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ABSTRACT

                     This document examines the current promotional methods used
by North Carolina community colleges to advance entrepreneurship education
and identifies practical strategies for improving promotional efforts and
outcomes. The observations, interviews, and anecdotal information presented
in the paper are based on the author's three years of community college
teaching experience and responses to an informal survey of Small Business
Center Directors in the North Carolina Community College system. The author
highlights the need for entrepreneurship education by asserting that
entrepreneurship is a global concept, entrepreneurship materials can and
should be modified to meet the unique needs of students, and a holistic
teaching approach allows the integration of entrepreneurship concepts and
skills throughout the traditional business school curriculum. A survey of
common promotional methods revealed that Business Centers rely heavily on
local newspaper advertisements and non-targeted, direct mailings, despite the
fact that these methods were also described as the least effective ways of
promotion. Strategies geared toward improving the promotion of
entrepreneurship education include: (1) effective modification of course
materials (e.g. incorporation of student goals, basic business concepts,
unique community characteristics); (2) open discussion of global issues
surrounding entrepreneurship; and (3) the careful integration of
entrepreneurship concepts into other disciplinary areas. (Contains 14
references.) (RC)

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING

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Abstract

This paper is based on observations over the last three years teaching traditional business classes and entrepreneurship as an adjunct faculty member of two community colleges in rural North Carolina. Entrepreneurship classes are offered as curriculum courses and noncredit classes in both institutions. Community college student populations are unique with needs and issues unknown in the high school or traditional college setting. Most of these students are already in the workplace and may even be in an established small business enterprise. Entrepreneurship education provides these students with skills and knowledge that they can immediately take into the workplace, whether corporate or small business.

We can demonstrate the need for entrepreneurship education by focusing on the following points: entrepreneurship is a global concept, entrepreneurship materials can and should be modified to meet the unique needs of students, a holistic teaching approach allows the integration of entrepreneurship concepts and skills throughout the traditional business school curriculum. This paper will discuss the current promotional methods being used in North Carolina community colleges and the outcomes of these efforts. Review of the promotional methods leads us to areas for needed study and possible growth and improvement.

Specific areas where instructors can assist in institutional promotion efforts include: effective modification of course materials, open discussion of the global issues surrounding entrepreneurship and careful integration of entrepreneurship concepts into other disciplinary areas. This paper will address factors to consider when modifying materials and the commonalities of entrepreneurs and global executives. It is imperative that instructors see the role they play in institutional promotion of entrepreneurship studies and student recruitment. This writing is intended to open discussion and point to areas for further and more formal and detailed assessment. North Carolina wishes to become a global leader in entrepreneurial endeavors. Review and improvement of promotional and teaching methods could push the state closer to this goal and provide valuable information for others in the global teaching community.

Introduction

Entrepreneurs create jobs, increase the positive cash flow for their communities and provide examples of leadership and a catalyst for change. Even entrepreneurs, who function outside the role of small business owner, as _intrapreneurs_ in corporate positions, require a new and dynamic form of business education. Adult learners returning for skills development or career change information may not respond to traditional classroom techniques. Indeed there are those that will argue that "everyone is an entrepreneur" (Grumpert 1996) whether they are in or outside the corporate world. In order to be successful today's workers must constantly be searching for new approaches to doing business. Therefore community colleges must be constantly improving entrepreneurship offerings and effectively promoting them to the community.

The observations, interviews and anecdotal information in this paper are based on three years teaching in the North Carolina Community College System. The author taught noncredit continuing education courses at Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro, and is an adjunct faculty member in the Business Department of Alamance Community College in Graham. This information should provide the conceptual framework for further study of promotional efforts for community college entrepreneurship courses and for other educational institutions that serve similar populations of adult learners. The lack of a systematic evaluation method within the North Carolina Community College system makes it difficult to examine and improve promotional methods, so we must rely on information gathered through less formal means.

It is the opinion of the author that more effective promotion of entrepreneurship education can begin by doing the following things:
1. Carefully examine and evaluate current promotional efforts using standardized methods. Money and staff time can then be concentrated on those methods that most effectively reach the colleges' target audience.
2. Modify entrepreneurship teaching materials to improve the experience of students. Students who have positive classroom experiences and successful business launches are more likely to provide the college with "word of mouth" advertising to future students and are more likely to return for additional classes themselves.
3. Acknowledge and discuss the global nature of entrepreneurship studies. Let students know how essential a global view is for achieving success in any business career and how entrepreneurship studies can help them acquire this view.
4. Integrate entrepreneurship concepts into the traditional business curriculum, concentrating on freestanding skills that will transfer into any occupation. This requires that the staff and administration develop a more flexible approach to business study.

