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With an outreach mission of community service and support, many metropolitan universities are faced with creating innovative ways to be of assistance. Recognizing the needs of women as entrepreneurs, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga created a new outreach institute. This article outlines the formation of the Institute for Women as Entrepreneurs. Using the talents of business students, faculty, and volunteer consultants, the Institute has assisted over 150 women since its inception in January 1995. The institute is the first outreach program under the school's Center for Business Advancement. The article ends with a discussion of the implementation approach along with other possible alternatives and suggestions for replication at other metropolitan universities.

Using Educational Resources to Assist Small Business Growth

Metropolitan universities traditionally include service to regional municipalities, businesses, and industry as part of their overall mission. Innovative programs allow universities to extend their educational mission to an ever broader range of citizens while meeting their service priority. With a base of educational expertise, universities can address the concerns of the larger community. An innovative program initiated by the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) is an example of how a university can take advantage of its metropolitan location to provide service to the community as well as provide firsthand learning experiences for faculty and students.

The Institute for Women as Entrepreneurs (IWE)

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, in response to future and emerging needs of the region, established the Institute for Women as Entrepreneurs, or IWE, as an outreach activity of the School of Business Administration in January 1995. The mission of the IWE is to assist women in bringing their business concepts and entrepreneurial ideas to fruition. Using volunteer consultants, the expertise of School of Business Administration faculty, and the talents of business undergraduate and graduate students, UTC has provided services to over 125 regional women entrepreneurs. This article describes the functioning of the institute and offers replication suggestions for other universities interested in using educational resources to aid small business growth.

A review of literature points to the business development needs of women, who represent the fastest growing group of business owners.

Economic Importance of Enhancing Women's Entrepreneurship

IWE discovered the need to help women because our region and our nation need the new and more highly skilled jobs, increased leadership, and increased tax base to be derived from better operated existing businesses and from new business development. According to the June 1995 issue of *Entrepreneur* magazine, a total of 7.7 million women-owned businesses generate nearly \$1.4 trillion in sales and employ 15.5 million people in the U.S. This growth drives investment, corporate decisions, and future economic policies.

Between 1979 and 1989, businesses owned by women grew at a rate of 12.6 percent—more than twice the rate of men. According to the U.S. Small Business Association (SBA), women-owned businesses employ 35 percent more people in the U.S. than in the Fortune 500 worldwide. In the U.S. women own 38 percent of all small businesses and account for 14 percent of business receipts. These women are new and vital components in the country's economic growth. They have staying power—over 40 percent have been in business for 12 years or more. The future economic vitality of our nation will be closely tied to the success of better run businesses and new entrepreneurial ventures.

Importance of Entrepreneurship to Women

Women through the ages have changed business history by facing great personal difficulties, legal barriers, ridicule and danger, to pursue and realize their

dreams of leadership, entrepreneurship, and business ownership. According to the American Women's Economic Development Corporation (AWED) in 1981, "women bring valuable assets to business ownership. Women have good ideas for products and services, enthusiasm, imagination, and dedication to quality, but they frequently lack formal business training, sufficient experience in the marketplace, and the necessary confidence, assertiveness, and support systems."

Many benefits can be gained by meeting the needs of women entrepreneurs. Participating women will have a more secure future through their career awareness and personal development. Long-term benefits include: more women will choose business careers; women will advance more readily in business careers to a higher levels of responsibility and salary than before; more women-owned businesses will succeed; more women will start their own businesses; and women will learn about businesses and organizations through role models of faculty and successful business owners.

Summary of the Status Quo

Sharon Hadary, Executive Director of the National Foundation of Women Business Owners, believes that the substantiation of women business owners' contribution to the economy is necessary to combat the skepticism with which they have had to deal for years. Hadary reports that "regardless of the size of the business, without exception, women business owners have long listed their greatest challenge as being taken seriously."

In "A Tapestry of Values: Gifted Women Speak Out" (1994) a sample of women examined their perceptions of interactions, career aspirations, mentor relationships, career and family life, and self-image. The group revealed pressures to conform to stereotypical roles for women, inconsistent vertical development career opportunities, and the importance of business connections. Key educational needs for women business persons and entrepreneurs, based on a myriad of research studies, are: leadership, clarifying goals and personal values, creating a business plan, and gaining more insights into general business management.

