

# INVESTIGATING THE PERCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*This study focused on a university-wide entrepreneurship education program. The program sought to expand the outcomes of entrepreneurship education to social and political contexts where the goals are not necessarily economic. Data revealed that university faculty and student community held many varied, often competing views of the program. For instance, business major students' views were limited to the business sphere whereas non-business students and instructors asserted that entrepreneurship could be applied to both business and non-business endeavors. As presented in discussing the findings of this research, this difference suggests that the implementation of the program adopted a broader perspective of entrepreneurship but implicitly involved a consideration of economic ends (e.g., acquiring funds). Such instrumental orientation was also found to cause the possibility that popular notions of entrepreneurship and indeed the views of faculty and students may hinder the implementation of the program. Further, the university's policy implementation was found to influence the research participants unequally, thus fueling competing views of the program.*

**Keywords:** University Entrepreneurship Education, Policy Implementation, Student's and Faculty's Perceptions.

## INTRODUCTION

As the global economy moved into a deep recession since 2008, many countries, including the United States, began looking to entrepreneurship models for solutions that would lead to a sustainable economic recovery (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2011). Paralleled with the increasing interest in entrepreneurship, specifically the development of entrepreneurship education programs as a viable springboard for economic growth became a great priority in curriculum development (Rauch & Hulsink, 2015; McGuigan, 2016). In the U.S., it has become one of the fastest growing fields of study in higher education institutions. Scholars in American entrepreneurship education have reported that university entrepreneurship courses have grown in both the number and diversity of course offerings in recent decades (The Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence, 2015).

Since 2006, a large state university in the southwestern U.S. has launched a university-wide entrepreneurship education program (henceforth, the program) providing the site and focal point for this research. It sought to expand and re-valorize the concept of entrepreneurship throughout many academic units. Despite this effort, preliminary observations and informal conversations indicated that the university faculty and student community held many varied, often disparate views of entrepreneurial education. Considerable social scientific studies have found that the adoption of new organizational policies or programs do not necessarily mean that the program will be fully implemented as it was originally designed (Sabatier, 2007). The implementation process invariably includes modification and reconceptualization by

organizational actors. Theories of implementation suggest that innovations including those in educational programming are inevitably transformed in the process of implementation (Lipsky, 2010).

This study drew upon theories of policy implementation and combined them with supplemental insights from active audience theories to better understand how the program has been implemented. Specifically, special attention was devoted to how the interactions among students, instructors, and the university influenced implementation of the educational policy on entrepreneurship education. Additionally, the researcher was interested in the social context in which competing views of entrepreneurship appeared to co-exist and shape people's perceptions. In order to assess the program, the research here focused on faculty's and students' perceptions of the program's goals and their views of the purpose and utility of specific entrepreneurship courses. Their perceptions were collected, analyzed and compared to the objectives and the definitions stated by the university. In doing so, the researcher attempted to check on the degree of consistency between the two perspectives and whatever consequences and implications for the program this revealed.

The presentation of this study is divided into the following sections. First, there is a brief review of relevant literature on entrepreneurship and policy/program implementation. Second, there is an explication of the research methods. The third section contains a report of the research findings concerning the comparison of the perceptions about the program among a small sample of students, instructors, and the university mandates. The fourth section discusses how the students and instructors actively interpreted the received information and how that interpretation has led to their differentiated understandings of the program. The conclusion summarizes the findings and implications of this research project and also presents several limitations that may inform relevant future studies. Overall, through analyzing students' (especially business majors' vs. non-business majors') and instructors' perceptions of the program, this study contributes to a better understanding of: first, the implementation of new educational programming; second, the role of entrepreneurship education initiatives at the university and perhaps at other universities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Three bodies of literature are relevant for this study. The first part addresses conflicting concepts of entrepreneurship. As the research findings below would illustrate, this conflict was manifested in instructors' and students' differentiated perceptions of the program and therefore complicated the university's program delivery.

The second set of literature addresses program implementation, a key factor in the present research. Lipsky's (2010) theory of policy implementation draws attention to the appreciation of discretion concerning its significance for the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation. As Lipsky (2010) defines it, discretion refers to the autonomy of front-line staff in decision-making concerning the type, quality, and quantity of rewards and sanctions when delivering a policy. Following this, Hall's (1981) media theory of encoding/decoding would be utilized to substantiate the dynamic process in which university faculty and students, as front-line policy practitioners, have exercised discretion through interpreting and participating in program delivery.

