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The Evolution and Implications of Entrepreneurship Curriculum at Universities
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The Evolution and Implications of Entrepreneurship Curriculum at Universities

ABSTRACT

The notion of entrepreneurship is not a new one. Neither is the idea of entrepreneurship education. However, post-secondary entrepreneurship curriculum has exploded the past thirty five years. A number of reasons have helped to fuel this growth. An argument can be made that entrepreneurs can be made and are not born. Entrepreneurship education is the tool that encourages the transformation process. At the university level, most entrepreneurship curriculum is taught in business schools and colleges. Implications indicate that entrepreneurship education is good not only for students who become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship curriculum stimulates creativity and ownership, two traits desired by corporate America.

INTRODUCTION

The process of entrepreneurship is powerful. As stated by Kuratko & Hodgetts (2004)

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision change and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. Essential ingredients include the willingness to take calculated risks – in terms of time, equity, or career; the ability to formulate an effective venture team; the creative skill to marshal needed resources; and fundamental skill of building solid business plan; and finally, the vision to recognize opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction, and confusion. (p. 30)

One school of thought indicates that universities shape people's minds and influence people's decisions toward career paths. A diverse, yet not contradictory school of thought indicates that university curricula are a reflection of society's wishes. No

matter who is correct, the growth of entrepreneurship curriculum in universities the past thirty five years is exponential. This growth is not limited to the United States. Most industrialized countries have entrepreneurship curriculum in its business school forefront. In understanding this unprecedented growth, one must look at the history of entrepreneurship, the creation of entrepreneurship curriculum and its defining role within the university structure.

METHOD

A comprehensive secondary analysis was performed to support underlying assumptions developed by the author while teaching non-credit entrepreneurship seminars at a medium sized university in the Midwestern United States. Sources were gathered from peer-reviewed journals, professional conference proceedings, published governmental research, entrepreneurship-based foundations, and books. Implications and recommendations proposed by the author were based on secondary research and the author's experiences as an entrepreneurship instructor.

THE HISTORY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

One could argue that entrepreneurs have been around since the beginning of time. Maranville (1992) implied that the historical perspective of entrepreneurship has included the hunter/gather age, the agricultural age, the mercantile age, the industrial age, and the service age. Cunningham & Lischeron (1991) indicated that the current word "entrepreneurship" comes from the French verb "entreprendre" and the German word "unternehmen," both which mean to "undertake" (as cited in Carton , Hofer & Meeks,

1998, ¶ 9). Scholars Bygrave and Hofer in 1991 defined the entrepreneurial process as involving all the functions, activities and actions associated with the perceiving of opportunities and the creation of organizations to pursue them (as cited in Carton , Hofer & Meeks,1998). The modern concept of entrepreneurship was introduced by Schumpeter (1934, p. 74) who defined entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship as follows: “the carrying out of new combinations we call enterprise; the individuals whose function it is to carry them out we call entrepreneurs.”

The explanation of entrepreneurship is best viewed on continuum. A sociological view of entrepreneurship lies on one end of the spectrum while the opposing end indicates that entrepreneurship is no more than business development. Carton, Hofer & Meeks (1998,p. 5) stated that “the essence of entrepreneurship is the pursuit of discontinuous opportunity involving the creation of an organization with the expectation of value creation to the participants”. Gartner (1988) was slightly more elementary with his definition. He indicated that entrepreneurship is the creation of organizations. Maranville (1992) indicated that the power of business ownership is also called entrepreneurship. He further stated that this interpretation is only valid if the owner’s resources are applied in ways that are more productive and yielding than those resources would be elsewhere.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR?

Not everyone agrees as to entrepreneurial characteristics. Gendron (2004) indicated that in the workplace in some measure, everybody is an entrepreneur. Klofsten

(2000, p.342) stated that “others believe it is possible to stimulate entrepreneurial behavior in many ways and that this leads to something positive”.

