Exciting Entrepreneurship Education

By Hope J. Gibbs

Entrepreneurship education programs have become a popular way for schools to introduce the world of business to students, and equip them with the essential knowledge and skills necessary for success.

Today, school mission statements are often typified as a partnership of businesses and the community with the goal of preparing students for successful and rewarding careers. These collaborative associations serve the mutual needs of successful educators, students and businesses. This ideology has spurred an increase among schools to create new and innovative business curricula.

According to the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, "In the past 15 years, entrepreneurship education has grown dramatically, as reflected in the increased student enrollment, proliferation of formal entrepreneurship centers, intercollegiate business plan competitions, new entrepreneurship curricula and programs, and endowed chairs and professorships. Approaches to entrepreneurship education have varied across colleges and universities from single course offerings in business plan preparation to integrated curricula that include marketing, finance, competitive analysis, new product development and technology."

Entrepreneurship education programs afford students the opportunity to integrate several areas of study, such as accounting, finance, economics and marketing. Students build critical decision-making skills necessary to create, build and maintain thriving new businesses, or become a valued member of an already established business.

"Entrepreneurship has become one of the most sought-after areas of study among collegiate business students," says Michael Camp, director of research at the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership. "Graduates of these programs are not only increasing in number, they are reshaping our understanding of market, technology and management leadership. Bent on realizing their own perceived opportunities, they continue to define the standard for business innovation—and, by doing so, will forever alter the competitive landscape for future enterprise."

As career and technical educators aggressively reach out to community business leaders for support and aid in the development of academic programs that will produce highly skilled graduates, one school is reaching out to partner with colleges across the United States to establish a new entrepreneurship program. Shoreline Community College (SCC), located just north of Seattle, appreciates that entrepreneurship education is on the rise and acts as a springboard for business students as they work toward becoming the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Investing in Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs

In March 2005, the Workforce and Economic Development team at SCC announced that it was partnering with colleges across the United States to develop classes and programs for local entrepreneurs. SCC targeted existing entrepreneurs in the hospitality and tourism field, with particular emphasis on immigrant entrepreneurs.

Among the partner colleges are Edmonds Community College in Edmonds, Washington; Kingsborough Community College, located in Brooklyn, New York; Augusta Technical College in Augusta, Georgia; and Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland. Each school is developing both credit and non-credit modules that will be shared among the other colleges. SCC is responsible for developing the marketing, risk assessment and human resource modules.

"Cooperation between postsecondary
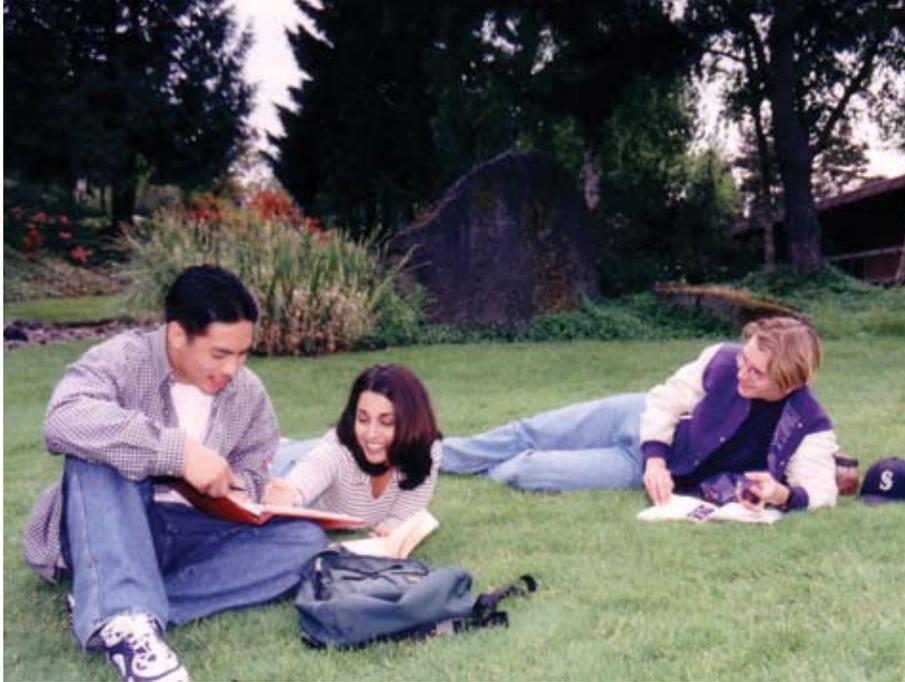
institutions is rare," says SCC Business Instructor Charles Loomis. "However, our VP of workforce and economic development, Darlene Miller, has been the catalyst that has brought our five institutions together. Our current project is developing entrepreneurship programs and training for the hospitality industry. This is a three-phase program, and we are now in the final phase that consists of creating short learning modules to educate students interested in entrepreneurship, and to offer these short courses to existing and developing businesses in our community. Our modules are designed to improve the success of businesses and to establish learning communities that can act as future mentors for businesses to come."

