KENT STATE UNIVERSITY GOLF COURSE BUSINESS PLAN

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by

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Executive Summary

This document contains a business plan for the Kent State University Golf Course. The business plan discusses the current situation of the golf course from a social, financial, and managerial standpoint. There is also a competitive analysis conducted with details about the nine most direct competitors to the KSU golf course. The business plan contains a SWOT analysis of the golf course. This analysis details what the golf course is doing well, what it is doing poorly, what potential opportunities are, and what the threats to the golf course are. Within the opportunities section, there are detailed plans on ways that the golf course could generate more revenue. One of the major issues discussed in the plan is the placement of the golf course within the university. The golf course does not seem to fit under the athletic department, but also does not look to be welcome in recreational services. Accounts from both the director of recreational services, Julian Gretchen, and the athletic director, Joel Nielsen, are included in this portion of the plan that help to justify that the golf course does not seem to fit within the university. The business plan includes some alternative options for the golf course if it were to not be owned by the university. I have included my personal recommendations as to what the golf course should do in the future. The majority of my recommendations are low-investment options that could give the golf course a chance to generate more revenue immediately before considering some of the alternative options. However, as
discussed in that recommendations section, I do not think that the golf course should be
owned by the university from a business standpoint.
Mission

There is not a stated mission of the Kent State University Golf Course, however, based a statement from the head golf professional, the mission of the course is to provide the community with a great golf and social experience while providing a friendly and professional environment.
Club History

The Kent State University Golf Course opened in 1921. It has been a university-owned golf course since 1967. It is located on Route 59 in Kent, Ohio, and features 18 holes. The course is a public course, which means it is open to all people. Public play is a beneficial part of golf because it allows the public to get exposure to golf at a convenient and affordable rate while not requiring the annual dues that private courses do. The golf course is currently budgeted under the Kent State University athletic department and has been since 1997.
Management Structure

Advisory Board
The KSU Golf Course currently has an advisory board that makes the decisions regarding the financial and social future of the golf course. This board consists of the athletic director, Joel Neilson, senior associate athletic director, Janet Kittell, head golf professional Jarrod Page, KSU director of golf, Herb Page, and associate head golf coach, Robert Wakeling. These individuals all have extensive background in playing golf as well as being involved in golf course management, which is why they are the members of the advisory board for the golf course.

Golf Course Management Structure
Jarrod Page is the head golf professional at the golf course and is in charge of day-to-day operations. He supervises the detailed operation of the golf course, clubhouse, pro shop, and maintenance operations. He controls the marketing and maintains the financial records for the golf course. Jarrod has been employed as the head golf professional since 2013.

The golf course maintenance is conducted by Brett Mickley and his staff. He is the head superintendent of the KSU golf course so he handles all of the grooming of the golf course. Brett has been on staff since 2012.
The additions of Brett Mickley and Jarrod Page were made to change the culture of the Kent State Golf Course and to make it a desirable location to play golf at in Northeast Ohio.

The golf course is currently managed under the athletic department at Kent State University. Since 1997, the golf course has been a part of the athletic department. Many universities tend to have the golf course structured under recreational services, however this is not the case at Kent State.
Club Services

The golf course offers both a snack bar as well as a merchandise shop. The snack bar is rather limited and is not a full-service food and drink bar. However, it provides the general needs for most golfers by providing beer, soft drinks, and snacks. The merchandise selection in the golf shop is relatively small, which is largely due to the fact that the pro shop itself is small in size. The pro shop carries golf apparel, golf balls, and golf clubs. One of the best things about the merchandise shop is that it carries Kent State decaled clothing in name brands such as Footjoy, Under Armour, and Nike, which are very popular brands within the golf clothing industry. This allows golfers to purchase KSU clothing and represent the school both on and off of the golf course.
Social Situation

The Kent State University Golf Course is often not seen as the most desirable place to play. The main reason for this is that the length of the course is extremely short. Many people just simply do not want to play a course that is short. This may be a common misconception about golf because people seem to let the length of the professional courses influence the courses they want to play. The golf course, however, is popular among women and seniors because of the short length of the course. Women and seniors typically do not hit the ball as far, so playing a shorter course is much more enticing to them.

The KSU golf course hosts fourteen weekly leagues that have played at the course for over fifteen years. Twelve of the leagues consist of sixteen players, while the other two average thirty to forty players each outing.

The golf course does not receive a large quantity of student play on a regular basis. Many students do not even know where the golf course is or that it even exists, even though it is just two miles from campus and on the main street of Kent, Ohio. One issue with student play is that there is currently not a way to track the number of students that play the golf course and how regularly students play at the course.

Another peculiar thing about the KSU golf course is that the KSU men’s and women’s golf programs do not use the golf course to play or practice. Both teams make use of the golf course occasionally in the winter when the weather permits due to the excellent
drainage of the golf course. Other than that, both teams use Windmill Lakes Golf Club in Ravenna, Ohio.
Financial Situation

One of the major challenges that the KSU golf course has is that prior to the hiring of Jarrod Page, the previous head golf professional did not keep financial records very well. There are no records as to number of rounds played, which is a vital statistic when managing a golf course because that is the best way to track the amount of play that the course is getting and how regular that play is. It is known that in the 1990s the golf course, like most courses in America, enjoyed a great deal of financial success due to a boom economy. However, also like most courses, once the economic downturn occurred in the early 2000s, the golf course began to suffer financially.

