Liberal arts courses aren’t meeting students’ needs, but we can’t just turn them into business courses.
By Mary Godwyn

Creating a Liberal Arts Course That Integrates Entrepreneurship
Syllabus from Godwyn’s course Minority Voices in Entrepreneurship
Sequestered far from rough-and-tumble, real-world considerations, often viewed as too theoretical to be useful, a liberal arts education is associated with thinking and contemplation rather than praxis. Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is almost always situated within the domain of business and involves some type of market exchange, giving it immediate economic significance. Risky, exciting, and fast paced, entrepreneurship represents not only engagement with the outside world, but also the attempt to change the world according to a particular vision. In his 2007 Newsweek college guide, “Twenty-five Hottest Schools,” education journalist Jay Matthews describes liberal arts offerings as “intellectual” and entrepreneurship courses as “careerist.” Yet even proponents of entrepreneurship education complain of an absence of rigor in much of the available research, and the foundational theory of entrepreneurship remains largely unarticulated, driving doubts about its qualifications as an academic discipline. Critics maintain that entrepreneurship programs do little more than promote profit-driven, commercial enterprise. Liberal arts and entrepreneurship have a common foundation, but they have erroneously become defined as polar opposites within the academy; thus, the power and effectiveness of each have been undermined. The solution is for those in liberal arts and entrepreneurship programs to work together—without driving each other crazy.

The Business Context
Entrepreneurship programs are growing at an astonishing pace. According to Fortune magazine, three thousand colleges and universities offered some form of entrepreneurship education in 2007. Entrepreneurship courses are the fastest growth area in business and engineering schools; moreover, colleges and universities, in their efforts to attract students and increase the economic utility of undergraduate degrees, have begun introducing entrepreneurship programs in liberal arts schools.

Entrepreneurship professors routinely insist that their discipline is distinct from business management and that entrepreneurs are not merely business owners. Syracuse University entrepreneurship professor Michael Morris writes, “Entrepreneurship is the most empowering, the most democratic, the most freedom-creating phenomenon in the history of the human race.” William Scott Green, part of the Kauffman Campuses Initiative promoting the teaching of entrepreneurship, suggests that entrepreneurship can be seen as “an antidote to the alienation that both Marx and Weber saw as the ineluctable trait of capitalist modernity. In Marxist terms, entrepreneurship can be seen as the reverse of alienated labor, when workers do not own what they produce. In some basic sense, the entrepreneur is at one with the enterprise of her or his devising.” Green and Morris agree that colleges and universities should make “every student an entrepreneur.”

When discussing actual classes and curricula, however, entrepreneurship quickly and inexorably becomes conflated with typical business offerings. For example, at Syracuse, contexts for entrepreneurship include start-up ventures, early-growth firms, family businesses, rapid-growth ventures, corporate entrepreneurship, academic entrepreneurship, and cultural entrepreneurship; the latter two are only vaguely defined. In its integrated Entrepreneurship and Liberal Arts program, Wake Forest University offers undergraduate students an entrepreneurship minor. Even in the program’s integrated courses, however, entrepreneurship education continues to be directed toward business objectives. In Teaching the Business of Art, an elective course, Wake Forest students are paired with “successful working artists and skilled professionals to introduce and strengthen the entrepreneurial skills needed to make a living as an artist.” In this integrated course, the idea that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking can be integrated within the study of art itself rather than used merely as a means to market and sell art has not yet been articulated and
Despite the desire to develop university courses so that students encounter, in Green’s words, “entrepreneurship in regular mainstream disciplines—from philosophy to history to chemistry,” we have not adequately formulated how entrepreneurship can be integrated into liberal arts courses without turning them into business courses. Moreover, though there is widespread desire among entrepreneurship aficionados to claim that entrepreneurship involves more than just business skills, no description of entrepreneurship yet exists that would qualify it as a philosophy of life, an attitude, a mindset. To date, entrepreneurship has been imprisoned within a business context largely because the subject matter has been governed by the pedagogy and objectives of business schools rather than those of liberal arts education.