Current promotional methods in North Carolina community colleges

Entrepreneurship classes are promoted primarily through the Small Business Centers affiliated with each community college. Small Business Centers function as a resource for students and the general community. Business center directors can, through discussions with students, help them choose between continuing education offerings and short courses and full semester length classes offered through the curriculum department of the college. Curriculum courses are listed and described in the official college catalogue.

The following questions were sent via email to all the Small Business Center Directors in the North Carolina Community College system:
1. What is your usual method for promoting entrepreneurship classes and workshops?
2. Please describe your most and least successful promotions.
3. What is the completion rate for your entrepreneurship courses?
4. How many different entrepreneurship offerings do you have this semester? Is this more or less than previous years?
5. Do you do any student follow-up? If so what methods do you use?
6. Who are your community partners for teaching entrepreneurship? (for example REAL[1], SCORE[2], etc.)

Answers to these questions reveal some shortcomings in the promotional efforts of the schools and with evaluation systems. The following chart lists the promotional methods currently being used in the order of frequency mentioned. Methods described as "most" or "least" effective were also listed by frequency mentioned. Responses reveal that Small Business Centers use local newspapers and non-targeted direct mailings most frequently to promote entrepreneurship course offerings. However these two methods are also most frequently described as the some of the *least* effective. In addition business workshops and public speaking engagements are perceived by the Small Business Center directors as the *most* effective promotional methods. When workshops and public speaking are mentioned they were often followed by comments indicating that though directors knew they were highly effective promotional and recruiting methods that they required "too much time" to be used often. More troubling is the comment from one Small Business Center Director that "We do not measure the effectiveness of the individual methods." This system as it is now has no standard mechanism for evaluation of promotional literature and therefore no basis for improving methods.

Table 1

Methods used, listed in order by frequency mentioned	Methods described as least effective	Methods described as most effective
Direct mailings-general	Direct mailings-general	Workshops and public speaking
Local newspapers	Posted flyers	Phone calls and emails
Direct mailings-targeted	Local newspapers	Direct mailings-targeted
Internal college literature (catalogues	Chamber newsletters	

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[1] REAL – Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning Curriculum licensed by Realenterprises, Inc.
[2] SCORE – Service Corp of Retired Executives

and postings)		
Workshops and public speaking		
Radio		
Web pages		
Local Television		

Table 1 continued

The rest of the questions dealt with evaluation and follow-up after students have been enrolled in entrepreneurship courses. Small Business Center Directors reported course completion rates from 40% to 100%, with the range of 70-85% being the most frequently sited. However, many also stated that they did not have access to exact figures. The number of entrepreneurial course offerings was described as "about the same as last year" by most programs with two reporting a slight increase in classes and workshops, one program with significantly more and one with significantly less course offerings than the previous year. Here again the directors volunteered many comments on their lack of "exact numbers".

The most frequent follow-up tool was the end of class survey or evaluation. These were either given to students at the last class or mailed to them afterwards. Several programs use a telephone survey of former students instead. Two programs state that they have "indefinite and continued" contact with all former students. Without a standardized long term tracking tool it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training the students received. This makes it impossible for the college in question to know whether the student experience will be a promotional help or hindrance for interesting other students in future entrepreneurship offerings.

The following questions were given as an in class survey to currently enrolled entrepreneurship students:
1. How often do you read the local newspaper?
   Daily, weekly, monthly, occasionally, never
2. Do you belong to your local chamber of commerce?
3. Are you already a small business owner?
4. How did you hear about this course?
5. Please rank the following factors in order of importance regarding your choice to take this course—with 1 being most important. Place a 0 next to those items that do not apply.
   ____time of day and days the class is offered
   ____cost of the course tuition
   ____advice or recommendation of college staff person
   ____course title
   ____other (please specify)_____

Students enrolled in a curriculum-based course, for which they will receive four college credit hours sited the college catalogue most often as the initial source for information about the class offering. Only one student reported being a daily local newspaper reader. As a group these students do not have chamber of commerce or local business network ties. The "most important" factor in choosing to take the entrepreneurship course varied with each individual student. However, the time and day the class was taught was consistently the second most important determining

factor. This seems to indicate that curriculum students are not exposed to the most frequently used Small Business Center advertising methods. Survey questions were sent to noncredit students through the Small Business Center Directors at Alamance Community College and Durham Technical Community College. No results were forwarded to the author.

Profile of the students

The North Carolina Economic Development Board declares in the summer 1999 Comprehensive Strategic Economic Development Plan that the state has the goal of "becoming a world-renowned center for entrepreneurship." Strategies to achieve this include expanding outreach and access to rural, women, and minority-owned businesses. Effective promotion of entrepreneurship educational programs can therefore be seen as an essential step towards achieving this goal.