The fiscal year of the golf course begins in June. In the 2013-2014 fiscal year, the golf course had a loss of $134,787.87. One of the challenges of having a golf course run by the university is the fact that the employees must be put on high salaries due to university regulations. This means that the golf course already has higher expenses than other golf courses that are not university owned.

Due to the financial struggles since the 1990s, the golf course has had to cut back on pesticides and labor to decrease costs. Another area that has saved the golf course money is that instead of purchasing new maintenance equipment, the golf course has maintained and repaired its current equipment. One of the issues that will arise in the future is that the golf course is at a cross roads where they cannot cut anymore costs. Due to the age of
the current equipment, the course will have to purchase new equipment in the future, which is a large expense.

Progress is being made to help improve some of the long-standing deficiencies at the golf course. Since Jarrod Page has taken over, the golf course has added a computer to modernize its business practices in order to better track the number of rounds played and the revenue generated at the course. Jarrod has also proven to increase the fiscal responsibility and ability to budget the golf course. Due to this improvement in record keeping, the golf course and athletic department have a much better understanding as to where the golf course stands financially.

The hiring of Brett Mickley was also a big step for the golf course because he is the first certified greens superintendent that the golf course has had. To many golfers, the condition of the golf course is critical in deciding how to rate their golf experience, therefore, hiring a certified greens superintendent will help improve the condition of the course.

The golf course has also expanded onto the popular golf website “Golfnow”. This website is designed to help golfers book tee times at the last minute for a lower rate. Although it is a lower rate, this allows the golf course to get more exposure and ultimately help to increase the number of players coming to the course. Typically, the KSU golf course will posts tee times every day from 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. in fifteen minute increments.

In 2013, the golf course had 723 rounds played due to GolfNow with a revenue of $15,185, while in 2014, there were 943 rounds and a revenue of $22,390. By these
numbers, it is obvious that expanding onto GolfNow has been a positive step for the golf course and should continue to be a part of the business model going forward. One question that arises from the use of GolfNow is whether the golfers using this service are new players or if they are simply regular players getting a discounted price to play a course they normally play. There is not currently a way to track which of these is the case. If the service is bringing new players, then it is a positive for the golf course because it brings in new clientele to play the course. However, if it is simply regular players, then the course is losing money because these players simply receive a lower rate to play the course they normally play.

Another new attraction that the KSU course added in 2014 was to build a Foot Golf course. Foot golf is a growing game where the players use soccer balls and kick the ball into a bucket that is in the ground. It is the same concept as golf, but is a much more affordable option than golf is. Foot golf also brings in a new audience to the golf course that may not regularly be there to play golf. The convenience of the foot golf course is that it is actually built into the regular golf course so it can be going on at the same time as regular golf. KSU golf course had 230 rounds of foot golf played in 2014.
Competitive Analysis

There are 9 golf courses that are located close to the Kent State University Golf Course that provide direct competition to the course. These golf courses are all direct competitors to the KSU golf course because they are all public golf courses located within eight miles of the university. The KSU golf course is located 2.30 miles from the center of campus. During the week, the golf course charges $19 to walk and $27 to play with a cart, while on the weekend it is $23 to walk and $31 to take a cart.

Competitors

Oak Knolls Golf Course

Oak Knolls is a public golf course located in Franklin Township, Ohio, which is just north of the city of Kent, Ohio. It was designed in 1961 and has a 6,883 yard 18-hole layout from the back tees. The course is mainly tree-lined and has some slight elevation changes. The course does provide golf carts and does not have cart paths, so it is “off-the-path” all of the time. The course has a small clubhouse and snack bar. Oak Knolls has a small dining area for banquets or dinners that is mainly used for golf outings. The golf course facilities include two small putting and chipping greens, but the course does not have a driving range. Oak Knolls is located 2.43 miles from the center of campus. The weekday rates are $21 to walk and $28 to take a cart, while on the weekend it is $26 to walk and $39 to play with a cart.
Raccoon Hill Golf Club

Raccoon Hill is a public golf course located in Kent, Ohio and was founded in 1970. The course is 18 holes, 6,300 yards in length from the back tees. The course is tree-lined with small greens and fairways. The condition of the course is below average. The course has a pro shop, snack bar and restaurant. The course has a putting green, but does not have a driving range. The golf course is located 3.38 miles from the center of campus. The weekday rate is $24 to walk and $34 to ride in a cart while it is $30 to walk and $40 to ride on the weekends.

The Fairways at Twin Lakes

The Fairways at Twin Lakes is located in Kent, Ohio and was founded in 1925. The course has 9 holes and 3,239 yards from the back tees. The golf course has above average greens and has very demanding tee shots with many elevation changes. The course used to be a private club, but is now open to the public. There is a new 5,000 sq. ft. pro shop at the course. The club also has a restaurant called The Overlook that hosts banquets and provides outdoor amenities for weddings or corporate parties. The course also sits adjacent the Twin Lakes, so it has a scenic view. The golf course is located 6.78 miles from the center of campus. The weekday rate to play the course is $16 to walk and $30 to ride in a cart and it is $17 to walk and $34 for a cart on the weekend.

Fox Den Golf Course

Fox Den is an 18-hole golf course located in Stow, Ohio. The course was founded in 1966 and is a 6,518 yard course from the back tees. The course has small fairways and
greens and is in average condition. The course features a driving range and two large putting greens, and several chipping areas. The course has a pro shop and snack bar, but does not have a restaurant. Fox Den has an upcoming junior golf program as in 2014 it just began to host the PGA Junior Golf League. The course is located 4.83 miles from the center of campus. The weekday rates are $25 to walk and $32 to ride in a cart while it costs $35 to walk and $45 to ride on the weekend.