As more studies on smaller, women-owned businesses are conducted, unique characteristics emerge. They are resource-poor, more dependent on the external environment, and have greater need for leadership training. Many face the corporate glass ceiling in terms of promotion ability and are sandwiched between caring for children and aging parents. Small business ownership meets the needs for

flexibility and independence many of the women crave. The SBA provides further support for the importance of entrepreneurship to women. They report 64 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 34 and 46 percent of women between the ages of 35 and 55 want to become business owners and predicts that women will own 50 percent of the small businesses in the twenty-first century. Women are a logical target for assistance: in the 1990 census, females outnumbered males in every identified racial group.

Principal Barriers Faced By Women

A study of women's occupations found a critical need for support networks for women in sales, communications, business, and professional areas, trades, and technology ("Exploring New Worlds: Trades and Technical Occupations for Women," 1991). The U.S. House Small Business Committee hearings cited four major barriers to women's entrepreneurship:

- limited access to commercial credit;
- virtual exclusion of women-owned businesses from government procurement activities;
- limited management and technical training to "fast track" women into the marketplace; and
- inadequate information and data on women-owned businesses.

Even though women are entering the work force in growing numbers, wages still lag behind those of male counterparts. In 1992, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the typical American women who worked full time in 1992 was paid only 75 cents for every dollar her male counterpart was paid. Business leadership and entrepreneurship training by women are key ways to overcome these pay inequities.

Other barriers that are unique to women business persons and entrepreneurs include: discriminatory attitudes, gender stereotypes, lack of confidence and expectations (such as the attitude that women entrepreneurs are dabblers or hobbyists), socialized ambivalence about competition and profit, and lack of self-confidence (Gould and Parzen, 1990; *Women and Entrepreneurship*, 1993).

Rationale of the IWE

The IWE serves as a cornerstone project to lead many more women to succeed in the face of these personal and external challenges. In support of assisting women, Nubler (1992) found that women participating in business training appreciated the acquisition of management skills, had a more favorable attitude toward learning and the importance of management know-how to improve business, and acquired cognitive skills. In his study, more than one third of the participants' businesses expanded after training was completed, and the benefits to participants exceeded program delivery costs. A similar study by Jose Lascon (1991) found that obstacles to gender equality in training and employment are often due to women's lack of awareness of training opportunities.

Discussions and surveys conducted with the Dean's Executive Advisory Council in the School of Business Administration, led to the formation of the IWE. This council, made up of 15 community business leaders, identified the major barrier to increasing the number of women in business as a lack of knowledge about business opportunities and the mechanics of start-up. In addition, suggestions by regional sources indicated the need for business and entrepreneurship assistance for women. The Council, particularly the president of a local bank, found that while many potential small business owners approached regional banks for loans, most lacked confidence in their abilities and, due to lack of business training, most did not have a well-developed, comprehensive business plan.

UTC, as the only four-year public institution within 100 miles of the 460,000 residents of the Chattanooga metropolitan area, acknowledged these facts and its responsibility to address the community's needs. Thus, with support from the advisory council and the dean, the IWE was created. University administration was supportive, and a business faculty member was chosen to head the institute with the charge to consult with her colleagues in the creation and development of the structure and processes of the institute.

Functioning of the IWE

Based on past research findings as well as discussions with the Executive Advisory Council, individualized consultation was chosen as the principle mode of operation for the IWE. Mentoring and one-on-one problem solving are cornerstone activities of the IWE program. Each woman who seeks assistance for a

specific problem or issue will have varying degrees of knowledge, experience, self-esteem, and expectations about her business future. Her particular business issue will have its own uniqueness, depending on such factors as the type of business, its location, clientele, market competition, length of existence, and financial stability. With this many variables, individualized assistance is the only reasonable and feasible way to effectively work with women to devise a plan or solution to their particular business needs. We assist women with their varying and evolving needs over their business and professional life cycles.

While group counseling and large seminars on business topics were considered, the dean and consultants believed the individualized counseling would best meet both our initial market needs and those of women, because women might be reluctant to participate in large group sessions. Later seminars are proposed once the group of participants is large enough to need a similar business development topic.

