Words In the Clouds: Connecting books from across the world.

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Peace 325 Final Project

Why?

With my parents being from Africa, I have always felt very connected to the two countries (Ethiopia and Ghana) and helping to improve the lives of the people that struggle.

Growing up, my mother always taught me to appreciate my education. Both of my parents lived in poverty growing up. In Harrar, Ethiopia, people want to go to school, but the economic disparity makes that incredibly challenging. My mother would tell me stories of how she could only afford to buy shoes once a year, that she shared textbooks with 7 or 8 people, and that going to college was only a dream.

Book drives are great projects. You take books that are probably collecting dust on a shelf and you give it to someone else that will read and appreciate it. With firsthand experience of planning a book drive with my family, we realized shipping internationally can be very expensive. I wanted to find an effective way of sending books to an Ethiopian library, without spending most of my resources on distributing them. Technology can be used to bridge this gap.

What?

The challenge of the peace projects was to "Think global, act local." My project is to donate e-readers full of a variety of e-books to the Harrar National Library in Harrar, Ethiopia. These books will be donated by individuals, organizations on University of Louisville's campus,

and businesses in the Louisville area. The main goal is to pose the question, "what book exemplifies your values?" An individual can donate sponsor their favorite children's book or University of Louisville's Peace, Justice and Conflict Transformation Program can recommend John Paul Lederach's Little Book of Conflict Transformation.

Choosing the Amazon Kindle e-reader was easy. I am familiar with the product and knoq most of its features and how it can enhance the project. The Kindle is portable and lightweight, connects to internet, and has unlimited Cloud storage. The unlimited cloud storage was important, because that means we can never donate too many books for the product. On an e-reader, you can also bookmark pages, note and highlight, synchronize to audio, and be connected to other readers who have read that book.

Where?

Further research into Ethiopia's economic and educational disparity shows that educational resources in the rural parts of Ethiopia are spread very thin. In the transition between primary and middle school, 40% of students drop out of school, especially those of lower-class background. This factors into half of Ethiopia's youth being either unemployed or underemployed. (Classbase)

In the Harrar National Library, we would house the e-readers in a corner on the first floor, and attach them to cables on a table, so the community can come and read them there.

Who is involved?

Other partners for this project would be working with UPS world port located in Louisville, KY. I would ask UPS to ship the e-readers as a donation. Amazon is my supplier, creating the model of e-reader we would use, which is the kindle. I would reach out to Amazon to get discounts on bulk ordering and special deals on books. Lastly, our last big partner is the sponsored library, Harrar National Library.

To see overall growth of the project through the years, I have connections to venture capitalist firm Access Ventures, a firm that works with organizations in all sectors to create impactful investments that produce positive change. I'll also work with my father's company HSE inc. a social enterprise company that helps with modern-day social problems. They have connections to countries like Central African Republic, Liberia, and Mexico. With more research, and examining on how the process in Ethiopia will go, I can modify to adapt to a new country and culture with the necessary funding.

The groups that will be impacted will be the community of Harrar. The national library is free, so anyone can access it. E-readers will have a wide variety of books, like picture books, young-adult fiction, or even textbooks. On the flip side, I want this project to also impact the students that will be a part of the project. With integrated, interactive features of the project, students can build stronger connections with Ethiopia and the Harrar community. On a Kindle e-reader, you can communicate with other people who have read any particular book. Through this feature, we can create peer reviews of books, online book clubs, and in the future, organize group service trips that promote literacy in the library in elementary schools.

How?

To implement the project, I created a two-step approach: Fundraising and Operations.

For the fundraising aspect, I want to ask University of Louisville organizations for funding. Many service organizations like Engage Lead Serve Board, Student Activities Board, RaiseRed, and other service organizations receive funding, and asking for their support to sponsor e-readers or books would be a starting point.

While certain organizations on campus receive funding, most of them do not. I want to give fundraising opportunities to organizations that want to participate, but do not have the financial means to do so. Fundraising ideas I had were selling shirts with the logo "Words in the Clouds" and percentage nights with local restaurants.

Fundraising is not for everyone, and my goal for this project is to include as many people as possible. For individuals or organizations that do not want to fundraise but want to be a part of the project, I want them to submit books with a paragraph review of why they chose it. I will submit all of the submissions to a panel in Harrar, and allow them to choose which books they would like additional funding to go toward.

I also want to turn to the Louisville community. I want to write letters to local businesses and nonprofits that also have a similar mission, and ask for donations.

My fundraising goal for the first year is 5 e-readers and at least $1000 set aside for e-books. The average eBook on amazon is $7, allowing us to download around 142 hand-picked

books. Each book will represent an organization's values or an individual's favorite book, and a lasting legacy for Louisville's community.

With further growth, I want to reach out to other universities and states to repeat the same model. I have a large network of students from various parts of the state that could act as ambassadors that could help manage progress at different schools.

For the operations side, I want to partner with UPS to deliver the e-readers to Ethiopia for free, as part of their donation. Since nothing is guaranteed, if UPS does not agree to delivering for free, the e-readers are light weight so shipping charges will not be too expensive.

I want to contact Amazon to see if we can get a discounted price on the e-readers, since we were buying in bulk and it is for social good. I also want to talk to Amazon about pre-loading top free books on the account.