Maplecrest Golf Course

Maplecrest Golf Club is a public golf course that was established in 1928 and is located in Kent, Ohio. The course is 18-holes and has a length of 6,132 from the back tees. The course has small fairways and greens and is in very poor condition. The golf course features a large putting green and driving range. The course has a pro shop and a small snack bar. The golf course is located 4.79 miles from the center of campus. The course offers a flat rate for players weather they walk or ride. During the week the cost is $30, while it is $35 on the weekends.

Sunny Hill Golf Club

Sunny Hill Golf Club is located in Kent, Ohio and is a 27-hole facility. The course has a main 18-hole loop meant for golfers who desire a challenge and want to play a full round. The remaining nine holes is meant for beginners and seniors and is set up for a more relaxing, stress-free round of golf. The course features a clubhouse and pro shop. The clubhouse has many amenities, which include a pool, sports bar, sand volleyball court, and horseshoe pit. The course has both a putting green and driving range. The golf course is located 5.42 miles from the center of campus. The rate during the week is $18
to walk and is $24 to ride in a carts. On the weekend the rate to walk is $22 while the rate to ride is $32.

Green Hills Golf Course

Green Hills Golf Course is located in Kent, Ohio. It is a 9-hole course that measures 3,912 yards. The course does not have a pro shop, but does have a snack bar. The course has a putting green and does not have a driving range. The golf course is located 4.37 miles from the center of campus. The course charges $22 to walk and $39 to ride in a cart during the week while charging $29 to walk and $46 to ride on the weekend.

Roses Run Country Club

Roses Run Country Club was designed in 1998 and is a public golf course located in Stow, Ohio. It is an 18-hole golf course that is 6,859 yards from the back tees. The golf course has generous fairways and moderately sized greens. The condition of the golf course is below average. The course has a large country club that hosts banquets and weddings. The course features a bar and grill, pro shop, driving range, and putting green. The golf course is 3.73 miles from the center of campus. The course charges a flat rate to walk and ride, which is $32 during the week and $48 on the weekend.

Brookledge Golf Club

Brookledge Golf Club was founded in 1988 and is a public golf course in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. It is an 18-hole course that has a length of 6,371 yards from the back tees. The golf course has small driving areas and is kept in good condition. The course has a pro shop, driving range, and putting green, but does not have a restaurant. The golf
course is 7.59 miles from the center of campus. The course charges a flat rate to walk and ride, which is $25 during the week and $30 on the weekend.

**Windmill Lakes Golf Club**

Windmill Lakes Golf Club was established in 1970 and is a public golf course in Ravenna, Ohio. It is an 18-hole course that has a length of 6,936 yards from the back tees. The golf course features tree-lined holes with undulating greens. The course is in above average condition. The course is well-known for its pro shop as it has the largest and most diverse pro shop in Northeast Ohio. Windmill Lakes is also the official home of the Kent State University men and women’s golf teams. The golf course is located 7.90 miles from the center of campus. The rates during the week are $32 to walk and $42 to ride in a cart while it is $55 to walk or ride on the weekend.

**Significance of these competitors**

All nine of these golf courses pose a direct threat to the Kent-area golfers, which is a major challenge in the KSU course in creating more play. Due to the financial situation of the KSU course, it is logical to assume that many of these nine courses also have similar challenges and are also trying to develop similar methods to increase play and revenue themselves. This being said, it could be difficult for the KSU course to differentiate itself from its competition.
SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Condition of course and service quality

- The condition of the course is showing improvements since the hiring of Brett Mickley as head superintendent.
  - This is an essential improvement to the golf course because if the course is not in top condition, then most players are not going to have a desire to play it.
- The condition of the greens at the course are above average in comparison to the majority of its competitors
  - Most golf courses are often judged by the quality of their greens, so having above-average greens is a clear advantage for the KSU course in comparison with its competitors.
- There is professional service offered from the staff at the course.
  - This is a strength of the golf course, however, in comparison with its competitors, it is a rather irrelevant strength because the competitors also offer professional service.
- The golf carts are in good working condition.
  - Again, this is something that is a good thing for the golf course, but this doesn’t seem to be a problem at any of its competitors either.
• The course has exceptional drainage. This is an advantage because the area of Kent typically gets consistent rainfall, so having good drainage is a great benefit.
  o Most of the golf courses have good drainage due to slight elevation changes and drainage runoffs.
• The clubhouse has a new façade.
  o The clubhouse for the KSU golf course is pretty outdated and the exterior was also outdated. Putting a new façade on the building made it look like a much more desirable location for golfers to go and play.
  o Prior to the change, the golf course looked run down, largely in part to the poor quality of the clubhouse, which would be the first impression that a golfer would have of the golf course.

**Accessibility at the golf course and the pace of play at the course**
• The Golf course is located on the main road in Kent, route 59.
  o Having accessibility to the golf course is a key advantage that the course has. Many of its competitors are not placed directly on a main road and are often difficult to locate.
  o This being said, with modern day GPS, its competitors can be located with ease, so the true advantage of this easy-access location is that it is visible to those who are passing by, which could lead to potential future business.
• Availability of tee times at the course
This is an advantage only because it allows for the growth of the play at the golf course, however, availability of tee times simply means lack of current play at the golf course.

In relation to its competition, the KSU course is not very busy, so it does have available tee times. This could be seen as an advantage if the course can create an awareness of this availability.

