priority to work at the food truck. Due to this, it is important to keep in mind that since we cannot randomly assign which students work on the food truck, there will be selection bias5 because of the different experience levels of the students. Periodic follow-up will also be conducted after each graduating class to collect data on post-graduation job rates.

It is crucial that we cater to the needs of the community and gain acceptance. Surveys will be available at the food truck beginning on opening day. This will give us feedback on whether the community welcomes this new concept of a food truck and whether the quality of the food is up to their standards. If there is general acceptance, this will help to create a pool of customers committed to sustain the food truck. Based on our sales forecast we expect to break even from opening by May 11th. Once there is positive cash flow, OPDE can use profits for initiating new training programs and expanding old ones.

**Limitations**

We ran into a few questions that we were unable to answer while creating this proposal. We researched each question to the fullest extent, but some of the answers can only be found through personal experience when we get to Rwanda. First of all, we are unsure whether there is a market for a food truck in Huye. Research has found that it has been traditionally considered rude to eat in public in Rwanda. However, the increasing popularity of restaurants and the emerging food truck industry suggests that these social norms are changing. We are targeting University of Rwanda students as the main customer base for our food truck, but we are unsure whether the students have a disposable income to spend on food. Building on this, we saw on the University of Rwanda website that there is a dining hall on campus but we couldn’t find any details about it. We also researched restaurants in Huye, but we are not sure exactly how many there are and how often students eat out.

We also had a lot of questions pertaining to OPDE. There is a website for OPDE in Huye, but it doesn’t appear to be up to date. One very important aspect of our proposal is whether or not OPDE’s farm has enough resources to sustain the food truck. We also do not have up to date statistics on the number of vocational students enrolled at OPDE or OPDE’s academic calendar. Hopefully we can answer all of these questions upon our arrival in November.

**Endnotes**

1. Reciprocity theory is employed by giving the University of Rwanda students free samples at opening day. This will create a feeling of indebtedness between the customers and the food truck, which will motivate the students to buy food from the truck in the future.
2. The food quality moderator effects the sustainable income for OPDE and the community’s decision on whether or not to purchase food from the truck
3. Social Proof- students will see other students with samples from the food truck and hear about the event through their peers, which will [hopefully] cause them to also visit the event
4. Scarcity- The truck will only be in a certain area for a limited time so customers will be motivated to buy food before the truck leaves. This same principle can be used with a limited supply of food resources.
5. Selection bias- Random assignment is not available due to our preference for older students to participate in the food truck project training. The comparison of older and younger students groups is misconstrued by this preference and effects the validity of the data.