

Why We Must All Teach Social Entrepreneurship

Amy Jordan, Ph.D.

University of Arkansas, Fort Smith

**Author Note**

Dr. Amy Jordan, Professor of Organizational Leadership, University of Arkansas-Fort Smith. Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Dr. Amy Jordan at [amy.jordan@uafs.edu](mailto:amy.jordan@uafs.edu).

An unexpected outcome of researching Social Entrepreneurship is the realization that many of us have been turning our class discussions and assignments to this vital subject matter ... If we're listening.

The landscape of higher education is shifting as economic tides and redefined student populations prompt us to re-evaluate the worth of an “added” education. A concern is that personal enlightenment may drop in its ranking as a reason to pursue further learning as tightening constraints in daily life eliminate leisure learning -- remember *that* term? Time must be validated. Effort must be focused. Monies and households must be better calibrated. Student enrollments lean toward a profile of a slightly older, part-timer who shed the fresh-faced freshman look in another life. According to the projected enrollment numbers issued by the National Center For Education Statistics, most of the 21 million students on our campuses today represent a semblance of “nontraditional” circumstances, bearing new sets of values and redefined purposes. Estimates point to a growing number of older students (Over 8 million students are 25 and older). With age comes responsibility. Older students, as well as many younger students, seek higher learning opportunities between work hours and their children’s softball games. Typically, the older students are re-entering classrooms after workforce participation in dwindling fields of employment (Fast Facts )

What are the goals of these new, but seasoned, students? If we listen, we hear a student desire to link need with moral legacy. Purposeful work. Jobs that impress their families. Delight in connecting technology with real world issues. Investing time in exchange for social value. Claimed destinies.

The recent explosion in the entrepreneurial workplace is a well-discussed and celebrated piece of the American pie. The Social Entrepreneurship slice is growing and deserving an equal nod. This seems to be the bite of pie that continues to tempt students in measurable upward trends. Nonprofits and Social Entrepreneurship businesses claim larger work forces than the year before and the year before that. (Kuratko, 2005)

What is driving this trend? What is sweetening this collective pie? If we listen to our students’ desired outcomes for a second chance, the answer seem to be an ironically hopeful one.

Perhaps an upside to the economic downturn lies with the goals our new student populations are seeking. No... Demanding. A delayed higher education

pursuit has allowed for deliberation. Time out of the academic arena requires income and real-life work and balance. Dreaming and paying bills, it seems, are not always complimentary bits of business. Witnessing, or experiencing, a shriveling definition of "company loyalty" is an exercise in personal worth.

As educators, we are placed in paradoxical roles. We teach to the predicted list of needed skill sets. We teach to the traditions of higher learning. We teach to the lowest denominator. Perhaps we teach to the highest denominator. Today, we might be defending the value of a college education. An upside for us, in these economically-twisted times, is an opportunity to listen, really listen, to the charges our students are willing and even audacious enough to take on. How can one question the role and value of our disciplines and industry when the desire for more awareness and harnessing of social entrepreneurial knowledge is ours to deliver?

Many great universities and colleges have already embraced and formalized the study of social entrepreneurship. It is a noble venture. The success seems apparent. Models are out there to study, and perhaps adopt, as we continue to integrate this discipline into the big picture of higher learning. The online B.S. in Social Entrepreneurship at Southern New Hampshire University and the Impact Entrepreneurs program at Portland State University are just two examples, and certainly there is more work is to be done.

In the meantime, the opportunity to integrate within our classes the rich dialog of students' hopes and newfound aspirations, whether in a chemistry lab or in a History 101 discussion box, is ours to elevate. We have millions of chances to listen and really hear students who are trying to connect a formal education to the desire for purposeful lives.

**Works Cited**

- Fast Facts* . (n.d.). Retrieved December 18, 2013, from National Center For Education Statistics: <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>
- Kuratko, D. (2005). The emergence of entrepreneurship education: Development, trends, and challenges. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, , 577-597.

### **Author Biography**



Amy Conlan Jordan is a professor of Organizational Leadership at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith. Now in its sixth year, the program course content was initially developed by Jordan. She continues to expand program offerings with input from regional business and nonprofit leadership. A graduate of the University of Alabama, Jordan has worked with U.S. State Department in Central and South America, Webster University and Breckenridge Mountain College and has served in leadership positions with such organizations the Breckenridge Music Institute, The Fort Smith Art Center and Leadership Fort Smith. Jordan's interest in social entrepreneurship stems from her work as the UAFS Campus Coordinator for the American Democracy Project and the students with whom she closely works. Recognizing that "social worth" is an emerging and growing motivation for higher learning, she is an advocate for a more holistic approach for communities and their institutions in work and place.