- Affordable place to play because it is rather inexpensive
  - In comparison with its competition, the KSU golf course is definitely one of the most affordable options.
  - The only course that is cheaper to play that the KSU course is the Fairways at Twin Lakes. However, this is a nine-hole course, so the price to play eighteen holes is cheapest at KSU.
  - Being the cheapest golf course could be an advantage because it could allow the course to get golfers who are just looking to play for a low rate.

- Usually a quick pace of play at the course
  - One of the biggest issues in the game of golf is the slow pace of play. Many players simply do not want to spend the time that a round of golf takes, so they just do not play.
  - Having a quick pace of play is a similar consequence as the availability of tee times because the course simply just does not get as much play as its competitors.
This being said, the golf course should market the ability for players to play quickly, which could create interest in the golf course.

- Carts are always allowed off of the cart path because the entire course does not have cart paths
  - Many golfers do not want to walk the entire golf course when they play, they want to just ride the cart up to their ball and hit it. Because the KSU course usually allows carts off of the path, this allows for its players to fill this desire.
  - Allowing golf carts off of the path also allows for the pace of play to be better, which is an advantage the course has over its competitors.

- There are few rules on attire, which is appealing for most college students
  - Golf clothes are usually very expensive, so being a college town, not requiring a dress attire is an appropriate rule.
  - Most of the other golf courses in the area do require proper golf attire, so the casual rule on attire is an advantage for the KSU course for those who do not have or cannot afford golf clothing.

**Promotions**

- Addition of the foot golf course
  - The addition of the foot golf course makes the KSU golf course the only foot golf course in the area. The nearest competitor for a foot golf course is in Cleveland.
The foot golf course allows the course to diversify itself from its competition and to tap into a new market of participants throughout the Kent area.

- Involvement on GolfNow
  - This is something that is essential today in the golf world. Most of the course’s competitors also use GolfNow, so it does not give the course a competitive advantage, but it is a strength for the course, nonetheless.

- Use of Twitter, which is appealing to the younger generation
  - Again, most of the other golf courses have also began using Twitter as a form of marketing, so this does not give the golf course an edge over its competition.

Miscellaneous

- Consistent league play
  - As stated earlier, the golf course has fourteen current leagues that have been intact for at least fifteen years.
    - Having consistent league play allows the golf course to have a reliable source of revenue each week.

- The course is suited to lower scores due to the short length of the course.
  - Many of the competitors of the golf course have difficult layouts, which makes low scores few and far between. For players simply trying to shoot lower scores, the KSU course should be a desirable destination.
Weaknesses

Lack of proper facilities

- Lack of practice facilities
  - No driving range, which is not appealing to many golfers
  - Small putting and chipping green
  - Many of the course’s competitors also have a lack of facilities, however, many of them do have ample facilities, which puts the KSU golf course at a clear disadvantage for players who are wanting to practice before or after play.

- Poor condition of cart paths
  - Not all holes have paths, but those that do are not in good shape
  - This is a weakness of the golf course, however, in comparison with its competition, is not a real issue because they too have cart paths that are in poor condition.
  - The cost to repair or replace cart paths is very high and due to the poor economy, golf courses cannot afford to fix this problem.

- Small pro shop
  - Having a small pro shop makes merchandise sales very difficult due to a small selection of merchandise.
  - Many of the competitors also have limited pro shops, however, courses such as Windmill Lakes have a large advantage in this category.
• Small parking lot, which is an issue when the course is busy
  o This is a clear disadvantage for the golf course. If there is not enough
    parking for its players, then more people are not going to be able to come
    play the course.
  o The competitors of the golf course do not have this issue and have ample
    parking.
• Lack of visible signage from the road
  o Not being able to be seen is a major issue that any golf course would have.
  o Some of its competitors also have this issue, so it is not a detrimental
    problem, but is a problem that should be addressed.
• Lack of quality of bar and food services
  o No meal or dining services and doesn’t have a full-service bar
  o Most of the other courses in the area provide more drink selection and
    have a food menu, so not having this service is a disadvantage for the
    KSU course.
  o Many golfers turn a day at the golf course into an experience, which
    includes a meal or drink after the round, so not having this service
    prevents many players from coming to the KSU course.
• Aging maintenance equipment, which will need replaced at some point in the near
  future
This is also an issue that many of its competitors share, so is not a true disadvantage, but is something that will require a large investment in the future.

**Lack of knowledge or awareness**

- Lack of advertising for the golf course
  - In comparison with some of its competitors, the golf course does not have an advantage or disadvantage.
  - The cost of advertising is high, so most of its competitors also do not have a great deal of advertisement and face this issue as well.

- Lack of membership
  - Not all of the golf courses in the area provide membership options, however, several of them do.
  - This being said, those that do have membership have a clear advantage in terms of guaranteed revenue per year from its members that the KSU golf course does not have.

- Lack of outreach to University students and staff
  - The KSU golf course is directly linked with the university and has access to its students and faculty, so not using this potential revenue stream demonstrates a weakness that the golf course has.
  - This has the potential to be a strong advantage for the KSU course that the others do not have, so reaching out to these players is an essential step.