While the above observations may be true, there appear to be three factors that appear to influence the decision to become an entrepreneur. Dyer (1994, p. 10) indicated that “these factors have either an individual, social or economic basis. Individual factors include the ability to take risks and a tolerance for ambiguity. Social factors – often come from families where father or mother was self-employed. Family support has an impact. Economic growth that creates business opportunities can also spawn entrepreneurial careers”. Wu and Knott (2005, p. 3) proposed that “there are two distinct sources of uncertainty in entrepreneurial ventures; 1) uncertainty regarding market demand, and 2) uncertainty regarding one’s own entrepreneurial ability”. They further postulated that entrepreneurs display risk with respect to demand uncertainty, but exhibit overconfidence or risk seeking with respect to ability uncertainty.

Although characteristics may be generalized, at times they can be substantiated by the primary target audience. Dyer (1994) indicated that many time those who engage in entrepreneurial activities do not define themselves as entrepreneurs. Dyer (1994, p. 7) further asserted that “one’s orientation to an entrepreneurial role occurs in two stages. The first stage concerns the acceptance by an individual of what might be called the general entrepreneurial role. If they create and own organization, they have accepted an entrepreneurial role. The second stage in the development of an entrepreneurial role is what might be called the creation of a specific entrepreneurial role”. Winslow, Soloman and Tarabishy (1997) indicated that entrepreneurs are usually seeking rapid growth, immediate and high profits and a possible quick sellout with a large capital gain.

CURRICULUM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Brown (2000, p.1) asked the question “Are entrepreneurs born or are they taught?”

Educational institutions seem to have the answer to this age old question: entrepreneurs can be taught”. Heeboll (n.d.) also supported the notion of successful business formation via educational programs and industrial development programs. Hynes (1996) believed that the most fundamental issue relating to enterprise education is addressing the question of whether entrepreneurship can be taught. Fifteen leading educators responding to Hynes survey indicated that entrepreneurship could be taught.

Entrepreneurship education has been in existence for some time. McMullan and Long (1987) indicated that in the world, applied education in entrepreneurship can be traced as far back as 1938 to Shigeru Fuji, Professor Emeritus, Kobe University, Japan. They also stated that the U.S. Small Business Administration reported that prior to 1953, only the University of Illinois offered a course in small business or entrepreneurship development in the United States (as cited by Winslow, Solomon & Tarabishy, 1997). Evidence suggests that the demand for specific, well-developed entrepreneurial training is quite strong (Seymour, 2001). Seymour (2001, p.1) further stated that “while entrepreneurship training has existed only on the fringes of academe, a growing number of community colleges, universities and business schools in the United States now provide it in several forms”. Klofsten (2000) indicated that the entrepreneurship and new business development program (ENP) in Sweden contains the following cornerstones: business plans; workshops; mentoring; supervision; networking, incubator facilities; and seed financing.

Seymour (2001) reported that in 1970 16 business schools had entrepreneurship programs. In 2000, the number reached over 1,500 universities or colleges offering entrepreneurship courses. She further reported that although a small number of universities offer formal programs in entrepreneurship, most major universities offer at least one entrepreneurship class. Robinson & Haynes (1991) found further evidence of this growth in the expansion of endowed positions in entrepreneurship.

As a starting point in the curriculum formulation process, Maranville (1992) suggested the integration of three broadly based curriculum objectives. Those objectives include: the exploration of the economic nature and role of entrepreneurship; the discovery and examination of the principles of innovation; and tracking the role of entrepreneurship and the principles of innovation as they occur in economic history.

WHERE IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP TAUGHT?

Most universities view entrepreneurship as a business curriculum so place this field within the business area. Entrepreneurship is primarily offered in management departments as promulgated by Teach & Miles (1997). According to 1996 data from Teach & Miles,

Entrepreneurship is predominately taught in management departments, with 81% of the respondents stating that entrepreneurship is taught in the management departments at their institution. Marketing departments offered entrepreneurship related courses in only 26% of the responding institutions. Finance offered entrepreneurship courses in 21% of the responding institutions. (p. 25)

As cited by Dunn & Short (2001), a recent study of entrepreneurship education (Vesper & Gartner, 1999) indicated that although over 100 universities have entrepreneurship educational programs less than 20 of these universities have developed their programs into majors.