North Carolina has a 58-campus system, which 800,000 people used in 1997-1998. Seventy percent of these students took some noncredit programs, mostly in workforce training. (Phillippe and Patton 2000) The North Carolina system focuses on job training, literacy and adult education. Most students are part-time (60.2%). North Carolina has a stated goal of "enhancing small business centers", the entry point for many entrepreneurship students, in the year 2002 (Phillippe and Patton 2001).

All American community college students are more likely than their counterparts at four-year institutions to balance work and family responsibilities (Phillippe and Patton 2000). These students from a wide variety of economic and racial backgrounds sometimes include those whose primary schooling experience was less than adequate. Thanks to open admissions policies, these learners are provided with remediation and then a second opportunity to gain the education they desire.

Utilizing the available demographic information about our students, as well as anecdotal information from staff can help us better target our promotional materials. We can also take this information to use in the next step of the process as we modify materials to fit each new group of incoming entrepreneurship students.

Modification of materials

Turnbull and Williams (1997) clearly state, "The initiative must continue in the longer term however, to ensure that the academic world relates its work to the contemporary business environment more effectively than it does at present." It is up to the entrepreneurship educator to modify prepared materials and teaching techniques to more closely mirror the experiences students will encounter in the workplace.

The following factors must be considered when instructors modify prepared curricula materials in entrepreneurship classes:

1. Individual student goals for the course

    2. Command of basic business concepts
    3. Types of businesses students plan to open
    4. Unique characteristics of the surrounding community

Individual student goals for the course:
The student who is just beginning to explore the possibility of becoming a small business owner and the student who is already working in an entrepreneurial endeavor have different individual goals with regards to course work. It is the job of the instructor to find out early in the process what student expectations are and help them to determine if the entrepreneurship course offered will move them closer to their stated career goals. Self-directed learning resources for entrepreneurs often begin with self-assessment exercises. Entrepreneurs are asked to answer questions about why they wish to go into business, how much money they expect to make and what type of time commitment they are prepared to make (Harper 1991). It is a mistake for instructors to skip over this material in eagerness to get to the *real* business course work. Understanding the motivation and goals for individual students allows the instructor to keep the course interesting and to make sure that students are exposed to the information they need to succeed in their endeavors. Goal clarification also provides a tool to evaluate course effectiveness at the end of the session.

Command of basic business concepts:
It is especially critical for instructors of non-credit or continuing education courses that have no prerequisite class work to ascertain the level of mastery for certain student skills. Adult learners reentering the classroom for the first time since primary school may lack abilities and background that business faculty take for granted. Interactive exercises (icebreakers) can help the instructor discover things like reading, writing and oral communication levels. In the absence of grading requirements continuing education instructors can offer flexibility in the way students demonstrate comprehension of material.

Each new concept should be introduced with a short session on basic ideas and terminology. Students lacking fundamental academic skills or financial literacy should be directed to sources for remediation.

Types of businesses students plan to open:
It is impossible for any prepared curriculum to address every potential area that students will be interested in exploring. Entrepreneurship classes must be effectively promoted not only for the purposes of recruiting students but in order to recruit and retain mentors, guest speakers and support people from the surrounding community. "Clearly then, the teaching process must integrate the experiences, activities and challenges faced in entrepreneurial careers and it is therefore important that practising entrepreneurs represent viable role models that students can relate to." (Turnbull and Williams 1997)

To this end the REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) curriculum provides, as part of the implementation manual for instructors a "community support team" recruiting section. This material includes a sample letter that REAL instructors

are encouraged to personalize and then mail to prospective support team members. These are the people who serve as guest speakers on specific topics, lenders and local business leaders. At Central Carolina Community College the first group of people who received this letter all rejected the idea of becoming involved with the REAL program. Upon further investigation it was discovered that they found the language of the letter to be very intimidating and suggestive of a much larger commitment in time and energy that they were willing to make. Additionally when questioned later these people also said the letter made them feel as if they were perhaps not qualified to speak to or assist REAL entrepreneurship students. At the fall meeting for REAL instructors this same experience was described by almost all of the post-secondary and high schoolteachers.

A more effective, but more time-consuming method is the personal invitation from the instructor. Community experts, entrepreneurs and lenders are asked individually to come to the class as "guest speakers". These guests are asked to prepare twenty minutes of information about their area of expertise and to be prepared to then answer student questions. Students are prepared before these visits with classroom discussions and exercises on networking. Mentor or client/consultant relationships are then allowed to organically develop between the budding entrepreneurs and the "guest speakers."