The Liberal Arts Context
We cannot ignore the fact that the liberal arts are not meeting many students’ needs. The number of business degrees granted by colleges and universities has been rising, and only a small percentage of twenty-first-century college students are choosing liberal arts majors. As increasing focus is placed on vocational education, liberal arts courses can seem anachronistic, even useless.

Defenders of the liberal arts argue that liberal arts disciplines teach the critical-thinking skills leaders need to make sound decisions, and in our complex democracy, each citizen is a leader, choosing for herself or himself who will govern and by what policies. Political writer Michael Lind writes, “In a democratic republic, isn’t it necessary for all citizens to have at least the basics of a liberal education? Even if their participation in public life is limited to voting occasionally, citizens cannot adequately perform that minimal duty unless they have the training in reasoning, rhetoric, and fact that in aristocratic and patrician republics was needed only by the few.”

However, liberal arts programs must acknowledge the pressing pecuniary concerns that many students face, such as significant postcollege indebtedness, and articulate the economic utility of a liberal arts education. The liberal arts can situate practical skills in a context of ethical decision making that addresses public good and community perspectives. Foundationally similar, the liberal arts and entrepreneurship share the same critical, forward-thinking orientation: they involve the study and analysis of what is (for example, the current state of the economy, social justice, citizenship and community affairs, business environments, and public and private needs) and, by identifying and evaluating opportunities for improvement, consciously contribute to what will be. The liberal arts are distinguished from the servile arts because they focus on subjects that are worthy in themselves rather than those that are worthwhile only insofar as they are a means to the cash economy, material benefits, or increased social status. This distinction is also what separates an entrepreneur from a mere business owner. Entrepreneurship is a tangible, practical manifestation of a liberal arts sensibility; it has economic ramifications that extend the ability of the entrepreneur to engage with social discourse—to develop and express personal identity by influencing the larger social context. By situating entrepreneurship within the academy, we can legitimate the practical, material dimension of the discipline to the degree that entrepreneurship shares the values of the liberal arts: commitment to selfexpression, debate, creativity, problem solving, and the ongoing articulation of the mutuality of social responsibility and personal identity.

Integration
Some educational institutions have already begun to integrate liberal arts and entrepreneurship courses; however, integration of liberal arts and entrepreneurship curricular and cocurricular activities often lack a coherent rubric with which to define and evaluate integration. Given the current, lopsided valuation of material and economic directives, business concerns tend to dominate such integration efforts. We need a template that can be used in crosscampus initiatives to integrate entrepreneurship into any liberal arts discipline with special attention to preserving disciplinary integrity. I suggest a rubric (see related articles) in which enterprise development is only one of four possible outcomes that define an integrated course. Liberal arts professors would not be asked to teach business or to direct their disciplines toward a business outcome; they would, however, be asked to identify the real-world applications of their disciplines as well as to reinforce the traditional fundamental aspects of liberal arts education that situate responsibility and agency in the student.

Entrepreneurship education is now part of many liberal arts institutions, and that is a good thing. However, liberal arts and entrepreneurship faculty members themselves must articulate and interpret the objectives and outcomes of course offerings. We can do that by doing what we do best: critically examining the process to ensure that courses are consistent with the values and goals of liberal arts education. By recognizing common foundations and objectives, liberal arts and entrepreneurship faculty can work together without driving one another crazy!

Mary Godwyn is assistant professor of sociology at Babson College. Her research is concerned with social theory as it applies to issues of equality, and she has published in journals such as Current Perspectives in Social Theory, Symbolic Interaction, and the Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Creating a Liberal Arts Course the Intergrates Entrepreneurship

1. Study entrepreneurship from another disciplinary point of view. Following are examples of courses that could involve the study of entrepreneurship:

- The Sociology of Business Ownership: Self-Advocacy among Marginalized Populations
- The History of Entrepreneurship in Cleveland among Lebanese Americans
- The Economics of Entrepreneurship during the Great Depression
- Common Psychological Characteristics and Patterns of Behavior in Entrepreneurs
2. Incorporate the entrepreneurial process into other courses through assignments and classroom practices (entrepreneurial processes should be explicitly stated in the syllabus as course competencies, and evaluative guidelines should also be articulated). Possible approaches could include the following:

