Why Teach Social Entrepreneurship: Enhance Learning and University-Community Relations through Service-Learning Outreach

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Abstract

This article focuses on providing a convincing argument for incorporating social entrepreneurship into the business professor's classroom. The outreach provided by social entrepreneurship enhances learning and promotes university-community relations. Service-learning engagement activities, in the form of social entrepreneurship, create a three-way partnership between the university, its community, and its students.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is a new discipline area within business schools, and is closely aligned with the field of social issues in management. Social entrepreneurship allows business professors the opportunity to offer an experiential learning environment. This article focuses on providing a convincing argument for incorporating social entrepreneurship into the business professor's classroom. The outreach allowed by social entrepreneurship creates service-learning engagement activities and a three-way partnership between the university, its community, and its students.

Social Entrepreneurship Defined

Gregory Dees and colleagues define an entrepreneur as one who is innovative, opportunity oriented, resourceful, and able to create value and foster change *(Dees, Emerson, and Economy 2001)*. A social entrepreneur, in addition to possessing entrepreneurial characteristics, has a social mission to make the world a better place. According to Dees, social entrepreneurs measure their success not by profit or monetary gain, but by the added social value they create.

To better illustrate social entrepreneurs, let us describe their unique ability to serve as change agents in the social sector *(Dees,*

Emerson, and Economy 2001). Social entrepreneurs adopt an organization and create a mission to sustain social value. They are able to recognize and relentlessly pursue new opportunities to serve that mission. Social entrepreneurs engage in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning. They act boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand and exhibit a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

> *"Social entrepreneurs engage in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning."*

There are core values or common traits that set the social entrepreneur apart from well-intentioned individuals and organizations. As described by the Schwab Foundation *(Hartigan 2002)*, the social entrepreneur has:

- An unwavering belief in the innate capacity of all people to contribute meaningfully to economic and social development.
- A driving passion to implement his/her idea(s), be it in the form of a new invention, a different approach, a more rigorous application of known technologies or strategies, or a combination of all three.
- An innovative, problem-solving stance toward a social problem, coupled with dogged determination that allows him/her to break away from constraints imposed by ideology or discipline that pushes him/her to take risks others would not dare.
- A healthy impatience that does not allow waiting for things to happen. The social entrepreneur is the social change agent that makes things happen.
- An ability to identify problems created by change as opportunities to transform society; and
- A nonideological, practical vision driven by his/her idea of what will work to improve people's lives.

While it is easy to define a discipline area, it is often necessary to state what a concept isn't. Social entrepreneurship is not the same as philanthropy, because the dependency that can be created by charity does not profoundly improve the societal problem. Also, social entrepreneurship is not a traditional area of discipline, because the social entrepreneurial approach is based on certain

values that are common among entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurship is a different approach to social issues in management in that it fuses entrepreneurship with a view of society that encourages personal responsibility and accountability *(Hartigan 2002)*.

In summary, a social entrepreneur's mission, to make the world a better place, is achieved by his/her ability to foster change and persistently pursue opportunities consistent with his mission. When defining social entrepreneurship, common core values have been attributed to social entrepreneurs. The traits described illustrate the social entrepreneur's commitment to better society through innovative solutions.

Social Entrepreneurship Enhances Learning

College students are interested in jobs that incorporate a more meaningful way of earning a living. "Work is not only a means of survival and meeting basic livelihood requirements. It is also a means of self-expression, self-actualization and a vehicle for meaningful engagement in one's community" *(Davis 2002, 9)*. Young adults entering college crave opportunity, envision success, and have big dreams about their future.

The desire college students have for meaningful work can be addressed through teaching the concepts of social entrepreneurship. Professors can use several methods to teach the concepts of social

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entrepreneurship to college students, including guest speakers, case studies, discussion groups, lecture, research projects, written papers, and presentations. These methods are not as effective as service-learning because they are not as experientially based for the student as the environment created by service-learning.

Service-learning advances the three-way partnership between the community, university, and students. Jacoby *(1996, 5)* defines service-learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development." Service-learning

reconnects a university's resources with the needs of the community while providing students with a valuable learning experience.