Entrepreneurship classes are typically in tandem with another discipline. Teach & Miles (1997) found that the most common course taught in conjunction with entrepreneurship was business policy or strategy, with almost 68% of entrepreneurship faculty teaching policy/strategy. Porter and McKibbin (1988) suggested that entrepreneurship education is moving towards integrative, comprehensive, and holistic programs (as cited in Winslow, Solomon & Tarabishy, 1997). Maranville (1992) indicated that as long as free enterprise exists, entrepreneurship and innovation will never totally disappear. He also argued for understanding of the history – social, economic, and cultural effects – surrounding entrepreneurial activity. A broad and transcending perspective that is highly sought in general education is facilitated by entrepreneurial activity.

Brown (n.d.) affirmed that university professors tend to begin with a definition and conceptual explanation of entrepreneurship and move onto the fundamental skills of starting a business-generating an idea, analyzing the market, finding the capital, and management and accounting procedures for running a business.

WHY ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM?

Society has been very clear in its desire to include post-secondary entrepreneurship education in curriculum. Singh and Magee (2002, p.1) indicated that

demand is driving education. The demand is coming from proposed entrepreneurs and larger corporations in need of “cross functional thinkers with entrepreneurial skills”. Garavan & O’Cinneide (1994) asserted that entrepreneurship education and training programs are aimed directly at stimulating entrepreneurship. Their definition of entrepreneurship is independent small business ownership or the development of opportunity-seeking managers within companies. Seymour (n.d.) summarized that the large motivator for students to get involved in entrepreneurship is their desire to make money – something that college students, being one of the largest consumer groups in the nation, are notoriously either lacking or pursuing. Entrepreneurship classes may also be a result of demand. Dudley & Dudley (1995) affirmed that today’s students are much more career oriented than earlier generations.

Hynes (1996) surmised that entrepreneurial education incorporates both informal and formal methods. The informal aspects of entrepreneurship education combine and integrate with the formal aspects of education. The informal aspects focus on skills building, attribute development and behavioral changes. Kolvereid (1997, p.154) further indicated that “graduates who have taken a major in entrepreneurship have stronger entrepreneurial intentions and act more entrepreneurially than other graduates. Entrepreneurship, at least to some extent, is a function of factors which can be altered through education.”.

Garavan and O’Cinneide (1994) cited seven common objectives of entrepreneurship education and training programs. Those objective are to: acquire knowledge germane to entrepreneurship; acquire skills in the use of techniques, in the analysis of business situations, and in the synthesis of action plans; identify and stimulate

entrepreneurial drive, talent and skills; undo the risk-adverse bias of many analytical techniques; develop empathy and support for all unique aspects of entrepreneurship; devise attitudes toward change; and encourage new start-ups and other entrepreneurial ventures.

Hynes (1996) declared that enterprise education is the process or series of activities which aims to enable an individual to assimilate and develop knowledge, skills, values and understanding that are not simply related to a narrow field of activity, but allow a broad range of problems to be defined, analyzed and solved. Gendron (2004) was bolder in his philosophy. He asserted that the driving questions are no longer whether entrepreneurship can or should be taught, but rather how to continuously improve its content and delivery to meet the needs of our current students.

Entrepreneurship curriculum is also used as foundation for students who go to work for corporate America. Dudley & Dudley (1995) broadly stated that those who can operate in the twenty-first century's business environment will have more information, more tasks, and more responsibility. Maranville (1992) proclaimed that those students who will be employed by large businesses will also quickly realize the realities of competition and innovation. Robinson & Haynes (1991) asserted that although the existence of formal organizations and academic programs are an indication of the depth or quality of entrepreneurship education within the university, several other related indicators are also relevant. Those indicators include institutional resources and relationships.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

While there demonstrates a strong demand for post-secondary entrepreneurship curricula, particularly at the university level, supply does not seem to follow. Singh & Magee argued that the growing shortage in the number of qualified faculty to fill the entrepreneurship curriculum will become a very serious problem. Entrepreneurship curriculum has not received the same status as some of the more mature curriculum, such as corporate finance as market research. As a result, entrepreneurship has not been a primary focus for teaching and related research at the university level.

Klofsten (2000) believed that entrepreneurship should be viewed at three levels within a university structure. Taking a macro point of view he posed that the creation and maintenance of an enterprising culture on the whole at the university should be on the forefront. He then indicated that separate courses in entrepreneurship needed to exist. There students could learn more about entrepreneurship as a subject itself. Klofsten (2000) further believed that on a final level, specific training programs for individuals who want to start their own enterprise should be integrated into the curriculum.