This project will also take effective communication with my contacts in Ethiopia. One of the biggest obstacles is not being able to be on the ground in Ethiopia when the e-readers are delivered. Luckily, the contacts are my family members and I have them on every form of communication like Facebook messenger, WhatsApp, and email. Regardless, it will take effective communication and adaptability to make sure that the e-readers are delivered, set up, and useful to the population.

Lastly, I want to make sure that this project helps the community. I want to provide follow-up surveys to see what Harrar needs. What books are they interested in? Do they need more e-readers or more e-books? How can we better connect Harrar to Louisville? For these questions, I do not want to assume I know the answer without asking the population.

When?

An important part of peacebuilding is being honest about how much time you have. Right now, I am taking 18 credit hours, balancing three jobs, and I would not do justice to this program if I take it on right now. However, my senior year, I will be taking 12 credit hours and an ample amount of time to make partnerships with Louisville businesses. Next semester, I will also get a certification in project management, which will give me a new experience on how to tackle social projects.

A specific time-line of fall 2018 into the future:

- September 2018-Ppitch to at least 30 organizations on campus. Of those interested, get contact information of a representative and add them to an email listserv to keep them updated.

- October 2018- Set up fundraising for organizations. Create a tank-top design with RSO, Cardshirt Company. Sell shirts to generate donation money. Organize an excel document of what each organization fundraises, so they know how many books they can choose.

- November 2018- Pitch to 10 more organizations (especially ones with funding since fundraisers will be over) and set up tabling events on campus where students can learn more about the project, recommend books, write letters as to why reading is important, etc.

- December 2018- Turn to Louisville Community and reach out to non-profits and for-profit businesses and pitch the idea. December is also Christmas time, so hopefully some businesses may be in a giving spirit.

- January 2019- Get into contact with Amazon, and make an agreement on e-reader prices, downloaded e-books, and cloud set up.

- February 2019- Schedule a meeting with UPS. Pitch the idea, see if they are on board with delivering to Ethiopia for free.

- March 2019- Ship E-readers, talk to contacts on the ground to make sure the set up goes well. Evaluate progress, like how many people use them, what were the popular books, what age group is using them the most.

- April 2019- follow up by creating a survey that can be taken on the e-reader, asking readers if they feel like there should be more/less e-readers, any problems they have had, any books they want to read, etc.

- September 2019- into the future- I want to evaluate success, and based on satisfactory results, I'll research more places in Ethiopia where this can be recreated. I'll reach out to contacts at different universities in the state, and train them on how to recreate this project at their schools. I'll also meet with different stakeholders around the state to get larger sums of money donated, and work with HSE inc. to scout different countries. With enough interest, I will also research different volunteer companies to organize group service projects to areas where the project is located. Volunteers will serve based on area's needs, but include a day long activity that promotes literacy within the community.

Strengths:

Strengths of the project is that it is taking a good project (book drives) and making it more cost and technologically efficient. I also have strong connections to the people of Harrar, so there is not a barrier in at least introducing the project. Other strengths are that with the few organizations I have pitched this idea to, there is interest. I have a lot resources like an organization to design the shirt, my sorority to help support me, the office of student involvement to help me with promotional items like a video, and connections at many different schools to help grow the project.

Weaknesses:

This project has never been done before, so it is hard to say what obstacles we will have. While I am not worried about connecting to students, I am worried about getting local businesses involved. I am not from Louisville, so I do not have the same personal network of people like I would back in my hometown. Another weakness is that when the books are shipped, I will not be there to receive them or help set them up. That is why communication is so important, to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Predecessors:

A famous predecessor would be One Laptop Per Child. In 2006, OLPC built inexpensive laptops that were sold to developing countries, so students could use them. They experienced problems, like building laptops that were twice as expensive as they thought it would be. OLPC also promised to help improve standardized test scores and student achievement, and there was

no major difference. There were many barriers throughout the process like places not having internet access, and teachers not being trained.

Connectors:

Especially being at a university, one thing that will connect people is our shared belief of the importance of education. This is what connects students here in Louisville to the Harrar community in Ethiopia.

Technology also acts as a connector in this situation. The same technology that is used here can be used in Ethiopia. The Kindle has features to connects readers here to readers there.

Dividers:

Some dividers would be that people have a negative view of programs like One Laptop Per Child, especially when it does not produce the results people were expecting. Businesses that are familiar with these projects may apply negative sentiments of taking technology to Africa in my project.

Another divider is the time commitment. I will be in school the first year this is conducted, but the growth of the project takes place after I graduate. Also, the more complex the program gets, like going to other countries and creating service trips, takes a lot of work and time.

Fundraising is hard, but without it, we will not be able to fund the project. If organizations do not want to give us funding, or fundraise on their own, the whole project will come to a standstill.

The last divider is Ethiopia's literacy rate. Ethiopia's total adult literacy rate is 39% (UNICEF.) A divider of this project is while it tries to include all ages, it will leave out those who cannot read.

Relating back to Peace Studies:

Malala Yousafzai once said, "So let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty, and terrorism, and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons."

This quote highlighted the area of peacebuilding I was focused on which was to protect human rights and supporting broad-based education. I believe access to education is a human right, and I know people in Ethiopia want to read, it is just a matter of having the resources available. I also want to help create more opportunities to learn, so by providing these e-readers, anyone from a young child to a middle-aged adult can access them. The quote by Malala also highlights how by using education, we are fighting many social ills in a nonviolent way.