The last section of literature review concerns previous studies' methods and subject focus on researching entrepreneurship education programs. This section also prepares an examination of how university faculty and students have engaged in program implementation as well as how they influenced the program as a whole. Notably, critically reviewing the methods of these

studies suggests the importance of assessing program delivery through analyzing both students' and instructors' perceptions.

### **Conflicting Definitions of Entrepreneurship**

The recent emphasis on entrepreneurship in the aftermath of the economic crisis has produced conflicting views of entrepreneurship. The new, broader concepts of entrepreneurship are constructed upon the critiques of the old, narrower ones. The old definitions (Baumol, 1993; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Alvarez, 2003) are largely inherited from Schumpeter's (1934) conceptualization of entrepreneurship, and are therefore limited to the business field. As Schumpeter depicts, an entrepreneur is a risk-taking, innovative agent of economic change. In contrast, the new concepts (Mitchell, 2011; Abu-Saifan, 2012; Halberstadt & Kraus, 2016) suggest that the business perspective of entrepreneurship is limited when in reality entrepreneurial spirit and ideas are fundamental to all human activities. According to these concepts, entrepreneurship operates in a society as a whole, spanning across multiple sectors, domains and spaces.

The emergence of the new concepts, however, has not put an end to the old, narrower ones. Rather, the old concepts have remained to be influential in upholding an instrumental perspective. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is synonymous with job creation and profit making, and is thus central to the growth of a state's economy. Some of them are even reconceptualized from the broader perspective of entrepreneurship but still share the same theoretical roots with the old, narrower concepts due to a stubborn commitment to economic ends. For instance, O'Connor (2013) adopts a multi-definitional perspective from which entrepreneurship is reconceptualized as an almost all-encompassing politico-socio-economic phenomenon. This new concept, in his terms, "directs attention toward different economic outcomes and challenges the dominant association of entrepreneurship with business start-up" (O'Connor, 2013, p. 15). Nevertheless, its explicit association with the instrumental perspective is apparent in its attempt of articulating specific economic outcomes that entrepreneurial endeavors get involved in. This appears to be simply a continuation of the instrumental perspective because entrepreneurship is reconstructed to incorporate more social and political contexts but remains simply for the sake of economic benefits. This conflict is relevant to this study because it may cause or contribute to the possibility that popular notions of entrepreneurship and indeed the views of faculty and students may consider entrepreneurship in a narrower sense than the university does.

### **Policy Implementation and Active Audience**

The second set of literature is reviewed to construct a theoretical framework that was utilized to evaluate the program examined in this research. This set of literature includes Lipsky's theory of policy implementation and media theories of active audience. Lipsky (2010) defines "street-level bureaucrats" as "public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work" (p. 3). Public policies could therefore be modified in the process of implementation because street-level bureaucrats actually work in a different way from what the policies prescribe (Lipsky & Weatherley, 1977). Street-level bureaucrats map out a variety of coping practices that constitute an acceptable solution to what theoretically seems to be impossible demands. These strategies are exercised on the condition that street-level bureaucrats are pressured to accomplish enormous

tasks in a short period of time with insufficient resources. These practices, however, do not necessarily contradict the goals of policies but rather constitute a recurrent dimension of work in human service delivery by street-level bureaucrats (Evans & Harris, 2004).

In the case of the program, university instructors, as frontline bureaucrats, play an essential role in educational innovations through their discretionary decision-making in the understanding and execution of policies. University students are absolutely not passive participants in educational innovation because assuming them as the "ultimate subordinate" would be blind to the significance of their roles in the interaction among groups-clients, street-level bureaucrats, and upper-level supervisors (Prottas, 1978; McGinn, 2006). Rather, they actively engage in interpreting and implementing educational policy innovation.

The active roles played by instructors and students were addressed in active audience studies. In line with these studies, human subjects are in fact active readers/spectators when implementing the program. Drawing on their discursive repertoire, readers/spectators are capable of negotiating with contested meanings and constructing their own meanings out of various cultural phenomena. Hall's (1981) "encoding-decoding" framework indicates that messages are encoded into multiple meanings and thus decoded in different ways. Audiences, who share the same set of cultural codes with encoders, can interpret messages within the same framework, whilst those with different social positions (e.g., class, gender, and ethnicity) differ in alternative ways. Audiences undertake multiple strategies to understand the information they receive (Radway, 1987).

Hall (1981) further proposed three hypothetical decoding positions: first, the dominant-hegemonic encoding/decoding denotes the way that audience accept the pre-determined meanings; second, a negotiated code acknowledges not only the hegemonic influence in encoding/decoding but also the possibility of making adaptations in some particular situations; third, an oppositional code illustrates the way in which people reject the pre-determined cultural codes. In light of these models, it would be interesting to investigate whether university faculty and students have played an active role in interacting with each other as well as with upper-level supervisors (namely, the university) in reference to constructing their understanding of the Program/policy implementation.

