

Startups Powered by Companies: Matching Student Entrepreneurs with Real-Life Ventures.

by Dr. Martin Gersch and Janina Sundermeier

Our project group aim is to develop and establish Entrepreneurship Education, as part of the EXIST-IV project 'Entrepreneurial Network University' at the Freie Universität Berlin and the Charité –

Universitätsmedizin Berlin. In order to do this, we analysed the existing curriculum for Entrepreneurship Education in our School of Business and Economics, as well as in other departments and disciplines. Our main drive was to expand the existing curriculum by creating a new course to address the following questions:

- 1** How can our students benefit from the know-how and expertise of successful startups and established organisations in the area of business model development?
- 2** How can we encourage students who are interested in entrepreneurship but do not yet have their own business ideas to develop a business model?

Based on our reflections about suitable options, our objectives for the new course became:

- To enhance the practical experience (for students) of collaborating with organisations facing the challenge of developing a 'digital strategy'.
- To create a blended learning experience that contained e-lectures, interactive classroom sessions, and workshops.
- To create an interdisciplinary learning environment.

Our Story

Our new course, 'Entrepreneurship Education – Startups powered by companies', was delivered for the first time during the summer term in 2014. In this story, we

would like to share with you our journey from concept to realisation.

Kick Off

We decided that the solution to the first objective, creating an opportunity for more practical experience, was to engage startups, as well as established organisations, in our course. During discussions with potential partners, it appeared that most of them regularly spotted new business opportunities and related ideas. However, these ideas were often not pursued, due to limited resources. Therefore, our students saw our course as a chance to gain an extra resource, to help them identify and evaluate new business opportunities. This collaboration was a key building block of our new programme.

In order to fulfill our second goal, creating a blended learning experience, we developed e-learning content that consists of e-lectures and various kinds of web-based trainings (Table 1). The preparation of e-learning content was the most time-consuming task that had to be performed prior to the start of the seminar. It took us several iterations to determine the optimal length and settings of an e-lecture. Eventually, we were able to create a set of modular content elements that covered the important milestones in the process of business model creation. Moreover, several e-lectures were enriched with content such as literature and exercises, in order to create complete web-based trainings. However, this was time well spent, as our e-learning content is now available for lecturers across the university to use as part of their own programmes. Throughout the process of developing the structure of the course and its content, we received valuable feedback and support from various members of the 'Coneect' network.

Our third objective, to create an interdisciplinary learning environment, has been achieved through cooperation with the Department of Mathematics and Computer Sci-

Books

ence. Their students can now take our course and receive ECTS credits. Additionally, in 2015, we opened up our course to students of other disciplines, including 'Applied Literature Studies'!

Important Milestones

Definition of Learning Objectives

Our overall goal is to raise our students' awareness of the crucial decisions that are essential to the process of business model development. We hope that, by doing this, our students will become better informed on how to create a market-ready business model and validate its underlying assumptions. Moreover, our goal is to enable them to write a business plan, and present their ideas in front of a panel of experts.

Definition of Course Structure

The course, which runs twice a week, consists of one lecture and one tutorial. The overall structure is based around helping students to design a business plan. See Table 1 for an overview of the topics covered in each session. The course is delivered using the following approach:

- E-Lectures & Web-based training: e-learning materials are uploaded weekly onto our CMS, and students are encouraged to use this information as a resource and apply these to help shape their own business idea.
- Workshops: several workshops on, for example, the 'Business Model Canvas', 'Lean Startup', and 'Pitching' are organised to support the students in visualizing, testing, and presenting their business ideas, concepts, and models. Where possible, we encourage external partners to participate in these workshops.
- Coaching & Presentations: these sessions allow the students to discuss any questions or problems related to the development of their business models. The coaching sessions are organised by the students, who decide which topics or issues they would like to discuss. The interim and final presentations are held in front of a panel of experts, and the students have to present and defend their business models.

Lessons Learned

We have received very positive feedback from our students and partners, which has encouraged us to update our course on a regular basis, and helped to shape our thinking about future developments for the programme.



Aulet,B.,(2013)DisciplinedEntrepreneurship,NewJersey: John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey.



Faltin,G.,(2012)KopfschlägtKapital,dtv,München.



Osterwalder,A.andPigneur,Y.,(2011)BusinessModel Generation, London: John Wiley & Sons.



Ries,E.,(2011)TheLeanStartup:HowConstantInnovationCreatesRadicallySuccessfulBusinesses,London: Portfolio Penguin.