- Give students leadership responsibility for course outcomes.
- Allow students to share in evaluation of work (both their own and those of their classmates).
- Have a “real-world” aspect to the course—for example, by having students form an organization, raise funds for a cause, participate in activist work, engage with the community, conduct ethnographic research, or complete an internship.
- Focus on problem solving, consensus building, and teamwork.
- Develop competency in making persuasive, sound arguments.
- Develop spontaneous solutions through assignments that encourage students to think on their feet.
- Demand originality, creativity, innovation, and novelty.
- Make it safe to make mistakes.

3. Educate students to open a for-profit or nonprofit enterprise. Students should engage in the business and organizational basics of enterprise development and, in equal measure, with the ethical, social, and environmental considerations entailed in any business creation. When students create a business plan, they should:

- discuss the effect of the enterprise on a wide range of stakeholders and consider factors such as markets, funding, and economic viability;
- articulate the social, cultural, and environmental impact of products and services as well as the ethical implications of the business enterprise;
- consider how the product or service would affect business owners, consumers, employees, the local community, the larger culture, and the environment.

4. Help students develop characteristics of the entrepreneurial mindset, including willingness to take risks, innovativeness, creativity, confidence, critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities, the ability to identify opportunities, leadership ability, understanding of value creation, the ability to communicate effectively and present ideas clearly, and willingness to consider multiple viewpoints.*

A sample syllabus from Minority Voices in Entrepreneurship: The Democratization of Influence and Resources, an integrated sociology and entrepreneurship course taught by the author of this article, is available.

* Stephen Zabor of Hiram College articulated this fourth criterion of an integrated course.
Just Do It

Mary, thank you for this wonderful rundown on eShip and Liberal Arts.

I especially enjoyed the line: “Entrepreneurship is the most empowering, the most democratic, the most freedom-creating phenomenon in the history of the human race.”

To make a small plug for the entrepreneurship we’re spearheading at Colgate, [www.liainstitute.com](http://www.liainstitute.com) and [www.colgate.edu/entrepreneurship](http://www.colgate.edu/entrepreneurship), we feel two MANDATORY ingredients to creating entrepreneurs are a) actually creating something b) being mentored by entrepreneurs.

There is no replacement for actually trying to create something, failing, and having the advice you receive finally take root. only then can you evolve and learn the essence of entrepreneurship and how to be better next time.

There is no replacement for being part of a community of “YES”, that tells you you’re not crazy and helps you avoid the potholes that they’ve stumbled over in the past. Being an entrepreneur is scary in a world of “NO” and “that's not possible”, so there is nothing more inspiring than being around people who share you same passion for solving hard problems in inconceivable ways.

Would love to talk more shop with you on the subject.

Wills Hapworth
Alumni Executive Director
Thought into Action Entrepreneurship Institute
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Fine Art Courses

well, Liberal art is an art form which something we do in publicly by including debates, play and in military services. There is no restriction to do both together so we can do liberal and entrepreneurship work together without any hassle.
Liberal arts and entrepreneurship have a common foundation, but they have erroneously become defined as polar opposites within the academy; thus, the power and effectiveness of each have been undermined. The solution is for those in liberal arts and entrepreneurship programs to work together—without driving each other crazy.

The Business Context. Entrepreneurship programs are growing at an astonishing pace. According to Fortune magazine, three thousand colleges and universities offered some form of entrepreneurship education in 2007. “The liberal arts teaches you how to think,” said Finnegan, who
was a history and religion double major. “It taught me how to dissect a problem and how to learn. I know how to take a situation and break it down into quantifiable parts to understand them.” Sharp reiterated the importance of a Colgate education in fostering passion and entrepreneurial spirit. “The TIA experience allows Colgate students to identify a problem and then create a solution that works. Entrepreneurship and Liberal Arts, together, are powerful partners for future success.” Principal & Founder Store No 8 | VP, Incubation Walmart Co-founder, Hukkster. About Katie Finnegan ’05.