Johnson MBAs Make Finals in Acara Challenge
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Proposals to improve food safety in India by two teams make the final cut in international competition

Two student teams from Johnson’s “Creative Design for Affordability” class were named finalists in the 2011 Acara Challenge. The teams travel to St. Paul, Minnesota, on May 16, to make final presentations at the University of Minnesota’s Institute on the Environment.

The Acara Challenge, sponsored by the Acara Institute, challenged students to address a problem related to food and water security. Poor nutrition, lack of enough food or water, wasteful practices, poor infrastructure, and poor market information all contribute to lack of food or water security. The issue addressed by student teams could be related to the production, transport, marketing, selling, processing, storage, treatment, or consumption of food and or water. Johnson at Cornell University is one of 14 participating schools—seven from the U.S., six from India, and one from Mexico.

Both Johnson teams in the competition finals partnered with the K. J. Somaiya Institute of Management Studies and Research (SIMSR) in India to form ideas for products and processes that can increase food safety in India. “Swach,” proposed by Katy Maffei, MBA'11, Kirtana Raja, MBA'11, Leslie Mignin, M.Arch. '11, Tamara Struk, MPA'12, and four team members from India will provide food-safety testing kits and establish an auditing process to ensure the hygiene of the government-supported mid-day meal, served to school children throughout India.

“Prosperity Cart” is the idea of Cornell students Chris Walsh, MBA'11, Anne Laure Robine, MBA'11, Claudia Mei, '11, and Aleksandra Janjic, MPA'12, and four team members from India. It is a durable, long-lasting, state-of-the art food cart for street vendors that will minimize food's exposure to dust and germs. Greater food hygiene will reduce the likelihood of customer illness, and generate a larger customer base and lower cost of operations for vendors.

Team members all are enrolled in Johnson's Creative Design for Affordability is a 3-credit, full semester project-based course. The class uses product design to help students become more aware of their creativity and prepare them to lead or facilitate creative teams in their future careers as managers. Johnson students were paired with students in India for the Acara Challenge. Using ethnographic techniques, each team was required to identify a need, design a solution, and create a viable business plan to address food security in an economically disadvantaged area in Maharashtra, India. Each team short videos to illustrate their projects. The videos for both Swach and Prosperity Cart are available online.

Johnson's Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise received a Course and Program grant from National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance (NCIIA) in fall of 2010 to significantly enhance and institutionalize this new collaborative class that helps students conceptualize and develop new businesses that address global societal challenges.

Comments