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James D. Bell

Texas State University, jb15@txstate.edu

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JAMES D. BELL

Expand the Honors Curriculum: Teach Entrepreneurship, Risk-Taking, and Change Across the Curriculum

JAMES D. BELL

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Having students apply what they study and learn is a principal goal of all educators. This article describes a course, "Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Team Building: Identifying and Applying Best Practices," that was developed and taught in each of the last two years for a University Honors Program. Students not only learned but applied this learning as they effected minor and major change on campus. In addition, this article provides background information relevant to professors interested in offering a similar course and shares projects, outcomes, and a full-course structure.

"SO WHAT?" ISSUE

Honors Programs and Honors Colleges at the over 700 colleges and universities that are institutional members of the National Collegiate Honors Council attract top academic students.

At our university, over 600 students are enrolled in the Honors Program, and ninety-five percent represent majors "other than" business. More than ninety percent of these bright students will never enroll in a business class, nor will they take any course in entrepreneurship or small business. I believe this experience is typical of what occurs on most college campuses where majors, concentrations, and minors in entrepreneurship are offered but not taken by the majority of students attending and graduating from these universities.

I also believe that many minors and majors in leadership focus more on thinking than on doing, and, by examining and practicing how entrepreneurs aggressively enact change, we can include a valuable learning component in the curriculum.

The goal of this article is to encourage and guide administrators and professors as they expand entrepreneurship and leadership course offerings to students across the university.

INTRODUCTION

Is entrepreneurship more than starting and running businesses? Do entrepreneurs exist in private **and** public arenas? Are students on all campuses and in all majors inherently focused on being successful, making a difference, and developing skills in entrepreneurship and leadership? Assuming the answers are “yes,” this article provides guidance, strategy, and detail on how courses in entrepreneurship may be modified to target such non-business majors on any campus.

Specifically, a successful “Studies in Entrepreneurship” course (Mgmt. 4350), housed in the College of Business Administration, was modified by changing the course project from writing a business plan to effecting and instituting change on campus. Further, a university honors program offered and promoted the course, which was targeted to non-business freshmen and sophomores. The course was first taught in spring 2003 and again repeated in fall 2004.

Here is a brief description of the modified course.

“STUDIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP” COURSE BACKGROUND

Management 4350, “Studies in Entrepreneurship,” was first offered on our campus in 1999 and has been taught to more than 800 students—99% being business majors. The course provides presentations by entrepreneurs on Tuesdays and, on Thursdays, work on business plans of the students’ choosing. For more information on the course, refer to this web link: <http://www.business.txstate.edu/users/jb15/MGT4350/default.htm>

Since 1999, more than 100 successful entrepreneurs—representing the public and private sectors, big and small enterprises, young and old, men and women, minority and non-minority—have spoken at Texas State University. Just a few of the “tutors for enterprise success” have been:

- Sam Barshop, founder of La Quinta (Inns) and President of Barshop-Oles Development;
- Herb Kelleher, founder and former President, Southwest Airlines;
- Peter Holt, President, Holt Enterprises, Caterpillar, and the San Antonio Spurs;
- Stacy Bishkin, President, BBH Exhibits, Inc.;
- Tom Meredith, former CFO, Dell Computer;
- Red McCombs, CEO, McCombs Enterprises (includes Clear Channel Communications and the recently sold Minnesota Vikings);
- Mike Levy, Founder and Publisher, *Texas Monthly*;
- Admiral Bobby Inman, former Director of the (US) NSA and founder of MCC.

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The names of many of the speakers are household words. Others are success stories known only in their industry. They represent big business, small business, non-profits, and captive entrepreneurship (i.e. entrepreneurial activity within a business structure).

CABLE TV AND A TEXTBOOK

Tapes have been made of all presentations, and each has been edited to fit a 55-minute time frame. Since fall 2002, more than seventy selected videotapes have been shown on local cable television. Further, because of the class, twenty-nine "entrepreneurial stories" appear in a recently published book and CD entitled *Profiles in Entrepreneurship: Leaving More Than Footprints* (Thompson / Southwestern Publishers, 2004; available on Amazon).

In addition, although only one day each week is devoted to writing and presenting business plans, students enrolled in the "Studies in Entrepreneurship" class have placed second in 2002 and again in 2003, winning \$7,000 for two different business plans, at the Ernst Young/Nasdaq New Enterprise Creation Competition sponsored by Ball State University.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Although "Studies in Entrepreneurship" could be labeled successful, 99% of students that enrolled were majoring in business, and I was interested in teaching entrepreneurship to students other than business majors. In fall 2002, working with the Director of the University Honors Program, I created an honors course entitled "Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Team Building: Identifying and Applying Best Practices." Although the course was modeled after the "Studies in Entrepreneurship" course, the honors version was different in that it targeted non-business students who were freshman- and sophomore-level honors students. In addition, creating change on campus was the course focus rather than creating business plans.