"Another main goal," explains Loomis, "is to work toward long-term sustainability of our respective programs in an effort to move our learning network forward and into the future. Other joint community college programs are in progress, but are mainly aimed at alliances of local colleges. A strong motivation for these alliances is to eliminate duplication of overhead expenses, and therefore, not stretch available resources thinly between schools, but utilize these resources as one unit"

Entrepreneurship education classes began at SCC in the fall of 2003 with the course Entrepreneurship, Incorporating Virtual Enterprise (VE). The curriculum for the course includes such topics as the development of a business plan, failure facts in small business,

sources of capital, accounting, financial statements, marketing, human resource management, legal/regulatory issues and management principles.

SCC's partner school, Kingsborough Community College, established a second course using the VE course of study, and by fall 2004, SCC introduced VE to its course.

"This allowed us to network with the VE program developed and maintained by Kingsborough," explains Loomis. "This program puts the students into a virtual world of business, interfacing them with other entrepreneurship students (virtual businesses) throughout the world. Each student company can buy and sell products through a network of companies, getting their startup capital/loans from a virtual bank."

Students also have the opportunity to listen to and speak with four volunteer speakers each quarter. The speaker guest list is usually made up of a banker, a lawyer, an HR specialist and a small-business owner who has successfully graduated from the program.

"These talks give students practical insight into specific aspects of an entrepreneurial business and what is required to operate a successful business in the real world," notes Loomis.

Integrating Programs

SCC's goal is to integrate entrepreneurship into the majority of classes it offers and to its business community. The school received a grant in 2004 to integrate entrepreneurship, using the VE

curriculum, into a Level 5 ESL course. It has been a great success and is in its third quarter.

"The ESL program at SCC has begun using the virtual enterprise network in a class targeted for students interested in business and entrepreneurship," says VE ESL Instructor Donna Biscay. "Students in the class study with a team (an English instructor and a business instructor), building their language skills at the same time they learn about business in the U.S."

The VE network "virtual businesses" created and run by students in countries around the globe allow students to converse and trade with one another.

"As an example," says Biscay, "Shoreline students have created a virtual travel agency, and students in other

Shoreline's Gigain Widjaja, an international student from Indonesia, works at a computer in the Virtual Enterprise classroom.

businesses can make their virtual travel arrangements through that agency. There is a central bank, which the virtual businesses use to deposit their income and to pay their business expenses."

SCC can boast about being the first school in Washington state to offer the VE program and only the second community college in the nation to develop the course specifically for ESL students.

"Many students who immigrate to the U.S. or arrive as refugees are interested in opening their own businesses," says VE Business Instructor Anita McEntyre, "and participating in the VE class allows them to experience many facets of business before actually opening their own businesses. Each of the students' VEs has its own corporate structure, with a CEO and various departments. Students rotate through different roles in their companies in order to learn about the scope and responsibilities of each."

"ESL students who want to learn only about the HR function or other small-business positions, and do not plan on opening a business, can also benefit from this class since it is based on language skills and computer and entrepreneurship skills," says Es-

sential Skills Director Donna Miller-Parker.