Effective learning requires context through application and experience *(Dewey 1956)*. Much research has been done on the student achievements attributed to service-learning. Students performed better on tests as a result of participating in a service-learning project *(Markus, Howard, and King 1993)*. Content is better understood due to the application of course material that ties theory with their experiences and observations from the service-learning experience *(Rasmussen and Skinner 1997; Williams, Youngflesh, and Bagg1997)*. Students in service-learning environments experienced increased motivation and had better clarification of specific, substantive course material *(Cohen and Kinsey 1994)* and had increased self-efficacy as a result of a service-learning project *(Tucker and McCarthy 2001)*. "Service-learning courses provide a deliberate way to make the connection between theory and practice by providing opportunities to apply and teach theory in real-life situations" *(Procario-Foley and Bean 2002, 112)*.

Researchers involved in a service-learning project in an organizational dynamics (OD) course noted that students were motivated to embrace the additional responsibility associated with the service-learning project. Students were better able to contribute to the class, and to relate to the instructor and to one another more confidently than in a more traditional class. Students also sought after others' views and expertise in the classroom, which created a sense of community *(Thomas and Landau 2002)*.

Thomas and Landau *(2002)* also identified the skills learned through the OD course service-learning project. Students learned skills in conflict resolution, communication, role clarification, goal setting, and project management. In addition to enhancing these skills, students experienced real-life situationsthat forced them to analyze their relationships within the community. Most saw their role as one of collaboration and participation. Students also had to practice patience and active listening skills. Students' interpersonal skills were further developed. Writing and presenting to different audiences within academia, as well as to the community, forced students to write reports and prepare presentations in a manner that could be understood by and useful to a variety of stakeholders in the audience.

Much of the skills and knowledge that researchers have found to be enhanced through service-learning are necessary skills and abilities college students use in the study of social entrepreneurship. The University of South Dakota reported that employers are searching for candidates who demonstrate advanced interpersonal communication, self-motivation, problem-solving, and organization skills *(Newell 1996)*. While engaging in social entrepreneurship activities, students can gain these skills through the discipline provided by service-learning and community outreach engagements.

Service-learning is the preferred teaching method to enhance the learning of social entrepreneurship. The needs of the community can be met while promoting student development in an experiential learning environment. Several studies have confirmed that numerous student achievements are linked to service-learning. To capitalize on these achievements, faculty should incorporate service-learning projects into their curriculum.

Social Entrepreneurship Enhances University-Community Relations

Higher education must reconsider its mission of educating students for a life as responsible citizens, rather than educating students exclusively for an occupation *(Boyer 1994)*. Universities can address this challenge by offering social entrepreneurship courses that include service-learning. McCarthy and Tucker *(2002, 645)* reported that "when faculty members combine a lecture stressing the benefits of community service with the service-learning project, they can positively influence students' intended involvement in the community." Courses in social entrepreneurship allow students, as university liaisons, to engage the community through service-learning activities.

Traditionally, universities serve their communities through economic development, educational and health improvements, and cultural enrichment *(Dore 1990; Muse 1990; Ruch and Trani 1990–91)*. In Montreal, universities enhance the quality of life through cultural enrichment by making their art galleries, conservatories, museums, theater, music performances, and lectures open to the public *(Dore, 1990)*. Through an alliance with the city, county, and local private business council, the University of Akron established a business incubator that is designed to aid small and new businesses, which has enabled economic development in the

communities around the university *(Muse1990)*. In addition to business incubators, universities can support economic development through technology transfer projects and/or research parks *(Ruch and Trani 1990–91)*. Universities advance health care by training health care professionals, providing health services to the community, and disseminating health care knowledge to member-users in the community, as well as the medical community (Ruch and Trani 1990-91). Students involved in a service-learning project focusing on social entrepreneurship and business can assist the university in serving the community in ways similar to those described by Dore *(1990)*, Muse *(1990)*, and Ruch and Trani *(1990–91)*. In addition, the students involved in these projects will be interacting with the community firsthand, which may lead to positive publicity for the university.