This honors course was designed to spark genuine interest in creating and identifying opportunities for change on campus and especially for turning ideas into substance and into tangibles. Finally, instead of having invited guest speakers, the course used selected stories, videotapes, and a CD all taken from the book *Profiles in Entrepreneurship: Leaving More Than Footprints*, which highlights key concepts such as opportunity recognition, leadership, risk assessment/taking, decision making, compensating for limited resources, guidance and mentoring, and more, delivered by entrepreneurs who previously spoke on campus.

HONORS 3393

This modified course required students to work in groups/teams and create campus-based projects that identified a process, program, or system that was not being implemented or that could be done better; the teams then worked to develop a plan and strategy to turn their proposed change(s) into reality.

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Student teams pilot-tested their plans and prepared written reports identifying what they did and explaining why, where, when, with whom, and how they did it. They identified what worked and what didn't as well as what they would do differently in the future to improve the strategy and plan. Student teams presented the contents of these reports to the class as oral presentations.

The course enrolled students from pre-med, psychology, advertising, government, mass communication, nursing, and biology majors among others.

The results from 2003 and 2004 were impressive. The students became "intrapreneurs" and actually changed processes and policies as well as creating new programs at the university. Samples of changes included:

- adding a student crises and suicide hotline on campus;
- linking all computer labs on campus to "allow" only duplex (two-sided) printing and saving an estimated \$9,000 in printing costs each semester (this change was supported and legislation was passed by the Student Senate at the University);
- creating a tutoring program sponsored by the Honors College;
- creating employment assistance for Honors College students;
- modifying the campus recreation center's policy for outdoor exercise;
- working to create themed honors housing in the dorms;
- sponsoring an all-campus beautification program where students from campus organizations worked together to clean and spiff-up the campus each semester;
- creating an Honors Coffee House to be operated by an outside vendor with a percentage of sales going to support the Honors Program;
- improving the university's campus tours as well as a campus trolley system; and
- instituting an on-line suggestion improvement box for the campus community.

Three students from the course had their paper accepted by the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference, and they presented their findings and "change/creations" in Chicago in fall 2003. In Chicago they shared their entrepreneurial experiences and distributed copies of the class syllabus.

As noted previously, rather than create a new course on entrepreneurship, I modified "Studies in Entrepreneurship" and taught it to students enrolled in our University Honors Program. This "modified course" theme is being repeated to forestall objections from faculty members who may say they don't have time to create a new course.

The next segment describes the modified entrepreneurship course; details the changes/modifications made; includes a syllabus for Honors 3393S; and provides outcomes, student reflections, recommendations, and conclusions.

HONORS COURSE STRUCTURE

This course sought to identify characteristics needed to become an entrepreneur or intrapreneur (someone who works within a large enterprise). The course also examined how to build a team, how to build and sustain a guiding coalition and how to effect change; it also explored leadership principles necessary for team initiated and directed projects to succeed and prosper. Through selected videotapes and entrepreneurial stories, students learned how creativity and idea generating is necessary for change, growth, and improvement.

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This writing intensive seminar examines the “life stories” of selected entrepreneurs, identifies leadership qualities that may have contributed to success, and explores research-based principles necessary for groups to become teams and for teams to become high performing. The course output/tangible is for students to work in teams, identify potential needed/necessary “changes” that might be implemented, and work to effect and initiate these changes.

COURSE OUTCOMES, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

After completing the course, students will have:

- identified idea generating strategies and opportunities available in the university, local, and regional communities;
- identified and categorized leadership qualities needed to attract followers and to build a guiding coalition;
- identified how individual leadership qualities possessed by class/seminar participants compares with leadership qualities possessed by successful entrepreneurs and leaders;
- created an individual and team-based action plan designed to improve and build upon leadership qualities already possessed;
- worked in groups and created campus-based projects which required the group to become a team and to have moved through specific stages necessary for the team to become high performing;
- completed an action-based, tangible change project.

SEMESTER COURSE OUTLINE

Weeks 1-2

View select video portions of the entrepreneur speaker CD and read select transcripts of successful entrepreneurs to identify sources of ideas as well as idea-generating techniques necessary to stay current.

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Assignment

Students form groups/teams, and the teams individually and collectively begin to list strategies for identifying opportunities and/or for improving self-selected campus/community-based existing practices. Teams select preliminary projects related to campus-based innovation or improvement of existing practice.

Weeks 2-6

Review research-based techniques and principles designed to help a group become a team and progress through team stages. Introduce leadership and team member skills and activities required in high performing teams.

Assignment

Students work individually and collectively to create listings of team or group necessities and problems as well as to identify leadership characteristics necessary for success. Students evaluate their past performance and contributions as team members and then identify task or maintenance functions where improvements are sought and needed. In addition, student groups create vision and mission statements, identify their project target, develop specific goals, break goals into tasks and delegate the work to individual team members as well as create project time-lines and milestones.

Weeks 6-9

Continue to introduce leadership and team-based research intended to educate and challenge team members to develop and further refine skills possessed. Students initiate and continue working on their team-based projects.

Assignment

Teams submit their preliminary project related to a campus-based innovation or improvement of existing practice.

Weeks 9-12

Students discuss project successes and impediments and receive constructive feedback from all class teams.