There is not a “country club” feel
• Course is divided by railroad tracks
  o Large variance in the course from front 9 holes to back 9 holes
  o The golf course does not feel like a complete golf course, but simply as two 9-hole courses that are combined to make one 18-hole course.
  o This is a disadvantage with its competition because the other golf courses have a consistent layout throughout, which does not leave golfers feeling as if they are playing two different courses within one course.
• Shortage of funds
  o This is a disadvantage, however, all of its competitors also have this issue, so it is not a major issue in comparison to its competition.
• Lack of tournaments and outings
  o The inability of the golf course to host outings and tournaments is a clear disadvantage with its competitors. Most if not all of the other course host events on a regular basis, so not having this steady source of revenue puts the KSU golf course behind its competition.
• Lack of rules for attire
  o Many golfers prefer to have golf attire be a mandatory dress code
  o This is a rule that is followed by some of the other golf courses, but several also do allow casual clothing to play golf, so there is no real advantage or disadvantage here.
• Lack of length of the golf course
Some golfers do not see this as a desirable golf course because it is not a long golf course.

While some of the other golf courses are also short in length, the KSU golf course is the shortest in yardage, which makes it a last option for golfers wanting to play a course with any true length.

Weather

- Inconsistent “golf season”
  - This is disadvantage that all golf courses in Ohio face. Although it does hurt the business of the golf course, it does compare equally with its competitors.

- Course is closed for the majority of the school year, which limits the amount of student play that the golf course can receive.

Opportunities

Development of regular play and new play

- Unused revenue streams from university faculty and students, local high school students and faculty, and the Kent community

  - Within the community of Kent, Ohio, there is both a university and a high school. The university has just over 24,000 students while Theodore Roosevelt High School has around 1,400 students. This means that there are roughly 25,000 students that are relatively unaware of the Kent State University Golf Course and make little use of the golf course. In addition
to all of the students in Kent that do not play the golf course, there are
100s of faculty members that could get access to the course.

- Increase league play
  - One thing that many courses do is to have a weekday and/or weekend blitz for women, men, and seniors. These outings help for members/regulars to build relationships and also help to give the course consistent revenue on a weekly basis.
  - Other options that some courses do is to have year-long games between course regulars in which the players can play as much as they want in order to try to win the contest amongst the participants.
  - Another possibility could be to have outings based around PGA tour events where the scores of the professionals are randomly drawn and paired with the golfers playing at KSU.

- Skins game
  - Many players enjoy some day-to-day competition. One common way that many courses engage regular play is to offer some sort of competition with other players. A skins game is just one way in which courses are able to have players be competitive with one another.

- More student golf outings
  - As previously mentioned, there is a large possibility for student involvement at the KSU course. Because there are so many clubs and fraternities at the university, there could be an opportunity for the golf
course to seek out some of these clubs and fraternities and give them discounted rates on group golf packages and have small outings for them. It is very common for university organizations to have golf outings to raise comradery among the respective organization.

- New membership packages
  - There are not currently any membership packages at the KSU golf course. It is essential at a golf course to have steady revenue from members so that the golf course can get annual commitment from its players. The golf course could have student, faculty, Kent residents, and general memberships at different price points in order to accommodate all potential members in an effective way financially.

- Actively seek visiting parties and golf outings to host at the golf course
  - The golf course should actively seek businesses and faculty departments within Kent to try to get large golf parties and some small outings. This would provide the course with substantial revenue at one time. For instance, in 2014, the golf course was able to generate $1600 in revenue for the Bar 145 event that it hosted. If the golf course was able to get some other events like this, it would allow the golf course to grow its revenue stream. Another good thing about golf parties is that many of the participants often return for additional rounds, which would give the course even farther business.

- Develop a youth program
There is a large population of children within Kent, Ohio. Many parents are consistently looking for summer programs for their children while school is out of session. Many golf courses across the country offer week-long camps for children in order to get you children into the game of golf. This will also give some consistent revenue to the course while the college students are not in Kent.

One challenge to this would be that it will most likely require additional staff and supplies to start this program. This would allow the golf course to contribute in growing the game of golf to a younger generation.

- Offer incentives for first time players at the golf course
  - One thing that could help track players would be to offer first time players some sort of discount at the course. This could be tracked by requiring proof of identification and an email address. This could in turn, be used to have the option for people to sign up for promotional emails, which could help draw repeat customers. The challenge in this method would be to make sure that diligent records were kept in order to only give players this discount one time.

- Reach out to women and senior players
  - The golf course seems to be well-suited to women and seniors due to it being short in length. This being said, the golf course should do a community outreach program to target the women and seniors of Kent. Because this seems to be an evident target market within Kent that is year-
round, not just dependent on college students being in town for school, it is crucial to tap into this market.

- **Student outreach program**
  - As previously mentioned, an essential step in growing the number of rounds and revenue of the course is to get students to play. Getting awareness out to students will help with this process.

- **Course, City, or University Championships**
  - In summer amateur golf, there is the Portage County Amateur Championship that takes place at Windmill Lakes Golf Course and Oak Knolls Golf Club. A possibility for the KSU golf course would be to have a club championship, a city of Kent championship, or a university championship for students. This could be something that is done for a specific club or fraternity, where they have a club or fraternity champion. There are plenty of golfers that would show interest in a city or club championship to try to prove who the “best” golfer in Kent is. These events are a great promotional tool for the golf course and also help the course generate sponsorship.

**Promotional Outreach**

- **Increase the use of social media**
  - The KSU golf course does use Twitter to send messages and sales to its followers. However, Facebook and Instagram are other avenues of social media that are not used by the golf course, both of which could be used to
increase awareness about the golf course. Another strategy that many start-up companies and companies new to social media use is to “follow” users. This is effective because most people will “follow” people or organizations back who follow them. Therefore, taking a proactive approach to “following” potential customers could also increase awareness about the golf course.

