

Brown University
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Find Your Path: Bridging Opportunities for Burkinabè Students
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Overview:

“Find Your Path” is a three-week summer school for high school students in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. This project aims to connect students with the right resources to improve access to quality higher education. We provide an alternative to the inefficient systems in place. Ultimately, we intend to change the perception of education in the country and encourage parents to send their children to school for sustainable development.

Background:

In 2008, Burkina Faso had the lowest adult literacy rate in the world (25.3%).¹ According to the World Bank, the government made improvements to increase access to primary and secondary education. However, the challenge of higher education remains an obstacle. First, students struggle to find quality programs in the country. Second, there is a disconnect between the current higher education system and “the demands of the labor market.”² Because of that, a significant number of students either drop out or end up unemployed. The lack of opportunities available after secondary or tertiary education affect the youth’s willingness to remain in school.

Students and parents question the benefits of getting an education. Instead, 85 percent of the population opt for subsistence farming in rural areas. In peripheral areas, the problem of child labor in gold mines or industrial agriculture such as cotton prevails; the alternative is child trafficking and forced migration to Côte d’Ivoire to work on cocoa plantations. In urban areas, out-of-school youths quasi-automatically join the informal economy. However, these alternatives to formal education do not alleviate poverty in the long term.

By bridging opportunities for high school students, our goal is to show that getting an education is not useless. “Find Your Path” summer school will provide participants with the right tools to achieve their post-graduate goals. The program will address the challenges faced by students in their transition from high school to higher education. A successful path through education is possible, and this project will make it a reality for our participants.

Project:

The summer school will be organized in partnership with Trouve Ta Voie Afriki (TTV), a non-profit providing pre-college counseling services to high school students in Burkina Faso and Cameroon. TTV is a student-run online platform. They create and share content about the college application process on social media. Additionally, they connect high schoolers with current college students to get an idea of their personal experiences at different universities. My proposed project on the other hand is an in-person summer school with workshops led by professional counselors. Moreover, the scope of Find Your Path is wider than the pre-college counseling offered by TTV. Over the course of three weeks, students will take part in various activities on the topic of educational guidance in Burkina Faso:

¹ "UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008" (PDF).

²<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/277421531452640797/pdf/BURKINA-FASO-EDUCATION-PAD-06202018.pdf>

- **Counseling for academic and vocational guidance**
 - Discovering different fields and understanding in-demand skills.
 - Researching schools and financial aid packages.
 - Preparing application materials.
- **Career and university fairs for exposure**
 - Meeting school officials to discuss program specifics.
 - Networking with potential employers.
- **Personal development workshops**
 - Public speaking training and competition.
 - Cover letter and resume building.
 - Optional English lessons.
- **Weekly discussion themes and mentorship system**

Find Your Path's target audience is high school students aged 16 to 21. I expect the 16-18 age group to be more interested in academic guidance, and the 19-21 group to be drawn towards career-related content. However, students will have the liberty to choose the activities they want to take part in. Collaborating with TTV will facilitate the process of identifying and recruiting students for this project. We will spread the word about Find Your Path through their platform in addition to touring local schools and giving presentations about the project. Students will fill in a form to share their motivation for taking part in Find Your Path. Selected participants (40 maximum) will have access to all the offered activities. Larger events such as career and university fairs will be open to a wider public as capacity allows. In terms of logistics, I plan on renting out space at a local university to accommodate the summer school's participants. I will also hire professional counselors to lead the different workshops. TTV's college students network will allow us to find volunteers for the daily activities.

Outcomes and Continuity:

I expect Find Your Path to inspire students to set and achieve ambitious goals and to ultimately change the perception of education in Burkina Faso. Concretely, this is how I define success for this summer school:

- At least 25 active participants complete the three-week program.
- Participants set clear academic and/or professional goals.
- Participants matched with mentors by area of interest.
- Detailed plans for college and/or job applications for seniors.
- Familiarity with available resources in Burkina Faso and tips on how to reach out to institutions.
- The network of participants working closely with TTV for educational guidance.

Keeping the summer school running would require a regular source of funding. However, I expect Find Your Path to have a long-lasting impact on participants. The skills and tools gained during the summer will sustain them. Additionally, I expect participants to stay in touch and use TTV's platform for educational guidance. After the summer, I will work on raising additional funds in the form of

sponsorships, donations, and collaborations with organizations such as UWC Burkina Faso to make Find Your Path an annual event.