



**Bernard (Bill) Zannini, MBA**  
**Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill, MA**

### **Getting Started & Growing Your Entrepreneurship Program**

Northern Essex Community College (NECC) serves more than 7000 students at its campuses in Haverhill and Lawrence, MA. Both of these locations have lost their manufacturing base, and have seen a decline in new jobs and an increase in unemployment; they have also seen a higher than expected failure rate of small businesses. In order to address these issues, the College developed two courses: Entrepreneurship, which focuses on the creation of small businesses and jobs, and Small Business Management, aimed at increasing the success of small businesses.

#### **Start small with an eye towards the future**

In 2003, a small federal grant allowed us to design and develop a new course on Entrepreneurship, which would be run on a trial basis before being approved for the college curriculum. It was delivered to a small class of students who either owned a small business or were looking to start one. The course was a success! The course was then immediately honed to meet transfer and accreditation standards, and in 2005 we started offering the course for credit. Next, an Advisory Committee was formed, comprised of local business owners and of members of academia, at both the college and high school levels. The goal was to find ways to grow the program through outreach to students at the college and at local high schools, as well as to the community at-large.

We soon were delivering the course at two local high schools; we changed the curriculum of the Business Management program to include the Entrepreneurship course as a requirement for graduation; and we started planning events that would spread the word about the program.

#### **Get the word out**

In order to get the word out about the Entrepreneurship program, I visited local community venues to talk about *Entrepreneurship: The Road Less Traveled*. As a member of the NECC Speakers Bureau, I spoke at libraries, community centers, Boys & Girls clubs, Chamber of Commerce luncheons, and local high schools. A Workshop entitled *Entrepreneurship & Me* was held at the college for potential students.

Working with other departments at the college, flyers, brochures, and mailers were developed and distributed at the Advising Center on campus, at the Chambers of Commerce in adjoining cities and towns, and at workshops held at the college for potential students. Students in the business majors received the information via U.S. mail, and a webpage with a link to the Business Programs on the NECC website was developed to reach other students who might be interested in starting their own businesses.

### **Create Excitement**

To create excitement we designed events to bring students together with local small business owners who are successful and who also attended NECC. The first event was an Entrepreneurship Panel Discussion that included four past graduates of NECC who successfully started small businesses. This was a huge success, with over 100 students attending the event. The next year we held panel discussions during National Entrepreneurship Week in February and Global Entrepreneurship Week in November.

Our flagship event became a Business Plan Competition; this was accomplished at the college for the first time in April of 2008, followed by a second event in April of 2009. Students from the Entrepreneurship classes competed for scholarships, and the top student in the competition walked away with a laptop donated by DELL Corporation.

### **NACCE's Impact**

The information and the resources that NACCE provides are invaluable to the faculty and the Entrepreneurship program at NECC. Attending the NACCE conferences and webinars, visiting the NACCE Website, and reading the Journal have provided our department with new insights and acquainted us with the work that other community colleges are doing. It also puts us in contact with individuals who have experience in starting and growing a program, so that we can share ideas and obtain advice from each other.

### **Advice**

To recap, the best advice is to start small with an eye towards the future, spread the word, and create excitement. We have seen our enrollment in the course grow from less than 20 students per year to over 200 per year, and our target for 2011 is over 300 students. More students taking the course means more students are better equipped to start their own businesses and/or be better business people. The skills they learn in our courses are life skills that are transferable to whatever they choose to do.

- For copy of my presentation send an email to [bzannini@necc.mass.edu](mailto:bzannini@necc.mass.edu)
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