- Increase the awareness of the location of the golf course
  - The KSU golf course is located on the main road (Route 59/Main St.) of Kent, OH. It is also in very close proximity to the Walmart in Kent. This being said, the golf course has a large amount of passing traffic on a daily basis. One issue that the golf course has is that there is a lack of appropriate signage at the course. The course features only a small university-issued sign that is not very visible from the road. Adding a large sign on the façade of the building would help to increase awareness about the golf course.
  - One major tool that is used on college campuses is information booths and flyers. There are ample opportunities for the KSU golf course to hand out propaganda to students on campus. For example, there is the Kent State Freshman Blastoff that occurs the first weekend of every year, in which clubs and facilities set up booths to help raise awareness about what they do and where they are located. This is just one possible way that the KSU course could help inform new students about their possibility to play golf
while at school. KSU also has many events on campus in Risman Plaza and in the Student Center where the KSU golf course could also hand out information to students.

- One tool that could be beneficial to the KSU course while using promotional events like this would be to offer special pricing and discounts to students and faculty.

- Seek corporate sponsors
  - The KSU golf course could try to seek corporate sponsors in exchange for promotion or signage at the golf course. This would allow companies to also promote themselves, and would help the golf course generate revenue from sponsors. Another stipulation for this could be to offer partnership with some of the local businesses, which could include specials at the end of the golf course and the partner company.

- Coupon System
  - The golf course could distribute coupons and signage to popular locations in Kent. This would make the golf course more visible within the community. The golf course could also provide these businesses with some propaganda at the golf course in exchange for the permission to distribute these coupons. One option to help with this is to come up with some package deals with several other locations in which both parties would benefit.

- Use of the student newspaper, the Kent Stater
The Kent State University has a school-run newspaper that is distributed across campus. Many students read this paper while waiting for class to start and to keep educated about events happening at the university and around Kent. This is yet another way for the golf course to educate the students about the access they have to the golf course.

**Accessibility and facility upgrades**

- There is ample space within the clubhouse to host dinners or banquets
  - The KSU clubhouse has plenty of space within it to host dinner parties or banquets. Although the golf course does not have a full service restaurant, there could still be a post-round dinner for players. This could help the golf course develop a sense of social culture by having golfers spend additional time at the course. For this to work, the golf course would have to outsource for food, which would have an upfront cost to the course. One potentially challenge to this is that the club would need to have flexible funds to invest in the food. This would also require a great deal of promotion on the part of the course to raise awareness of this additional service.
  - Another positive result of adding dining services is that it gives the course the ability to offer some package deals with golf and a meal included in the package.

- Create an addition to the parking lot
There is a need for additional parking at the KSU golf course. In order for the golf course to host bigger functions and outings, there needs to be space for participants to park at the golf course. This is a challenging addition due to limited space for expansion. In addition to that, creating more parking is an expensive process, which may not be within the budget of the golf course.

- Warm-up area, which would be done with the addition of hitting nets
  - One of the major disadvantages to the KSU golf course is that it does not have a driving range. Although many of its competitors also do not have driving range, many of its competitors do. The average golfer does not play very regularly, so getting to warm up and hit some practice shots is often seen as a necessity to these golfers. One option to help golfers warm up at KSU would be to get some hitting nets for golfers to hit practice shots into. One obstacle in this option is that the nets are often expensive, so it would not be a first option for increasing play at the course.

- Offer golf club rentals for people who do not own their own golf clubs
  - One thing that would be crucial in growing golf would be for the course to be able to provide some sort of club rental program for students and other players to use. Getting rental golf clubs can be an up-front cost, but the potential for new golfers to come and play is great. This would be a critical step to increase student play because many students do not bring
their golf clubs to college due to space issues in dorm rooms or apartments or they cannot afford their own golf clubs.

- Provide a PARTA bus stop directly at the golf course
  - Kent State University has a partnership with PARTA bus company. The buses run all throughout Kent and already make a stop at the Walmart in Kent. One thing that could help with students getting to the golf course who do not have cars would be to have a PARTA bus stop option at the golf course. There are bus stops both before and after the course, but not at the course itself. This possibility could help with accessibility for students.

- Golf course lengthening plan
  - Head golf professional, Jarrod Page, has developed a golf course lengthening plan for the KSU course, which would help in the issue of the short length of the golf course. The issue with this plan is that there is not substantial land available to make significant changes to the length of the golf course. The proposed changes are minor and would not make a large impact in the overall length of the course. The main challenge with this plan is that lengthening a golf course requires a great about of money. Trees would have to be removed and new teeing areas would have to be constructed, which is a costly project. Although this seems as a very viable option, the small impact that it would have on the length of the
course makes this seem like it is not the most financially efficient change to make to the golf course.

**Threats**

**Economic threats and an inability to find a consistent market**

- The direct, local competition of the other golf courses discussed in the competitive analysis poses a major threat to the KSU golf course
  - With so many other golf courses that are in such close proximity to the KSU golf course, it seems that there needs to be something to distinguish the KSU golf course from the others.
  - The KSU course is a very affordable option compared to the other courses, however, with the lack of challenge in the layout of the golf course seems to be a big issue in comparison with its competitors.
- Economic downturn across the country has caused a nationwide struggle in the golf industry
- Lack of use by students
  - An increase in student play needs to occur to help the golf course increase revenue.
- Budget cuts by the golf course
  - In order to try to minimize annual loss, the golf course has seen many budget cuts.
- Competition with other activities in Kent
With the expansion of downtown Kent, there are many other attractive activities for people in Kent to participate in.

- Finding golfers when students are not in Kent (May-September)
  - When school is not in session, the population in Kent decreases significantly, so the golf course would have to find a target market for this time period, which is the key period for golf courses in the North due to consistent good weather.