Weeks 12-15

Students submit a team-prepared written report documenting their campus/community project and focusing on the six helpers—who, what, when, where, how, and why—as well as describe outcomes. Students also orally present the results of their project, receive feedback from the other teams, and prepare a “what was learned” analysis of the experience.

TEXTBOOK AND/OR LEARNING RESOURCES

Profiles in Entrepreneurship: Leaving More Than Footprints w/ CD (David Nelson and James Bell, Thompson /Southwestern Publishers, 2004).

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Packet of materials developed by the instructor and available for purchase at the University Bookstore. (Materials have previously been used to deliver in-house education and professional development for for-profit and not-for-profit businesses and organizations.) Expected cost not to exceed \$20.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

1. Attendance and informed participation at seminar sessions (10%)
2. Preliminary Written Group Project Report (due week 8) (15%)
3. Individual assessment of the quantity and quality of contributions, commitment, and attitude of team members. (10%: 5% week 8; 5% week 14)
4. Written Group Project Report (due week 14) (50%)
5. Team Oral Presentation (weeks 13 and 14) (15%)

Course Grading

90 > =A; 80 to 89=B; 70 to 79=C; 60 to 69=D; <60=F

Course Bibliography

- Candace A. Allen. *The Entrepreneur as Hero*. Federal Reserve Board of Dallas Publication, 1998, Volume 2 Number 1.
- Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith. *The Discipline of Teams: A Mind Book-Workbook For Delivering Small Group Performance*. Wiley Publishers, 2001.
- Leigh Thompson. *Making the Team: A Guide for Managers*. Prentice Hall, 2000.
- John P. Kotter. *Leading Change*. Harvard Business School Press, 1996.
- Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*. Wiley Publishers, 1996.
- Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. Simon & Schuster, 1999.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Here are selected student comments and reflections about the course and the experience.

- “The dictionary defines an entrepreneur as: A person who organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a business venture. This overall definition by no means truly characterizes an entrepreneur. For one thing, no one entrepreneur is the same. They may sometimes share characteristics, but rarely do we find two entrepreneurs with the same drive, focus, and attributes. The definition also leaves out the idea and thought process before the organization even begins.”
- “When I first learned that I had to think of an idea to change the campus or community, I was honestly petrified. I had only lived here for

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two weeks and didn't even know how to drive to Wal Mart; yet I had to come up with this really great idea for Texas State. Fortunately, after I calmed down and became accustomed to my surroundings, I started to see things to change everywhere. Sometimes it takes me a while to situate myself in a new environment, but when I do, I can easily strive...."

- "When I was told in this class we were to find problems on our campus and work to solve them, I was shocked. I was so accustomed to complaining about certain things on our campus, but I never thought of actually doing something about them!

In order to be a successful entrepreneur, there are certain characteristics one must possess. I think that I share some of these qualities, such as enthusiasm, passion, and dedication. I am excited with the idea of facing a new challenge or problem which I must work through to overcome. I am very passionate about the work I do and the activities I commit to. I am extremely dedicated and don't give up easily."

- "I am similar to every entrepreneur we have studied in that I am optimistic, and I march to the beat of my own drum. Also, I feel my focus and initiative are strong entrepreneurial qualities that will benefit me in the future."
- "The class has opened a new door in my life. I am now aware of what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur. Even though I do not possess all of the characteristics of an entrepreneur, I know what I have to do to get there. I have learned that an entrepreneur is not a job or a career; it is a lifestyle."
- "What does it take to be the best? This question is just as subjective as 'what came first, the chicken or the egg?' There are textbook definitions of what characteristics an entrepreneur needs to succeed, and many entrepreneurs are the textbook entrepreneur character profile. The combination of networking, research, self-motivation, and goal orientation is what I believe to be the most important."
- "The ability to find resources occurs either by networking or research. Many people would not consider networking a resource, but I believe that anything that is used to gain knowledge is a resource. After considering what we have done in this class, networking works in a spider-web form. It starts with a couple of people that an entrepreneur communicates with, and then the cycle keeps going until and beyond the knowledge acquired. Networking is essential in creating a guiding coalition, which is the best way to gain influence over the decision makers. The guiding coalition is what is

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needed to convince people that you network with to go along with your idea.”

- “I learned a lot, and the interesting part was...most of it was about me! *I have never had a class that taught me about developing myself.* Most of them are about learning new facts, or methods, or ideas. I can honestly say that what I learned in this class will be with me and help me for the rest of my life.”

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

As the student reflections indicate, application and growth—true learning—resulted. Across campuses, modules of this course may exist, but the focus is typically on writing business plans. By modifying a business plan course, by using real-life role models and research based principles, and especially by requiring initiative and change, this honors course examined and combined entrepreneurial principles and techniques, and it worked with a “non-business audience” early-on in the university experience with the goal of giving the student his or her junior and senior years to further apply and refine skills.

Expanding the reach of entrepreneurship/leadership throughout the university provides benefits to students and can have an important impact on an entire campus community. Honors program administrators are challenged to identify professors who teach or might want to teach entrepreneurship on campuses. And professors are encouraged to modify and share entrepreneurship across the university curriculum.

The author may be contacted at

Jb15@txstate.edu