There is an opportunity for educators to incorporate social entrepreneurship into the classroom in three ways. First, social entrepreneurship can be incorporated as a topic in existing coursework. Courses on such topics as organizational behavior, strategic management, and business environment could have a few lessons dedicated to social entrepreneurship. Second, social entrepreneurship can be developed into a course dedicated to the topic. An informal study we conducted in March 2003 suggested that few business schools offer social entrepreneurship courses in their business curriculum. If courses in social entrepreneurship are available, they tend to fall under the general entrepreneurship discipline (see Table 1). Because social entrepreneurship is an emerging concept that directly influences business, it is important for schools to consider incorporating the concept of social entrepreneurship in either dedicated business courses or as segments of existing courses. Finally, social entrepreneurship may be offered as an extracurricular activity in the form of lecture series, noncredit courses, special studies symposia, student volunteer efforts, and networking organizations.

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Each of the top schools of business ranked by *U.S. News & World Report (2002)* offered several different options for university

Table 1: Social Entrepreneurship in Top Schools of Business, Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, 2002

Top Schools of Business according to *U.S. News & World Report*, 2002		Social entrepreneurship courses, conventions, and organizations
1	Stanford University	A complete Social Entrepreneurship Course Series has been developed. The social entrepreneurship courses are designated as strategic management
2	Harvard University	Dialogue on Social Entrepreneurship, an annual convention organized by a student-run collaboration between the Harvard Business School and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.
3	Northwestern University (Kellogg)	The Public/Nonprofit Management Program offers courses in Social Entrepreneurship and Strategic Philanthropy. Students are encouraged to take the Social Impact Speaker Series as a noncredit course.
4	University of Pennsylvania (Wharton)	Promoting Social Change and Social and Economic Development are courses offered by the School of Social Work and can be taken by students in management. The Social Impact Management (SIM) Initiative is a student initiative that advances knowledge about social impact management through collaborative research, integration of content into courses, volunteer opportunities, conferences career management, and external and internal partnerships.
5	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan)	The course Social Entrepreneurship and Its Role in Society is offered as an Independent Activities Period in Special Studies through Urban Studies and Planning.
6	Columbia University	The management department offers a course in social entrepreneurship. The Social Enterprise Program in Columbia's business school is a resource center for alumni and students who seek information about careers in the field, volunteer opportunities, and social innovations in business.
7	University of California–Berkley	Nonprofit & Public Management, in the Haas School of Management, offers the course Social Venture Entrepreneurship. UC Berkeley hosted the National Social Venture Symposium to explore issues and metrics in social entrepreneurship in 2002.
8	Duke University (Fuqua)	Social Entrepreneurship offered by the School of Management allows students to create a business plan for a social enterprise of their own.
9	University of Chicago	Net Impact is a national network of emerging business leaders interested in applying business skills toward generating economic value while creating positive social change.
10	University of Michigan– Ann Arbor	The Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies hosted a conference, called Entrepalooza, which featured speakers and a panel discussion on social entrepreneurship. The university's Nonprofit and Public Management Center cosponsored the panel discussion on SE.

professors and administrators, community members, and students to embrace the concept of social entrepreneurship. Some examples of courses offered, student organizations, and events relating to social entrepreneurship include the Social Impact Speaker Series at Northwestern University, Social Entrepreneurship Course Series at Stanford University, Social Impact Management (SIM) Initiative at University of Pennsylvania, Social Enterprise Program at Columbia University, National Social Venture Symposium at University of California–Berkley, and Net Impact Organization at University of Chicago. For a more complete description of how the top business schools are incorporating social entrepreneurship into their campuses, see Table 1.

"Service learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experimental education because of their intention to equally benefit the provider (the student) and the recipient of the service (often a social service agency) as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring" *(Furco 1996, 5)*. The service provided by students with the support and encouragement of the university and professor will create value in the community. Youth Venture, sponsored by Ashoka, believes that young people ages twelve to twenty have the creativity and the energy to create and launch new organizations or ventures that can change their schools or communities. Ashoka promotes several success stories of young people who have improved the community though their service. An example of a youth-led organization is Hammered, an organization at Northeastern University that provides students with an alternative to drug and alcohol use. The organization's founder is a nineteen-year-old student who recognized that society needed an acceptable option for being drug- and alcohol-free. His solution was to create an alternative that focused on the possibilities of healthy, productive, drug and alcohol free lives *(Davis 2002)*. This student not only provided a valuable service to his community, but also through his social entrepreneurism learned what creating, marketing, and managing an organization is like. These are clearly skills that will aid his personal business development, and this learning occurred outside the classroom.