- Lack of new membership
  - As previously stated, adding membership is an essential step in growing revenue at a golf course. Even if membership is added, it is important to consistently add new membership, which would pose as a challenge to the golf course.

**Equipment and golf course limitations**

- Lack of tournaments and events
  - As discussed earlier, creating new events and tournaments would be a quick way for the golf course to make revenue. One issue in this is figuring out who would plan and conduct these events. Due to already running all of the day-to-day operations, it could be challenging for Jarrod Page to find the time to run any additional events. This would create a demand for additional staff or assistance in running these outings.

- Old machinery will need to be replaced
The current machinery is very old and has been repaired countless times.

The next step in regards to equipment is to have to purchase new equipment. This is a very costly investment that the course could have to take on in the near future. This is also an investment that is a necessity when running a golf course, so the funding for this equipment will have to be available when the current equipment does eventually fail.

- Insufficient ability to lengthen the golf course substantially
  - The golf course is land-locked, so significant changes are not able to be made
  - The financial undertaking in lengthening a course is very large and may not be worth the cost of what changes would be made
The placement of the golf course is in question. There seems to be no strong home as to who should manage the golf course.

**Viewpoint of Recreational Services**

- Julian Gretchen, the KSU golf course does not belong under recreational services.
  - The mission of Recreational Services at KSU to “foster lifelong commitment to health and wellness for the people we serve through exceptional programs, learning opportunities, services, and facilities.” According to Mrs. Gretchen, the mission is also to impact as many students as possible and to have services and programs that fit the needs of large number of students.
  - The golf course does not serve the needs of a large number of students, so Mrs. Gretchen said that the Rec Services money should be spent elsewhere. Basically, there is no way for Rec Services to take on the KSU golf course and take a loss of revenue
because it would create a great loss in funding for the current services that are already offered.

- Mrs. Gretchen said that money aside, she would like to be able to provide this service for students, but it just jeopardizes current services.

- One possible issue that Mrs. Gretchen discussed with the golf course is that many students do not know that the course exists and that the golf course is simply too far away from campus to appear as “ours”.

- In relation to a possible recreational service fee for the golf course if it were to be put under rec services, Gretchen said that it is simply not realistic due to the political climate in Ohio, which has a governor that is pushing for lower student fees, so justifying a student fee to play the KSU golf course would be difficult in that situation.

- Phelan Fletcher, intramural sports and youth programs coordinator
  - Intramural sports are designed to be recreational in nature and be available to everyone, where club sports are more competitive.
  - Rec services has stopped offering golf as an intramural sports in the past two years because there have not been enough participants register to run tournaments.
There is also not enough student interest for recreational services to start a club golf team.

This being said, it seems evident that golf is not going to be part of the planned programs for recreational services in the near future.

Viewpoint of Athletic Department

- Joel Nielsen, the Athletic Director of Kent State University

  - KSU golf course does not necessarily fit under the athletic department. Mr. Nielsen stated that the golf course would possibly be best fit within Rec Services in the university structure.

  - Because Rec Services manages and supervises the KSU Recreation Center, the KSU Ice Rink, as well as several other facilities, it seems that the golf course may not be placed correctly while being under athletics.

  - Mr. Nielsen also commented that to his knowledge, having a golf course managed under the athletic department is not a common practice and that most institutional golf courses are not managed by the athletic department.

  - In regards to the financial impact of the golf course leaving the management of the athletic department, Mr. Nielsen said that there would be little to no financial impact on the athletic department.

  - Based on these comments, it seems that the golf course may not be best suited under the athletic department.

It doesn’t seem to fit, should it even be owned by the University?
• **The question that arises under the current model is that if the students are not using the golf course, should it even be owned by the university?**
  
  - The mission of a university-owned facility is to benefit the students and put the student dollars to use in a way that will enhance their experience while they attend the university.
  - If the golf course is not frequently used by students, then it does not appear that the golf course should be a university-owned facility.

• **After talking with both the athletic director and recreational services director at Kent State University, it seems apparent that the golf course does not seem to fit very well in the structure of the University.**
  
  - Mr. Nielsen suggested that Rec Services could perhaps be a better placement for the golf course than under the athletic department.
  - Mrs. Gretchen stated that she did not think the golf course would be a worthwhile investment for recreational services to undertake.
  - With this being said, it raises the issue as to if the golf course should even be owned by the university by this point. Because the golf course is not profitable, it does not make sense for the university to incur a loss of revenue simply to maintain and manage the golf course.
  - Managing the golf course is in fact a business decision, so if the course isn’t making the university money, then it seems that it is not a valuable asset for the university to own.

**Alternative Options**
• Outsource the golf course to a third party or sell the golf course
  o One of the biggest issues with trying to sell the golf course is figuring out if the golf course is attractive to potential investors.
  o Selling the golf course would allow the university to spend money elsewhere. The golf course is not making the school money, so it makes sense financially to sell the golf course.
  o If a third party were able to buy the golf course, it would allow the golf course the ability to get more financial investment. This in turn would allow the golf course to get some more financial backing that would allow it to make some of the more costly changes.
  o As discussed in some of the other opportunities, there are some options to increase play at the course that cost more money than others. If there was more money available to spend on the course, then some of these options could become available.