The individualized counseling assists women in developing their latent business ideas, develop business plans, secure financing, and in general, obtain entrepreneurship assistance in a friendly, nonthreatening environment. Women contact the IWE and complete an initial form listing the woman's name, address, and phone numbers along with work history and business idea or business assistance need. Our volunteer consultant then meets with these women for an initial 45-minute appointment. Meetings are held on Wednesday afternoons from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the School of Business Administration.

Dean Fletcher supported the project by designating office space and supplies for the Institute. Once the initial consultation and assessment is completed, women are typically given assignments to complete (such as to assess the market, or prepare a business plan using provided handouts). After two or three initial consultations, they are typically referred to one of 15 business and engineering faculty who provide specific assistance (for example, with the marketing plan). These faculty had all indicated their previous willingness to assist the IWE participants and their primary business area or counseling specialties.

Business classes have been used to research a client's particular market question or start-up idea. The projects work well for both strategic planning and marketing research classes and provide real-world projects for students and faculty to address. While the school of business has no required or recommended clinical component in the curriculum, the student involvement has been used in

several classes. The decision to involve students is left to the faculty's initiative and scheduling. As the IWE has grown to a larger client base, faculty often scan the client list for potential class projects and are now actively involving classes with the real world problems they feel are more realistic and applicable than many of their textbook cases.

Detailed records are kept of contacts and referrals. Student assistants, funded by the dean, make phone calls and maintain the client data base. A comprehensive survey asking participants to rate the assistance they received through the IWE is mailed periodically. Successful start-up entrepreneurs will later be used as mentors for other women, thus increasing the importance of maintaining an accurate data base and business history. Students periodically call women to obtain follow-up information on the success of their businesses and to schedule additional assistance time if needed. While all the visitors to the IWE do not pursue their business ideas, all have rated the availability of our free services and the quality of our advice as "very good" to "excellent."

An example of the type and extent of services IWE provides can be seen in the following account of assistance given to a client by the IWE pilot project. A co-owner of a retail gun store and firing range in Whitwell, Tennessee, contacted IWE for assistance. Her clients are mostly men interested in hunting, shooting, and even reenactments. She saw a potential for increasing her clientele because more women were buying guns for security and needed assistance and training. As a woman with expertise in self-defense and marksmanship, she wanted to offer targeted safety courses for women. After talking with the owner at length, Dr. Helms requested her to provide IWE with copies of the store's ads and also arranged for IWE's small business consultant to contact her with additional marketing and market growth advice. Two UTC School of Business faculty in the marketing department also contacted the client to provide advice on modifying the store's advertisements to target women. An undergraduate team from the marketing research class assisted with the preparation of a marketing plan for the business. The client continued to fax copies of her flyers and advertisements for evaluation. Continued follow-up was provided as she made the suggested modifications to her promotional materials and followed the advice of the marketing faculty and class research. In this way the consulting becomes a continuous cycle of assistance as woman's needs change over time.

Faculty members provide pro bono consulting and mentoring expertise

on a wide variety of business topics that include: new ventures and entrepreneurship, idea generation and screening; planning and organizing new ventures; techniques and tools for market scanning; creating a business plan; banking relationships; venture capital and other sources of capital; legal issues; leases and liability; registration requirements; home based business ideas; forms of business ownership; company growth issues; tax requirements; and marketing, and accounting.

The faculty are evaluated yearly on teaching, research, and service. Assistance provided to IWE clients is part of the service component of their evaluation. No release time is provided for faculty assisting the IWE. However, contributions of faculty are documented in IWE files and the IWE shares comments and evaluations by clients with involved faculty, school of business administrators, and consultants.

We have no set limits to our assistance. After serving over 125 clients, we have had no abuses of the system or services; in fact, we frequently have had to follow-up with clients to keep them focused on their small business start-up ideas. We have talked to other community agencies and will refer our IWE clients to them when their initial counseling and start-up needs no longer fit our mission. We try not to duplicate any of the area services currently in place to help small businesses. Our services for one-on-one counseling are free and this assistance reflects the service mission of the university. We do plan to charge a nominal fee for future group half-day seminars to cover the costs of refreshments and handouts.