Unique characteristics of the surrounding community:

Small business ventures garner success by finding a market niche and filling it effectively. In order to do this, entrepreneurs must know the target market and surrounding community. Entrepreneurship educators will need to modify teaching materials, especially case studies and interactive activities to mirror the local culture. It is especially important to focus student attention on examples of successful entrepreneurs already within their community. The existing level of entrepreneurship and the perception and evaluation of these endeavors influence the decision to become and entrepreneur. The observation of lots of entrepreneurial activity in the students' vicinity makes the choice to become and entrepreneur "easier". (Minniti and William 1999)

Entrepreneurship and culture have an interdependent relationship. Cultural attitudes about success and failure may influence student decisions to pursue business ventures. (Begley and Tan 2001) Educators must be sensitive to the way that cultural values shape the experience and perceptions students bring into the classroom. The reciprocal part of this relationship can be seen as entrepreneurship provides the means to keep oppressed minority groups from falling to the bottom of the economic ladder. (Butler 1991)

Global issues around entrepreneurship

If our students are considering a twenty-first century career in business then they are considering a career in global business (McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002). There is

considerable similarity and overlap in the qualities that provide the foundation for success for global executives and entrepreneurs.

Table 2

Competencies of Global Executives, McCall and Hollenbeck (2002)	Characteristics of Entrepreneurs, Mitton (1997)
Open-minded and flexible in thought and tactics	They actively bank experience (lifelong learning)
Cultural interest and sensitivity	They systematically think and act**
Able to deal with complexity*	They continually test limits
Resilient, resourceful, optimistic, and energetic	They commit to a "cause" (strong sense of mission)
Honesty and integrity	They embrace competence
Stable personal life	The are situationists (importance of the moment)
Value-added technical or business skills	They take fast action
	They make significant and enduring change***

*Ability to deal with complexity—defined by McCall and Hollenbeck as problem solving by considering many variables and the willingness to take risks, qualities traditionally identified as entrepreneurial characteristics.

**They systematically think and act—defined by Mitton as having a *global view* that opens up horizons where they see an opportunity-filled environment presently choices rather than restrictions. This global view is essential for the success of international business professionals.

***They make significant and enduring change—defined by Mitton as the ability to see sameness in difference and difference in sameness. Entrepreneurs as change agents must master the same type of ability to function within different environments as global executives.

Coursework integration into business curricula and freestanding skills

Professional development is essential for instructors in the field of Business. Textbooks and statistics are often outdated by the time they reach the college classroom. As instructors we need to be prepared to access the newest information possible using the widest variety of sources at our disposal. In addition to learning the "latest" business theory and practices our students need to master the soft skills that will make them successful at work and throughout the rest of life. Employers often wish employees were trained in the areas of communication and leadership but sometimes hesitate to spend the money on these hard to define but necessary skills. Therefore it is important for us to integrate them into the rest of the business curriculum to make our graduates more competitive in the job market.

Mastery of soft skills, often known as social skills proves to be related to the financial success of entrepreneurs (Markman and Baron 1998). The ability to attract effective partners "read" others in negotiations and generate enthusiasm for a project gains entrepreneurs contacts and financial backing. These skills can be captured in the

classroom under the umbrella of topics like Business Communications and Leadership training. These topics, essential to entrepreneurs and corporate employees as well, can and should be addressed throughout the business curriculum in the community college setting. As Markman and Baron state "what is a common knowledge is not always a common practice", and social skills development often gets short shrift in the overall training program for business students.

Learning about the "entrepreneurial process" provides other students, technical and science majors for example, with the ability to advocate for and shepherd an idea through the process of product development (Hynes 1996). This interdisciplinary approach gives students in fields that seem removed from the business world the opportunity to see how entrepreneurial abilities can benefit them in their chosen careers. This in turn allows the educational institution to benefit for expertise and synergies obtained from cross-functional learning (Hynes 1996).

Conclusion

Current North Carolina Community College methods for promoting entrepreneurship course offerings rely heavily on maintaining and adapting methods from previous years. Information is gathered from students in a fairly informal manner, with extensive use of end of class questionnaires and individual interviews. A systematic review of the effectiveness of various methods could point to the best places to spend staff time and budget dollars. Careful review of promotional methods and student feedback would also allow educators to apply data from the North Carolina system to other educational institutions with similar student populations and issues. This would move North Carolina one step closer to the goal of becoming a world leader in the field of entrepreneurship.

Instructors can promote entrepreneurship education by making it a vital and integrated part of the total educational offerings at the institution. By emphasizing free standing and transferable skills like active listening, networking and basic financial literacy instructors can appeal to the practical and goal oriented adult learner. Entrepreneurs become the change catalysts and leaders of their communities. Entrepreneurship instructors must become the change agents within their respective institutions and leaders in the field of education. As educators we must be willing to exhibit the risk-taking attitude so long associated with entrepreneurs. We must move out of the comfort zone of the familiar and examine our promotional and teaching methods thoroughly and carefully. Then we must be willing to make the changes necessary to improve entrepreneurship programs in our home communities and across the globe.

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