

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**We need more institutions, individuals, and initiatives
to respond to alleviating society's social problems.**

by Bernard Turner

A Growing Trend

Marian Wright Edelman offers insight into some of America's social problems in the chapter "A Letter to Our Leaders" of her latest book *The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation*. Is this country living its creed and preparing for the future? She cites some examples of America's ranking among industrialized counties in investing in and protecting children:

- first in the number of persons incarcerated,
- highest in relative child poverty,
- highest in the gap between rich and poor,
- highest in teen (age 15 to 19) birthrates, and
- last in protecting children against gun violence.

These are just a few of the myriad of social problems our nation is facing. The question is "Who will answer the call to have the greatest impact in addressing and alleviating these problems?" Social entrepreneurs are responding to this call. Dr. J. Gregory Dees, known as the father of social entrepreneurship education and founder of the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, calls social entrepreneurs the future change agents in the social sector. His 2001 manuscript entitled "The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship" notes that social entrepreneurs

- adopt a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- recognize and relentlessly pursue new opportunities to serve that mission,
- engage in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
- act boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and
- exhibit a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

At the end of February, I had the pleasure of attending the Ashoka U Exchange held in partnership with CASE. Ashoka was founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton, who is considered the father of the social entrepreneurship movement. His organization is a working community of 2,500 leading social entrepreneurs. Ashoka is focused on creating change today for an "Everyone a Changemaker" society to become the reality of tomorrow.

The conference was attended by 300 people representing 70 universities along with 20 leading practitioner organizations. The prelude to the conference was a TEDx AshokaU "Universities Driving Global Change" event. TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to "Ideas Worth Spreading." What was surprising is the increased number of institutions of higher education that offer a course in social entrepreneurship: 20 a few years ago compared to 90+ in the United States and 122 internationally today.

So what is fueling this growth on the academic level? It can be attributed to more students wanting to have a meaningful life and make a difference driven to this calling for social change. Paul Malone, a 2010 Belmont social entrepreneurship and honors graduate, stated

I feel that social entrepreneurship is a meeting of practical business concepts and high moral aims to benefit humanity. This being the case, I feel that social entrepreneurship is exactly what I want to study in order to lead a fulfilling life while benefiting and working for my fellow human being.

Recognizing the importance of social entrepreneurship education, institutions of higher education are responding to the importance of their role in equipping students with the skills necessary to make transformational social change.

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AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Belmont's Response

Recognizing the unique capacity of universities to prepare the next generation of leaders for the social sector to respond to this growing movement, Belmont University stepped forward and developed the first undergraduate major in social entrepreneurship in the nation. The program began during the fall 2008 semester after much due diligence and the work of an interdisciplinary team of faculty and staff. The program is housed in the office of the provost with the program director reporting directly to the associate provost due to its interdisciplinary approach.

The purpose of the program is to prepare students to engage and transform the world through the formation or expansion of ventures that will create social change. These social entrepreneurs will be grounded in faith and values, shaped through experiential education and practical experience, and informed through the knowledge and skills drawn from diverse academic areas of study.

The curriculum combines business courses and issue-focused tracks in the liberal arts. Students also participate in service-learning activities, a 225-hour unpaid internship to gain practical experience, and working on an expanded project during their final semester. In addition to nine hours of social entrepreneurship courses, students complete 18 hours of entrepreneurship courses. There is regular exposure to nonprofits, social enterprises, social entrepreneurs, governmental entities, and other socially conscious for-profit organizations. Through these components, the liberal arts and entrepreneurship content is integrated with the experience and service that characterizes the practicing social entrepreneur.

The five thematic tracks are contemporary social issues, economic development, environmental science, global social entrepreneurship, and faith, culture and ethics, representing the final 18 hours of the 45-hour major. Students can earn a B.A. or B.S. degree. There are five main objectives regardless of track: ethics and values, the social entrepreneurial skill set, project planning, managing and sustaining an entrepreneurial initiative, and cultural, political, and social understanding.

Below are a few examples of students' interest in social entrepreneurship:

- "I would love to take my entrepreneurial spirit and apply it to help solve certain social issues."
- "If you were to ask me what my major is, I would most certainly say with pride, social

entrepreneurship with an ever-increasing emphasis in world changing."

- "In discovering social entrepreneurship, I breathed a sigh of relief—at last, melding my two passions, business and helping people succeed, into one!"
- "One day I hope to be working for a nonprofit, or any organization involved with helping people who are less fortunate, in some form."