Nonprofit organizations usually do not have the financial backing that for-profit businesses possess. By applying course content and their creativity and innovation, students can provide nonprofit organizations with excellent, much-needed resources. By partnering with the students and university, the nonprofit

organization will aid education and invest in the future of young adults as well as the community. Davis stated that "enabling young people to meaningfully engage in initiatives that they create not only makes youth the stakeholders of their immediate future, but of their community's long-term well-being" *(Davis 2002, 27)*. Through participating in the three-way partnership, communities will deliver awareness to young adults who may find an interest in a service or community-oriented field. After participating in a service-learning experience, some students were reported to change majors and attributed the change to the service-learning experiences *(Astin et al. 2000)*.

Penn State Great Valley's School of Graduate Professional Studies developed a Social Entrepreneurship course as an elective for MBA students. Course developers wanted to address ways businesses can add value to society, incorporate service-learning, and support the university's mission, which includes community outreach and engagement. Social issues in management, ethics, mentoring, and leadership were the focal areas during course development.

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The university partnered with two high schools and six social service agencies. Consulting teams were developed consisting of two MBA students and six high school students, which led to strong mentor-protégé relationships between the graduate students and the high school students. MBA students enjoyed the opportunity to share their business experiences and mentor the high school students. Because most of the MBA students worked in for-profit companies and yet were interested in this social entrepreneurship topic, they were excellent role models. High school students interacted with productive working adults who really care about improving their community.

The teams were to assist the assigned social service organization with a project that the agency suggested. Some projects included designing a volunteer project, developing a business plan, marketing plan, or strategic plan for the social enterprise.

Working with a client in the community gave the MBA students the opportunity to use their existing business skills to support the mission of a non-profit social service agency.

The course provided students with the skills, knowledge, and experience to be more effective in their social entrepreneurial pursuits and able to capitalize upon the social value that can result through the collaborative efforts of business people, social service agencies, and educators. Some MBA students expressed interest in making a career change that would allow them to ful-fill a social-oriented mission. The course gave the MBA students a point of reference when considering such a change. The high school students also learned much about how fiscally conserva-tive social service agencies have to be, and understood the value of volunteerism. In addition, all students expressed interest in actively serving their community through other methods of vol-unteerism.

The student teams gave a final team presentation to the par-ticipating agencies and community stakeholders. A copy of the team project was given to the organization to use. After the course was complete, several students continued working with the agencies on a volunteer basis.

The sense of responsibility students felt toward the team project was remarkable. An agency that provided transitional housing for abused women and children wanted to capitalize on available planned giving options. The team completed an internal assessment of the organization's needs and available resources, then developed a planned giving strategy that included a staging guide and project timeline. The agency created a committee of dedicated community members who used the planned giving rec-ommendations. All of the team members exchanged contact information with the agency and expressed interest in providing additional assistance in the future. Students attend events spon-sored by the agency to maintain a presence and provide support. This dedicated social entrepreneurship course at Penn State Great Valley demonstrates the great influence universities can have on their communities. And since service-learning is so integral to social entrepreneurship, many relationships can be made by stu-dents outside the business school that allow them to expand their networks and make an impact on the community in ways that never before were possible.

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship can be incorporated as a topic in existing coursework and/or developed into a course dedicated to the topic. The numerous benefits associated with service-learning provide an indisputable argument for why service-learning should be used to teach social entrepreneurship. Service-learning activities promote learning the social entrepreneurship topic as well as university-community relations.

The fact that big business greatly influences American culture should be an indication that business leaders should be sensitive to all stakeholders. "But what is most important is that management realize that it must consider the impact of every business policy and business action upon society. It has to consider whether the action is likely to promote the public good, to advance the basic beliefs of our society, or to contribute to its stability, strength and harmony" *(Drucker 1954, 388)*. Businesses can positively shape our society if the leaders that guide the organizations are socially conscious.

Because business has a large effect on our society, business courses offered in universities can encourage students to consider their impact on society. Educators can successfully educate students for a life as responsible citizens through social entrepreneurship and service-learning. The link between the students' learning and the university's effect upon its community is readily evidenced by the service-learning examples herein.

"Social entrepreneurs are the flame that ignites the fire of social transformation. That flame must be fanned and nurtured by those who understand what social entrepreneurship is about and delight in its promise to achieve social transformation" *(Hartigan 2002, 4)*.

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