SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A FRAME FOR BUSINESS WRITING

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DEFINING THE FRAME

What is social entrepreneurship (SE)?

Social entrepreneurs are purpose-driven, rather than profit-driven: they make positive changes in their communities through their businesses. Extending the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to be not just an add-on, but the whole *purpose* of a business, SE puts the focus on *"business as if people mattered."*

In short: SE develops, funds, and implements solutions to social, cultural, and environmental issues through for-profit enterprise. When adopted as the focus for a business writing course, SE provides insights into how communication and media can mobilize industry, community, government, and customer stakeholders to take action on critical problems.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Examples of businesses that balance profit with solving societal problems help unfamiliar students understand social entrepreneurship's scope and value. Here are three of the case studies that resonated most with students:

REMY NY

The human hair industry has big supply chain and transparency problems: hair is bought from women for pennies on the inch or even stolen from them, and wig retailers often lie about the origin or purity of the hair they sell. Dan Choi of REMY NY buys unprocessed hair directly from women who receive a fair price—enough to pay rent, send children to school, or start businesses.

Heroes to Hives

Addressing veterans' financial and personal wellness, this initiative develops beekeeping knowledge and networking for its participants so they can protect honeybees through small-scale, sustainable businesses. Since 2015, H2H has trained 456 veterans who manage over 2000 hives.

Papa App

Older adults can struggle with social isolation, technology, and housekeeping. Pairing elders with "Papa Pals"—college students seeking work and volunteer experiences—provides on-demand assistance and compansionship to help foster independent living and security in old age.

COURSE CURRICULUM

I: JOB PORTFOLIO

Emphasizing their contributions to community and culture, students create a suite of job documents that illustrate the differences that they've made in the workplace and beyond. Deliverables include...

- camera-ready résumé
- cover letter directly linking previous accomplishments with qualifications listed in a job posting
- inviting and individualized elevator pitch

2: ISSUE REPORT

After identifying an opportune problem or market for SE intervention, students design a report persuading stakeholders to take action. Topics included...

- automotive safety regulations in Latin America
- art therapy and mental health
- body diversity in fashion
- childhood hunger in K-12 schools
- micro-lending to reduce recidivism rates for felons

3: SHARK TANK PITCH

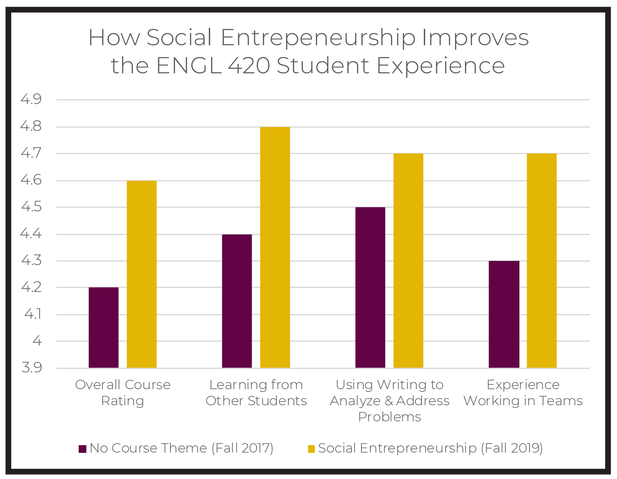
The final project asked teams of students to propose an SE solution for a vulnerable population: older adults aged 60+. Using open source governmental and scholarly datasets, teams gathered statistics to construct an action plan, budget, and pitch presentation for up to $1 million in venture captial funding, considering the unique needs of older adults both domestically and globally.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS + LESSONS LEARNED

Adopting an SE theme for business writing improved students' overall course experience, as well as collaboration with colleagues, project management, and purpose-driven writing to solve problems (see chart at right).

In project status updates and final course reflections, Fall 2019 undergraduates in an SE-themed ENGL 420 section wrote that the skills they developed in class helped them apply for summer internships in supply chain management and marketing, persuade their families of the importance of reducing emissions for improving climate health, and improve the writing of student-driven nonprofit organizations.

Fall 2019 students emonstrated interests in international development and environmentalism in particular: empowering the world's poor, improving infrastructure, peace-building, sustainable supply chains, combating climate change, and developing renewable energy solutions. Thus, future themed ENGL 420 sections could focus on renewable energy, corporate sustainability, and fostering development in global contexts.



STUDENT WORK

The very nature of social entrepreneurship asks us to consider *diversity*: how can we help the most people, but particularly people who are under-represented in or under-served by traditional industry? The course capstone project was no different, and student teams in the Fall 2019 section considered different segments of the older adult population as they designed their innovations. Solutions included...

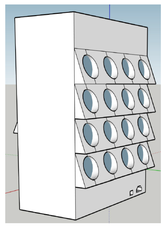
Promoting Safety & Mobility: EASY-CALL

A team of international students pitched a smartwatch that could translate across cultural contexts as an emergency alert device. EASY-CALL has audio calling and GPS capabilities to ensure that older adults can access emergency services, family, or caregivers wherever they are, without additional features that discourage their age cohort from using smart devices. The device is ergonomically designed, waterproof, and solar-charging, so it can function like a "second skin." Its interface uses only high-contrast colors in the red-yellow spectrum, because decreased color-filtering capabilities in older eyes causes difficulty differentiating between cool shades.

Combating Social Isolation: Guide & Grow

To adress elders' needs for social interaction and cognitive stimulation, an interdisciplinary project team designed a skillshare platform to pair older users with teenagers and young adults. As a professional learning platform, Guide & Grow would partner with college campuses to supervise internships and service learning experiences for credit.

Biomedical Design: EZ-Pill-Z



Day-of-the-week pill containers are ubiquitous in the lives of older adults across the US, with the average 60-year-old taking 13 prescriptions a day. These containers are prone to human error though, with over 700,000 emergency room visits due to medication mix-ups each year.

To alleviate the strain of daily dosage, a team of business and engineering students designed an automated pill dispenser that can manage up to 16 medications at one time. Optional connectivity with GoodRx and an app alert system has the potential to automatically reorder medications when supplies are low, and alert a caretaker on their smartphone.

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