In the first three years, the program graduated 10 students, and there are 30 current students majoring in social entrepreneurship represented in all five tracks. The alumni are in graduate school or seminary, taking some time off to travel overseas, or working for a consulting firm, an attorney, or nonprofits.

Impact

The program's impact can be seen in the involvement of students in service-learning activities, experiential learning, community-based research, and other forms of practical experience integrated throughout the curriculum. We want to ensure students are able to utilize what is taught in the classroom, that what was learned can be applied in real-life, practical situations leading them to critically reflect on these experiences. This is called the T-LAR (Teach, Learn, Apply, and Reflect) model. It is important that students develop knowledge and understanding of social entrepreneurship, enhance critical thinking skills, and demonstrate sensitivity to the importance of compassionate service for working with vulnerable populations.

Based on this model, below are a few examples of the program's impact:

- The program has worked with more than 100 nonprofits or social enterprises in middle Tennessee. After this semester, utilizing the Independent Sector's estimated dollar value of volunteer time (hourly rate), social entrepreneurship students will have accumulated nearly 7,000 hours worth approximately \$140,000, which equates to the equivalent of at least four full-time employees in the social sector.
- A few examples of their service include conducting an organizational assessment for a \$40 million social enterprise, internships with nearly 20 nonprofits or social enterprises, developing grant proposals for nearly 20 nonprofits (some received funding), developing a documentary on community gardens in Nashville, and writing a white paper on the issue of kinship adoption.

- Students participated in numerous service-learning activities with nonprofits for at-risk children and youth, mentally challenged seniors, families of incarcerated men, adoption, economic development for minority businesses, counseling families, and providing food for the hungry.

Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Service-Learning

The other component of the Belmont program was the creation of the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Service-Learning (CSESL). When developing the Belmont program, most social entrepreneurship programs existed as centers linked to graduate programs in business at prestigious universities such as Duke, Stanford, Columbia, and Oxford.

The CSESL seeks to empower and engage students, faculty, staff and community partners through various programming including training, service-learning, assessment, and research activities to impact social change through innovative approaches and projects. A speaker series brings nationally known experts in the field to campus along with local social entrepreneurs.

The current president and CEO of the Social Enterprise Alliance (SEA) was on campus this semester. SEA is the leading membership organization in North America for social enterprises, service providers, nonprofit organizations, corporations, and venture capitalists. In essence, SEA is a community of change makers with more than 700 members. There are several chapters nationwide, each tied to an area university. Belmont is the university affiliated with the newly established Nashville Social Enterprise Alliance Chapter. Students will benefit from this affiliation by having ongoing access to social entrepreneurs, being able to attend the annual SEA Summit, and working on projects promoting the social enterprise movement in Middle Tennessee.

The CSESL will be the arm that links the university in multiple ways to the community: to local and international agencies and neighborhoods that are sources of service and internships for students, to key leaders in the field who serve

as guest speakers and resources for the program, and to social entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders who benefit by accessing university people and resources.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship course, students are required to develop an essay on “Why Am I Interested in Social Entrepreneurship?” The following statement sums up our program:

I confirmed my need for something greater with this vision I had early on in my first semester at Belmont during a business class: While I was looking at the teacher, there was someone else in the world looking at life through a prison cell. While I was looking at my watch waiting to go to lunch, there was someone else in the world looking through trash to find something to eat. While I was looking in my book, there was someone else in the world deprived of an education. While I was looking at a text from my friend, there was someone else in the world looking for somebody, anybody, to care.

Becoming a part of the growing community of practice for building and advancing the academic field of social innovation was an objective of the Ashoka U Exchange. This is why universities like Belmont are instrumental in playing a pivotal role in educating tomorrow’s change agents in the social sector. However, as Harvard Business School Professor Jane C. Wei-Skillern noted in “Putting Entrepreneurship in the Social Sector,” a 2008 interview, “We define social entrepreneurship as innovative, social value-creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, government, or business sectors.” In essence, we need more institutions, individuals, and initiatives to respond to alleviating society’s social problems. It is my hope that others will answer this important call to service and join this growing movement.

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The newly established Nashville Social Enterprise Alliance is the local chapter of the Social Enterprise Alliance.

The SEA is the leading membership organization in North America for enterprising nonprofits, social purpose businesses and educators who come together to promote sustainable social innovation through networking opportunities, educational forums, strategic partnerships, and impact legislation.