Blurring Boundaries and Transcending Barriers to Develop a Multi-Organization Social Entrepreneurship Program

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The University of Arkansas is building a unique approach to social entrepreneurship by partnering with the Clinton School of Public Service and Noble Impact, an educational initiative that merges public service and entrepreneurship. Because our focus is on impact, rather than social mission intention, we have built the program using business tools from the outset. Our first program successfully incorporated a tool being widely adopted in entrepreneurship, the business model/lean canvas. Our experiences with the canvas and its adaptation for social entrepreneurship startups are the focus of this special session.

The business model/lean canvas, developed by Alex Osterwalder[3] and refined by Steve Blank[1], Eric Ries[4], and Ash Maurya[2], has been rapidly adopted by startup incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurship programs. The basic concept behind the canvas is that companies are more likely to succeed if they interact with their potential customers and systematically test their assumptions regarding their customers' problems, evaluate the best way to reach customers, identify early adopters, etc. Osterwalder, among others, has argued that the canvas can be effectively used by organizations whose purpose is social benefit, and this was our experience. We believe that the lean canvas approach is particularly applicable to social benefit startups, which are likely to face extreme resource constraints.

This session will be similar to an Academy of Management PDW session. It will begin with a discussion of our use of the lean canvas in a program developed by the University of Arkansas, the Clinton School, and Noble Impact. The first outcome of our "boundary-blurring" collaboration was a two-week program for high school students, most from marginalized groups, in July 2013. Using the canvas as a foundational tool, students created sustainable solutions to community issues by incorporating business development concepts, such as a unique value proposition. This fall, we will introduce an interactive MBA-level professional development social entrepreneurship workshop that uses the lean canvas. We will report on revisions we have made to the canvas as a result of these initiatives during this session and will introduce a new concept that worked well – an exit strategy for social startups.

Following the brief (15 minute) discussion of our experiences, attendees will apply the lean canvas to social entrepreneurship initiatives at their institutions. Thus, participants will develop a deeper understanding of how the lean canvas approach can be applied in a classroom setting as well as how students and others interested in social entrepreneurship startups can use it. We will conclude with a participant discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of a social entrepreneurship lean canvas and how it might be adapted to meet the needs of their students and institutions.

In addition to the high school and MBA social entrepreneurship programs, we are developing a Speaker Series that builds on the Clinton School's strengths and new undergraduate classes in social entrepreneurship for Walton College of Business students. Depending upon audience interest, we can also address the benefits and challenges of the boundary-spanning collaboration among Noble Impact, the University of Arkansas and the Clinton School.

Key words: lean canvas, public service, social entrepreneurship startup

References

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Trish Flanagan

At age 19, Trish began teaching illiterate teens from Ireland's traveling community. After working with homeless families and immigrant youth in San Francisco and southern Texas, she spent 3 years building a school in Honduras. While completing an MBA at the Walton College of Business and an MPS at the Clinton School of Public Service, she served as a fellow with the Room to Read library program in Sri Lanka and Cambodia.

She is the co-founder of Noble Impact, an educational initiative merging public service and entrepreneurship and coordinates the development of social entrepreneurship programs at the University of Arkansas.

Carol Reeves

Carol Reeves has mentored more than 40 UA student business plan/investment teams. Since 2009, her teams have won twice as many national competitions (19) as teams from any other university and have earned over $1.7 million in cash, started 10 high-growth businesses, and raised over $16 million in funding.

Carol has won two national awards for innovation in entrepreneurship pedagogy, was awarded a UA Faculty Gold Medal in 2009, and won the prestigious Arkansas Alumni Association Faculty Distinguished Achievement Award for Teaching in 2010. She was named one of the 10 most powerful Women Entrepreneurs by *Fortune* magazine in 2011.