

September 04, 2016 8:00 a.m. Updated 9/6/2016

Appeal of entrepreneurship classes on rise for all majors

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Special to Crain's Detroit Business

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Photo by University of Michigan More than 400 nonbusiness majors at UM are expected to take the Entrepreneurial Business Basics course this year.

Entrepreneurship has become a hot subject in recent years on the college and university campuses across Southeast Michigan. As interest grows, the schools are meeting the demand by launching, expanding and considering new programs that teach entrepreneurship to all students, not just business majors.

"Student demand for entrepreneurship courses is continuing to increase," said Stewart Thornhill, executive director of the Zell Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies within **University of Michigan's** Stephen M. Ross School of Business.

UM is an example of the growth in interest. The university has had to add another section of its Entrepreneurial Business Basics course to its fall catalog based on student demand this year, and nearly 400 nonbusiness majors are expected to take the course, up from 228 last year, said the institute. Because of the interest in entrepreneurship, UM also launched an entrepreneurship minor specifically for nonbusiness students last year.

"Students recognize that knowing how businesses operate and how to operate them is very beneficial," said Thornhill.

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UM is not the only school to add to or expand its offerings. In the past year, **Michigan State University** and the **University of Michigan-Dearborn** introduced entrepreneurial programs open to all majors, and **Wayne State University** is in the process of approving an entrepreneurship and innovation certificate for nonbusiness undergraduate students and community members.

Those are among the many area schools that are investing in entrepreneurship courses and programs. Here is a sample:

New offerings



Stewart Thornhill, University of Michigan

Since its 2015 launch, 75 nonbusiness students have completed UM's new entrepreneurship minor, and 379 are currently enrolled in the program, according to the Zell Lurie Institute. The main driver of the growth is student enthusiasm, said Thornhill.

For example, he said, many students are involved in entrepreneurial programs and organizations outside of their academic transcript, such as the student-run organization called OptiMize, which has hundreds of members from all areas of study. OptiMize's website, optimizemi.org, says it is "a supportive community for student innovators working toward a just and sustainable world. ... With the right mentorship and support, we believe anyone can learn to turn their ideas into impact."

Performing arts majors in UM's School of Music, Theatre and Dance also have an exclusive program, called Excellence in Entrepreneurship, Career Empowerment and Leadership, which offers courses, mentoring and networking opportunities in entrepreneurship and career development.

The program, which launched last fall, offers two practicums for the entrepreneurship minor, including a record industry workshop that resulted in a student-run record label, called Maize Collective, said Jonathan Kuuskoski, assistant director of entrepreneurship and career services in the SMTD.

"I think the next new thing (for the entrepreneurship program) will come from students," said Thornhill. "We will do what we can to make it successful."

Michigan State began in January a multidisciplinary entrepreneurship minor, open to both business and nonbusiness undergraduates. The program was designed to be inclusive of all majors to encourage nonbusiness students to participate, said Neil Kane, director of undergraduate entrepreneurship at MSU.

"The way I view it, entrepreneurship is cross-functional," said Kane. "The concepts it teaches are applicable across all industries."

Kane said around 200 students committed to the minor in the first semester, with about two-thirds coming from majors other than business. The minor is expected to grow this semester — enrollment in the Intro to Startups course has increased from 90 its first year three years ago to 650 students this fall, he said.

What makes MSU's program unique is its collaboration between departments, Kane said, as the minor is not housed in any one college on campus, and students take classes related to their major to complete it.

As the new program develops, Kane said, two priority areas to expand are international entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, which requires a slightly different skill set than for-profit entrepreneurship.



Tim Davis, UM-Dearborn

This year, University of Michigan-Dearborn launched an entrepreneurship certificate through its College of Business that is open to all students regardless of major as well as people not formally enrolled.

Tim Davis, instructor of entrepreneurship at UM-Dearborn, said the certificate was started because the school recognized that having an entrepreneurial mindset benefits more than those students who plan to open their own businesses.

"Thinking entrepreneurially can help people in many aspects of their life because it involves problem solving," said Davis.

The certificate is made up of three required entrepreneurship courses and one elective course from another discipline.

Before adding the certificate, UM-Dearborn offered business and nonbusiness students a class titled Entrepreneurial Thinking and Behavior, now one of three required courses in the certificate. Davis, who teaches the course, said the class regularly hits its 40-student capacity and often has a waiting list.

Judging by the demand, Davis said he expects the university to expand its entrepreneurial classes.

Existing programs



Photo by Washtenaw Community College WCC's Entrepreneurship Center is run by the business and computer technologies department and has numerous free resources, such as personal business advice, a co-working space, workshops and all-day industry-focused boot camps.

Eastern Michigan University also has an entrepreneurship minor open to all students. The introductory entrepreneurship courses have no prerequisites to encourage nonbusiness students to take them, said Fraya Wagner-Marsh, management department head in the College of Business, which houses the programs.

About half of the 25 students enrolled in this fall's introductory course are from nonbusiness majors, such as criminal justice, interior design and journalism, said Wagner-Marsh, who said she has seen an increased interest in entrepreneurship as more students see it as a viable career path. She said she believes this outlook has been spurred by more resources being available at universities and through the state through grants and programming.

EMU also is one of the many local schools that hold business plan and pitch competitions for students through its Center for Entrepreneurship.

Lawrence Technological University offers students in the College of Engineering the option of taking a certificate specializing in entrepreneurial engineering skills. The college also has

integrated entrepreneurial concepts into the undergraduate engineering curriculum, said Cristi Bell-Huff, director of LTU's Studio for Entrepreneurial Engineering Design.