This course has been one of the most exciting experiences in their years as instructors say Biscay and McEntyre. They add that the students are excited by the opportunity to explore issues related to working in or operating a business, and in preparation for further business or entrepreneurship training.

SCC's Virtual Entrepreneurs

"Traveling time is here. Get your swimsuits ready! Get your sunscreen out and hit the beach. Seattle International Travel (SIT) is an international travel agency, located in the Great Pacific Northwest region on the Shoreline Community College campus in the State of Washington." That is the introduction found on the Web site of SCC's VE, SIT.

The Web site was formed in March 2005 with help from two SCC graduates, Claire Fant and Donna Langley. Fant and Langley, who specialize in Web design and multimedia, worked as freelance Web designers to assist the students in the creation of their Web site. Their contribution to the project was essential in launching the new business on the Virtual Enterprise

Network.

"Without these two, we wouldn't have an online company," says Biscay. "We are so grateful for their time and knowledge."

This spirit of teamwork is another facet of business that is carefully nurtured at SCC and is evident in the international mix of students that make up the SIT team. There are Ruth Aguilar from Ecuador, Lilia Bauman from the Philippines, Seung Kwon Kim from Korea, Helen Shu-Yu Lin from Taiwan, Shiu Mai Pang-Li from Hong Kong and Kenichi Seo from Japan. Together, these students have successfully maintained their VE and met their company's mission in providing the finest service possible.

Another VE established at SCC is the Seattle International Sweet House. Like SIT, its Web design is by Fant and Langley, and instructors Biscay and McEntyre expertly guide the students. The Sweet House guarantees its product line of gourmet foods, and some tangible evidence of this business success is the mouthwatering that takes place at the very mention of ice cream and chocolate.

Again, a diverse team of students, all from various backgrounds, contributes to the Sweet House business, giving different perspectives and ideas to its product line and management. The students learn how to work together in solving the many issues that businesses face in the real world, and how to integrate their ideas with the hard, cold facts of running a business in the 21st century.
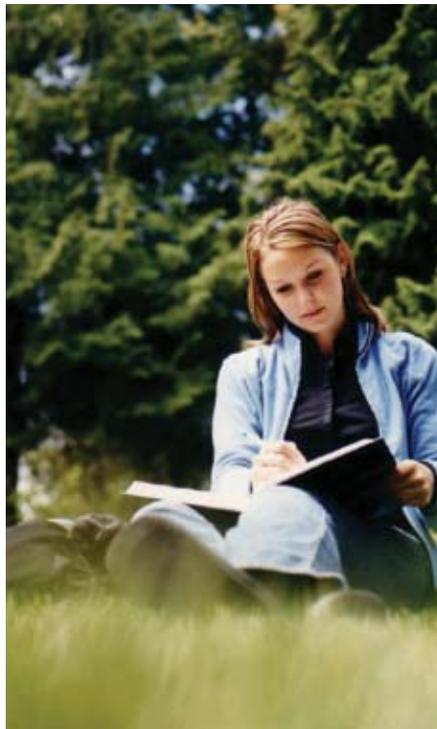
Funding Success

Although SCC's Entrepreneurship, Incorporating Virtual Enterprise course is funded by the college's general operating fund, outside funding is needed to continue the expansion and success of the program. A $26,000 grant was awarded to SCC for its collaborative project with Kingsborough, Edmonds, Howard and Atlanta Community Colleges. The Hospitality Entrepreneurship Project that consists of the module formation is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Additional funding was provided by the Herbert Jones Foundation to offer service to small businesses. The Herbert Jones Foundation believes that entrepreneurism and small business are the backbone for the strength of our economic system. The foundation promotes this belief through the initial and temporary support of new business programs managed by postsecondary educational entities in the state of Washington.

The need for strong entrepreneurship education in our nation's schools has certainly been validated, and it has also presented a challenge to schools across the nation to reach out and work together in expanding entrepreneurial education.

SCC has embraced the challenge and is successfully preparing business students to enter the job market in the small-business sector, or even to inspire these burgeoning entrepreneurs to start their own businesses. There is virtually no limit to how successful SCC graduates will be in the future. ⊤

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