The main lessons we have learned are:

1

That cooperation with successful startups and established organisations adds considerable value to the course, and clearly illustrates (to students) another possible career path besides research and permanent positions in organisations.

2

That, in any course, students need to be given time to reflect on and discuss their feelings about the learning experience and the process of developing their business model. We have learnt that close cooperation between staff and students is perceived as very helpful for both sides, and leads to more satisfying outcomes.

3

Our partners are always motivated and passionate about their role in the course. Nevertheless, they have a business to run, with all of the responsibilities that come with that. As we all know, time is a limited resource. That is why we have found it both important and extremely helpful to communicate our expectations clearly. We have also found it invaluable to have our partners present at the Kick-Off lecture, as well as the interim and final presentations, in order to explain their current position, challenge the students, and stimulate discussion. Moreover, we have found it essential to seek regular feedback from our partners, to keep them engaged and our students motivated.

Next Steps

After the initial launch of the course, in summer 2014, we reworked our programme based on the feedback received

Week	Lecture	Format	Tutorial	Format
1	Kick-Off	Lecture	Group Formation	Open
2	Business Models	Web-based training	Group Work	Open
3	Product & Services	E-lecture	Group Work	Open
4	Business Model Canvas	E-lecture	BusinessModelCanvasI	Class Workshop
5	Importance of the Team	E-lecture	Lean Start-Up	Workshop with External Partners
6	Market Analysis	E-lecture	Pitching	Workshop with External Partners
7	Marketing Strategies	E-lecture	Coaching I	Class Workshop
8	Interim Presentation	Team Presentation	Group Work	Open
9	Cost & Pricing Strategies	Web-based training	Discussion with "Berliner Sparkasse"	Workshop with External Partners
10	Group Work	Open	BusinessModelCanvasII	Class Workshop
11	Group Work	Open	Coaching II	Class Workshop
12	Group Work	Open	The Elevator-Pitch	Class Workshop
13	Group Work	Open	Group Work	Open
14	Final Presentation	Team Presentation	Finalization of Business Plan	Open

Table 1: Structure of "Entrepreneurship Education – Start-Ups powered by companies"

from our students and partners. The feedback encouraged us to offer the same course again the following summer. Alongside this, we also developed and offered a second course, in cooperation with Professor Wessel, with the same structure but with an exclusive focus on life sciences ('Entrepreneurship Education – Startups powered by life-sciences & research'). This seminar also attracted doctoral students from the field of medicine (Charité).

"Through this seminar, I learned how to develop a complete model for a business idea and write it down in a business plan. Our team received valuable support during the seminar and is now ready to found a startup. I recommend this seminar to everyone who wants to gain insight into the world of startups." (Student in summer-term 2015)

Both courses are constantly being improved, and we are always happy to receive feedback or provide support for lecturers with similar objectives.



Resources

For further inspiration on working with companies and other external organisations to support your entrepreneurship programme please go to our online compendium of learning materials and search for 'partnerships'.

When companies and student teams work together, they are involved in a process of co-creation. To find out more about co-creation why not review the video by Charles Savage:

Co-creating a Wiser Future

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZR19Elj7PU&index=34&list=PLYXAocQQ2XZAG1_-Fza3I5uoDzISjIFO

General Information

NAME:

Entrepreneurship Education –
Startups powered by companies

STUDENT PROFILE:

Master students in the programs
“Business Informatics” and “Computer Science”

TYPE: Seminar

SCOPE OF COURSE:

4 hours per week (=180h)

CREDIT POINTS: 6

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES: 20



Janina Sundermeier

Research Associate at the Chair of Prof. Gersch, Freie Universität Berlin.

My focus on Entrepreneurship, both in teaching and research, allows me to share my knowledge and practical experiences with our students. It encourages me to see our students and their business ideas grow over time and become successful. Moreover,

I support lecturers from various disciplines to realise new formats in Entrepreneurship Education, and to become a part of our university-wide entrepreneurship culture.



Prof. Dr. Martin Gersch,

Professor of Business Administration as well as head of Competence Center eCommerce, Freie Universität Berlin.

As one of the coordinators of the EXIST-IV project, “Entrepreneurial Network University”, I support the development of a university-wide entrepreneurship culture at the Freie Universität Berlin, as well as the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin. The progress in the area of Entrepreneurship Education

at both institutions is an important milestone to achieving this objective. It is great to see how the current curriculum is constantly growing across a multitude of disciplines. One of several crucial factors that contribute to this development is that we share our modular content elements, as well as experiences in Entrepreneurship Education, university-wide.