Bell-Huff said the college has put a focus on teaching the entrepreneurial mindset because students, besides being able to build products, need the business know-how to decide if there is a market and then how to reach it.

During engineering students' sophomore year, they build a working product prototype in the studio class Bell-Huff oversees and then test that product out with actual customers.

"Students are really uncomfortable doing that at first, but it's a really important skill to develop," she said.

The engineering college also partners with a local nonprofit each year, giving students the experience developing products for specific customers, said Bell-Huff.

Funding for the entrepreneurial programs came largely from a grant by the **Kern Family Foundation**, said Bell-Huff.

A grant from the Chicago-based **Coleman Foundation** in 2009 created a fellows program to teach students across all disciplines how to start a business, said Karen Evans, who was co-director of the Coleman Fellows Program.

As a result of the program, which ended in August, faculty members across the university began introducing more entrepreneurial concepts into their coursework, said Evans. That includes a chemical biology professor who added a unit on entrepreneurship to a science class, she said.

Oakland University since 2007 has offered an entrepreneurship minor to nonbusiness students through its School of Business Administration. In 2011, the program was redesigned to reach both business and nonbusiness majors.



Jae Hyeung Kang, Oakland University

The program begins with introductory business courses and the theories behind entrepreneurship, then builds into implementing those concepts, said Jae Hyeung Kang, who teaches entrepreneurship at Oakland.

Kang said students in his advanced entrepreneurship course, called New Venture Creation, work in teams to develop a business model and plan. About half the students enrolled are nonbusiness majors, he said.

In the four years he has taught the course, Kang said, he has seen a growing interest by nonbusiness students. Around 25 students take the minor each year.

Schoolcraft College has had since 2012 a small-business entrepreneur certificate program open to all its students as well as community members through its Small Business Development Center.

The five-course certificate is meant to teach those looking to launch successful small businesses the basics of entrepreneurship, including writing a business plan, financial management, marketing and business legal issues, said Jodie Beckley, SBDC director.

Beckley said more than 202 participants have completed the program.

Schoolcraft also offers several classes through its Continuing Education and Professional Development department that complement the certificate, such as Cooking Up a Successful Food-Related Business and Social Media Strategy to Maximize Growth.

The SBDC also puts on short seminars about the startup success and the center's free business counseling resources to students in those programs by working collaboratively with the instructors, she said.

Walsh College teaches business courses to **College for Creative Studies** students to assist those who have businesses or plan to open them. The partnership began in 2013.

Walsh also has LaunchPad, which assists aspiring entrepreneurs in developing and launching their businesses. The LaunchPad is available to current students, faculty and degreed alumni of Walsh.

Washtenaw Community College has an entrepreneurship certificate available to all students through its Business and Computer Technologies department. The certificate has three entrepreneurship courses, all of which can be completed in a short amount of time to cater to business owners and those wanting help launching their businesses, said Kristin Gapske, director of the community college's Entrepreneurship Center.

Gapske said the certificate teaches business skills, how to recognize market opportunities, and how to develop a business plan, among other topics.

"It's a great way for business owners to get practical experience and be done," she said.

The community college also has an Entrepreneurship Center, run by the business and computer technologies department, which has numerous free resources, such as personal business advice, a co-working space, workshops and all-day industry-focused boot camps.

Gapske said she has seen a growing interest in the creative industry seeking the center's services, including Mark Ducker, executive director of YPSI 24-Hour Film Shootout, who sought advice for how to promote his annual filmmaking event.

Beyond the certificate and resources, many other noncredit programs exist at WCC to help students and outside entrepreneurs, including courses in digital marketing and how to make a YouTube video or Wordpress website, Gapske said.

Future plans

Wayne State University could approve the entrepreneurship and innovation certificate this fall and then begin offering entrepreneurial courses as part of the certificate as soon as January, said Margaret Smoller, associate dean of WSU's Ilitch School of Business.

Smoller said students could participate in the certificate program after they complete prerequisite business courses, while nonstudents will need to have an undergraduate degree.

The proposed program would begin with an introduction to entrepreneurship and build to a hands-on capstone such as pitching a business idea to potential funders, said Smoller.

Smoller said many nonbusiness students have asked about entrepreneurial courses, including participants in the university's Blackstone LaunchPad and its business accelerator **TechTown Detroit**.

"So I know there's a lot of interest in Detroit for this type of program," she said.

Wayne State's School of Engineering got approval for a revamped entrepreneurship certificate this summer that is available to graduate and undergraduate students. The certificate was revised to better match the engineering students' curriculum needs, said Gary Witus, associate director of the Anderson Engineering Ventures Institute at WSU. Witus said students who take the certificate could have their tuition for the program subsidized through the institute.



Joseph Eisenhauer, University of Detroit Mercy

University of Detroit Mercy has had an interdisciplinary entrepreneurship minor available to all undergraduate students for many years. About half the students who take the minor are nonbusiness majors, said Joseph Eisenhauer, dean of UD Mercy's College of Business

Administration, which manages the minor. He said the college could soon expand its entrepreneurial offerings to students based on increased campuswide interest.

"In the modern world, more students are thinking of starting their own business," he said.

Beyond expanding entrepreneurial course offerings, UD Mercy recently opened a Center for Social Entrepreneurship, housed in the School of Business Administration, to provide the skills local practitioners need to grow their businesses, said Eisenhauer.

Henry Ford College does not currently offer specific entrepreneurship programs for nonbusiness students, said Paul Fisher, associate dean of business and computer technology, but he said it could offer such programs based on student interest.