Based on the initial success of the Institute, the future plans include more services to women. Now that a large database has been established, women are being surveyed about specific topics of interest and convenient times to attend seminars. Frequently mentioned topics to address include business plan preparation, growth needs, and market research tactics.

Fostering Partnerships and Sharing Resources

Regional partners serve both as recruiting liaisons, to direct women to our institute, and as providers of resources and materials to facilitate our program goals, including recruitment and networking. Partners include the RiverValley Partners, a local community economic research organization with a business incubator that can assist women with growing their established businesses. First American National Bank-Chattanooga has worked with the IWE to develop guidelines

for assessing financial needs to facilitate women's business loan requests at regional lending institutions. Other regional agency partners, community organizations, resource centers, and area economic development groups assist in recruiting. Faculty members speak to various groups to promote the IWE and other school and university activities. However, the best advertising has been word-of-mouth, as women refer their friends, co-workers, and family to the institute.

UTC provides office facilities and the dean provides funds to pay for periodicals, software, and other supplies as needed and approved. Due to the limited school budget, there is no additional financial support for involved faculty or the IWE director. We are a self-funded service with no current funds from local or statewide agencies or economic development offices. We are pursuing grant funding from both public and private foundations to assist in furthering the IWE's services and provide for infrastructure and faculty release time.

Problems and Lessons Learned

Faculty, students, community partners, and successful small business persons/mentors have gained satisfaction through their contacts with the IWE women. For students, entrepreneurial activity is an important aspect of many business majors, and new business venturing is a primary source of employment for students graduating from fine arts, engineering, physical therapy, and other professional degree programs. Thus involved students have received educational benefits.

The implementation of the IWE has been very successful, with few problems. In implementation, the best plan is to begin with a formal kickoff event and invite local business leaders and successful small business owners. Work to develop a complete list of influential business practitioner who can assist in spreading the word about the institute and in making referrals. Also as we began our consulting, we used several volunteers who could not make a set time commitment, which made scheduling difficult. Work to get a firm commitment so advance scheduling can be accomplished with clients. Use student assistants to remind clients of their appointments and provide complete directions and parking details. It is also important to maintain a client fact sheet. We gather information on their work history, business idea, and particular needs. We fax this one-page sheet ahead to our consultant, so that he has time to review it before the scheduled appointments.

One ongoing problem is the large percentage of clients who are unable to keep

their appointments. Many of the reasons are due to hectic schedules and child care commitments. We have begun a series of reminder phone calls. Because our services are free, we feel that clients do not feel a personal obligation to try to keep their appointments. One solution is to schedule phone appointments so that they can work around their busy schedules and still utilize the services and free consulting advice. Having a fax machine also allows us to help remote clients. Also, an additional issue is followup. We continue to have success using trained student assistants, funded by the dean, to make phone calls to schedule additional client appointments. Some women, we discovered, need the extra followup to support their continued efforts.

Our startup costs were minimal, primarily business cards, letterhead, stationery, and dedication of a separate office for housing books, software, and support materials. A dedicated phone line, full-time assistance even by several part-time student workers, and a fax machine are recommended. Initially, a telephone answering machine was appropriate for taking calls, but as the client base expanded, the IWE needed help with answering phone calls and setting up appointments. Student workers can be trained to do this task.

Faculty consultants skilled in small business startup can do the initial consultation if practicing business volunteers are not available. The IWE at UTC is fortunate to have a volunteer from the dean's executive advisory council who assists with the primary counseling. An impartial outsider, like this, is often a good asset to have. Other essential elements are: a faculty with a strong interest in applied research and service who welcome the opportunity of interacting with business people; a director willing and able to commit time and energy to the project; support of the university administration; and a staff to perform continuous followup with clients.

We have found a need to do public service advertising reminders when our appointments slack off. Using the campus radio station, as well as free newspaper announcements assist us in spreading the word about our services. Another suggestion is to maintain a file of handouts on how to prepare a business plan, sources of financing, and other frequently asked-for information. We prepared a factsheet on the institute and have it ready to send to interested clients or to use as a press release. Continuous evaluation is advisable. We developed a survey form and send it to clients after they have had their initial consultation to assess ways we might serve them better. To further involve classes, remind colleagues

about possible projects and service approaches well before the beginning of the semester so they can structure such assignments into their course curriculum.