• Sell the land
  o Sell all of the land that makes up the golf course
  o Sell some of the land and keep the rest of the golf for the use of the KSU golf training center
  o Sell most or all of the land on the back nine and make the front nine an executive course.
  o All of the above options pose as possibilities for the university to make some money from selling the golf course for non-golf use. This is an
occurrence that has become very common within the golf industry because some courses just simply cannot make enough money to stay in business. With the increasing need for housing within Kent, this seems like a very viable option that could make the university a good deal of money while also alleviate a financial burden.

- Keep the course where it is
  - The golf course could explore some of the opportunities that have been proposed and see if the golf course can generate more revenue that it currently is making. Performing some of the inexpensive changes to the course would be the most cost-efficient way to see if the golf course can become more profitable. It does seem reasonable that some of the low-cost changes could make a positive impact and increase the profitability of the golf course. If this can happen, then these low-investment opportunities would be an extremely efficient step to keep the golf course owned by the university.
Final Recommendations

There are numerous opportunities that were discussed throughout the paper. I think that there are some that are far more beneficial for the golf course than others. In order to determine which programs or changes I am choosing to recommend, I took the cost of them into account as well as how realistic each plan is. The plans I recommend are the most cost-effective and inexpensive. The main recommendation for the KSU golf course is to develop regular play at the golf course. There are many ways mentioned earlier as to how this would be done. These programs are all extremely inexpensive and do not require much investment. By looking at the golf course as a business, these programs seem logical because they do not cost the golf course much money at all. These plans still give the course the opportunity to grow its number of rounds and as a result, its revenue. I think that the most crucial step in creating regular or new play is to reach out to the student population of Kent. This makes up such a large population in the area for the majority of the year, so getting more student involvement would ultimately help the golf course generate revenue. The other logical recommendation for the golf course is to do a promotional outreach. Within this outreach, I think that the course should utilize sponsorship opportunities with other Kent businesses as well as a coupon system with these restaurants. These are cheap methods that allow the golf course to get some financial stability from the businesses in Kent. Although social media seems like a logical recommendation for the golf course, I do not think that it is a strong use of
marketing for the golf course because social media is so widely used now, I do not think that having a Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook would set the KSU golf course apart from other courses. I do not recommend the upgrades to the facilities in the near future. These changes require a great deal of investment that the golf course simply does not have. Also, due to the mandatory investment of new equipment in the near future, I think that it is essential for the golf course to start setting aside funding for this future cost. One recommendation that I have in regards to the facilities is for the course to start experimentation in hosting dinners because there is plenty of space to do so within the clubhouse. The PARTA bus stop is also something that could be discussed with the university and with the bus company because that could be an easy adjustment to the route of the busses since they already go directly past the golf course. Overall, the most viable options are the ones that cost the golf course a minimal amount of investment because the money to make big changes simply is not there in the current financial situation.

In my opinion, I do not think that the KSU golf course should be owned by the university. The golf course is losing money and is not within the mission of the university in regards to service for students. If there is an option to sell the golf course, I think that would be in the best financial interest of the university. It does not make sense from a business standpoint for the university to continue to invest in the golf course and not see any financial benefit from owning it.
Appendix of Methodology

In researching this project, one of the major challenges was the lack of historical information that is available about the Kent State University Golf Course. Prior to 2013, there are no existing financial records from the golf course. The issue with this is that the golf course success or failure is hard to determine due to this lack of information. The main method of gathering information in this investigation was to interview members involved with the KSU golf course as well as with specific management groups within the university. Below is a list of all of the people that were utilized in gathering information as well as what role they served in assisting with giving that information.

- **Herb Page**
  - The main person who helped in gathering some of the historical information is Herb Page. He is the director of golf at KSU and is the men’s golf coach. Mr. Page has been involved in the KSU golf program for 37 years and was asked to give his input about the KSU golf course during his tenure with the program. Mr. Page gave details about the newly formed advisory board for the golf course, which is not something publically known.

- **Jarrod Page**
• **Jarrod Page**
  o He is the head golf professional at the KSU golf course. Jarrod Page was able to give some information about the golf course structure as it currently stands as well as provide some financial records for the past two years. Jarrod also shared some of his own plans in regards to growing revenue at the golf course in the future.

• **Joel Nielsen**
  o Mr. Nielsen is the athletic director at KSU. He gave insight into the current placement of the golf course under the athletic department.

• **Gretchen Julian**
  o Mrs. Julian is the director of recreational services at KSU. She provided information about what the mission of KSU recreational services is for the students at KSU. She also discussed why she thinks that the golf course should not be included as a recreational service at the university.

• **Phelan Fletcher**
  o She is the intramural sports and youth programs coordinator at Kent State University. She gave information as to what exactly an intramural sport is by definition. Mrs. Fletcher was able to provide some insight as to why golf is not offered as an intramural sport nor as a club sport.

Another critical step in creating this business plan for the KSU golf course was to read over sample business plans for other golf courses. To do so, I simply used Google in
order to find some business plans from different types of golf courses. One challenge in finding sample business plans is that most courses do not have written business plans, which is why I had to branch away from Ohio in order to find some business plans that had extensive research done in their preparation. I did, however, focus on golf courses in the North because they would also have a similar golf season in terms of weather. There were two business plans that I used as a model in writing this one, which were for RedTail Golf Club in Illinois and the Lynnwood Municipal Golf Course in Washington. I chose these two plans because they were done in length and had elaborate plans for their respective golf courses. I also made sure to select one course that is privately owned, RedTail, and one that was publically owned, Lynnwood Municipal. I did this because I think it is essential to see the differences in the two and to also see how although the business models are quite different, many of the plans are still central. These two golf courses’ business plans greatly assisted me in figuring out what all should go in a business plan for a golf course in general.