Kuratko (2003, p.1) correctly supported the idea as entrepreneurship is one of a culture – not just the creation of business. Seymour (n.d.) postulated that “while every collegiate entrepreneur finds himself or herself in a unique position with his or her venture, it would seem that the average student would do best to take advantage of the resources that exist on college campuses, in order to gain real-world experience and lay the groundwork for future endeavors, until they have completed their education and earned a marketable degree”.

Teaching styles and demographics play a role in successful learning of entrepreneurship curriculum. Hatten & Ruhland (1995) reviewed a cooperative arrangement between colleges, universities, small business, and the U.S. Small Business Administration. Two conclusions of student attitude toward entrepreneurship were derived. Students who possessed an internal locus of control developed a more positive attitude toward entrepreneurship after they participated in a described cooperative program than students who did not possess an internal locus of control. They also discovered that student age was a factor in changing attitude toward entrepreneurship. The cooperative arrangement under review had a more powerful influence on students in the 20-22 year age bracket in producing a positive change in their attitude toward entrepreneurship.

While there is consensus that the university environment is one which can mold young minds, in the case of entrepreneurship education, this can serve as a dual-edged sword. Seymour correctly argued that having hectic schedules and limited time tempts many students to quit college to pursue their businesses. This is particularly true if those ventures seem poised to take off.

Entrepreneurship curriculum does not exist in a silo within business schools. Universities provide outreach, and in the case of land grant colleges, extension, to outlying areas. Outreach and extension extend economic development assistance to the community. Traditional economic development strategies for a region include business attraction, business retention and expansion, and business creation. Business creation is most closely aligned to entrepreneurship. Dunn & Short (2001), through a survey of entrepreneurs and small business managers in northeast Louisiana, indicated that the

study of entrepreneurship would not only be beneficial to students but as a sound economic development strategy. Huffman & Quiqley (2002) further suggested that the university is important in attracting human capital to the local area and in stimulating entrepreneurial talent. In addition to entrepreneurship classes, they indicate other support to stimulate this growth. This support includes university supported business incubators, business plan competitions and networking events.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE STEPS

The idea of entrepreneurship within a university has exploded the past thirty five years. Universities have become aware of the value of entrepreneurship on several levels. The entrepreneurial culture of corporate America has transcended into many universities. Although not true business owners, those who work in universities are now viewed as stakeholders. Entrepreneurship courses now are circulated throughout business schools. A certain amount of academic legitimacy has been achieved. However, entrepreneurship is primarily taught as an independent course and not integrated into established curriculum at business schools. The use of entrepreneurship in a contextual learning environment is sorely needed on university campuses.

Little research has been conducted on post-secondary entrepreneurship education. Knowledge of the impact of entrepreneurship education is scattered at best. At present there is little research available to provide a return on investment for entrepreneurship curriculum.

Few studies have reported the use of entrepreneurship education as an economic development strategy from within the university and the external environment. Many successful entrepreneurs have started as college students and created their own

companies, become millionaires and billionaires in the process. However, it is not known how successful university business schools and their related foundations and alumni associations have been able to leverage this success into financial support via endowed entrepreneurship chairs and related activities.

Traditional economic development practitioners take a three-pronged approach to improving their defined economic market. Business attraction strategies, such as obtaining that new automotive plant for the local community, are easy to justify and the return on investment is easy to grasp for constituents. The number of construction jobs created as a result of a new plant and the number of factory and office workers created once the plant is completed are prominent indicators well publicized.

The second economic development approach is to use a business retention and expansion strategy. This approach places an emphasis on those existing businesses in the defined region. Fear of business relocation or closure and the impact created by those factors are drivers for this strategy. Return on investment indicators include the number of jobs and businesses saved or created as a result of existing business expansion.

The third economic development approach to use is one of business creation. This approach usually emphasizes the entrepreneurial spirit of those willing to undertake a new business. Return on investment indicators also include the number of jobs created. Unfortunately, little, if any, formal research has taken place related to integration of this strategy with university curriculum as an outreach or extension effort. This is where our work begins.

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