We have not had more clients than we can help. In larger markets, one suggestion might be to offer priority to first time clients and then serve repeat clients as the schedule permits. When we are approached by men or couples that need help, we have assisted them as well, but continue to promote our services primarily to women.

Other School of Business Initiatives for the Community

The reception to the IWE in Chattanooga has been extremely positive and has helped to highlight the capabilities of the school of business administration and its faculty. It has proven to be a natural outreach activity, providing support for women entrepreneurs and an excellent source of applied research activity for faculty and students. It also spurred the growth of the other entrepreneurial centers and programs and led to a re-focusing of the curriculum.

With the success of the IWE, the School of Business Administration has created several new programs and services to address community needs. The new umbrella organization, the "Center for Business Advancement," coordinates the outreach programs. Staffed by a director of programs and a director of community outreach and student and secretarial support, the center includes the IWE; a Real Estate Center (which established a data base of real estate trends); the Institute for Marketing and Business Research (which conducts survey-based market studies); the Center for Entrepreneurship (dedicated to Entrepreneurial research and education and funded by a \$1 million chair in Entrepreneurship); the Family Business Center (focusing on the specific needs and succession plans of family businesses); and the Center for Business Development (working with various community industrial parks and business sites to provide consulting and research).

The school's curriculum has been redesigned to reflect local entrepreneurial interests. Realizing that few of the business graduates go to work for Fortune 500 companies, the curriculum better reflects regional business patterns and career paths. The new MBA curriculum, for example, includes four applications courses covering business concepts and tools to aid managerial decision-making. One of the courses is on small business/entrepreneurship applications. Others include service applications, manufacturing applications, and a business simulation.

Strategic Implications of Outreach Programs at Metropolitan Universities

The IWE is an example of the movement taking place in U.S. universities as they attempt to become a more integral part of the business community through applied service activities. Community programs are important because universities have more accountability for improving the quality of life for area citizens. Another impetus for outreach is the growing level of skepticism by the area public on how the university is spending funds. These concerns have placed a heightened priority on immediate job creation, education, and standard of living improvements. The community is leading the way in demanding more partnering and this was a key issue that led to the formation of the IWE.

Begin any outreach program by carefully examining the university mission and assessing community needs. Gather suggestions from various university advisory boards. Strategic planning can help the university assess strengths to see where a match exists with community needs. Setting realistic expectations for what you can do and accomplish is important. Often, funds to support such programs are limited. Thus universities must set priorities and engage in an efficient process of funds reallocation. Programs must be constantly evaluated to see if they are viable and serving a previously unmet community need.

One funding approach for outreach is to move some research funds from theoretical applications to applied settings. If participation in outreach activities requires release time for faculty, accreditation problems may emerge. This can be avoided by making such activities part of normal faculty service duties and involving a large enough group to share the work and minimize time commitments. Involving students is a good way to free faculty while at the same time exposing students to business start-up ideas and issues.

Faculty evaluation must change as these activities become part of the service component. The former narrow definitions of university service and research must change as the activities overlap in these programs. Solutions to these issues can include a cafeteria approach to faculty participation in teaching, research, and services that allow percentages of participation in each category to vary from semester to semester.

Junior faculty may also fear outreach participation because it may limit their mobility and take time away from scholarly publication. Promotion and tenure

committees must have strong leadership and work to include community outreach, as in the IWE, as part of an advancement path. However, the initial outreach participation typically comes from secure senior faculty. Deans and department heads must share the outreach vision for the faculty and college.

As the metropolitan movement continues to grow, such programs ensure the future of metropolitan universities by creating jobs for the community, doing their part to assist area groups, and by branching into new environments. Metropolitan universities are better suited to thrive in this environment. One caveat, however, is that it is easy to spread efforts too thin. Community expectations are high and demands are great. Remember, teaching is first in a metropolitan university's mission. Partnerships with the community should not detract from, but support, teaching and research. Used correctly, the return from such outreach is positive. Such visibility attracts new funds and donors to the university. Outreach programs increase the reputation of the university and ensure its long-term survival.

Suggested Reading

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