### **Specific Strategies for Examining Perceptions**

In this section, prior empirical studies are briefly reviewed to explain why this study focused on both students' and instructors' perceptions of the program and its objectives. These prior studies were influential in developing the detailed assessment plan that this study employed to investigate both students' and faculties' perceptions. However, the review indicates their much narrower focus solely on business-oriented entrepreneurship education programs. Also, the implications of their research findings may be considered as largely weakened by a relatively limited focus on either students or instructors.

Prior studies on entrepreneurship education can be grouped into two general categories. One category of studies (Piperopoulos & Dimov, 2014; Elert, Andersson & Wennberg, 2015; Zimbroff, Taylor & Houser, 2016) focused on students' perceptions of their participation in business-focused entrepreneurship education programs. Entrepreneurial initiatives in the non-business fields, such as the humanities, were overlooked or even discarded. Hence, the importance of their research findings is limited in value to the university studied in the present research. It is because the program has been expanded to the university as a whole. The other category attempted to evaluate entrepreneurship education programs, but did not do it through

examining both students' and instructors' perceptions. These studies (Mwasalwiba, 2010; Arasti, Falavarjani & Imanipour, 2012; Nani, 2016) assessed entrepreneurship education programs through investigating instructors' experiences or perceptions of teaching entrepreneurship. Though the importance of instructors' perceptions was addressed, that of students' perceptions was largely ignored.

This review supports the argument that the progress of academic studies on entrepreneurship education has remained stagnant partially due to insufficient fine-grained qualitative research on the impact of entrepreneurship education at the individual level (Dale, 2011). This limitation emphasizes and further reinforces the rationale for this research project: by focusing on both students and instructors, and by including the perceptions of non-business subjects, this study serves as an addition to the research in this academic field. Given the expansion of entrepreneurship education programs to non-business domains, this research aims to contribute to the field by advancing knowledge of university-wide entrepreneurship education.

## METHODOLOGY

Paulin, Coffey and Spaulding (2009) state that "in emerging fields like entrepreneurship, exploratory research often makes fundamental contributions" (p. 355). This study is exploratory in nature, generating hypotheses and grounded theories regarding the implementation of the program. Three data collection strategies-website analysis, participant observation, and interview strategies, were employed. The data gathered through these three different sources were triangulated to provide confirmation of findings and as Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte (2014) claim, "enrich analysis as they reveal different aspects of the phenomena under study, and enhance our attention to surprises and paradoxes" (p. 609).

This process was accomplished by undertaking an interpretative approach. The interpretive approach primarily focuses on questions of meaning. It has "its utility for studying situations in which the meanings of words and deeds are not or are not likely to be congruent" (Yanow, 2015). This utility justifies the use of the data triangulation method throughout the data analysis process of this study: the researcher's use of evidence from one data source clarified, corroborated, modified, and/or refuted his provisional meaning making derived from the other two sources. In doing so, the researcher compared the perceptions of the university's entrepreneurship education initiatives between students and instructors. Also, the data gathered through one data collection strategy were compared with those through the other two. In this way, the researcher was able to shed light on the process in which the meanings of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education have been constructed in the process of implementing the program.

### Website Content Analysis

The university's website serves as a major social media tool for spreading information on program delivery. Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) was used to analyze the website information. Altheide (1987) defines ECA as a "highly interactive" and "reflexive" research method that is "used to document and understand the communication of meaning as well as verify theoretical relationships. ECA is oriented to check, supplement, and supplant prior theoretical claims by simultaneously obtaining categorical and unique data for every case studied" (p. 68). The term "ethnographic" here is consistent with the traditional view of

ethnography as referring to in-depth study of human subjects and their cultural contexts (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Following from this, ECA takes root in traditional ethnographic research focusing on the study of human behavior and communication through immersion in the context of participants. It considers documents as products of cultural forms of social communication and interaction worthy of detailed analysis. Due to this study's exploratory nature and attempt to understand how the implementation of the program was being received and how the website information itself was produced, using ECA enabled the researcher to answer these research questions in a way that quantitative content analysis could not. ECA methods allow researchers to enter into data collection and analysis with predetermined categories based on literature review that guide the early stages of research. Once research is underway, other categories are identified and expected to emerge throughout the research so as to produce more insightful findings (Altheide, 1987) and a priori categories may be strengthened, modified, or discarded based on the data collected.

In line with these principles, the first step conducted for website information collection and analysis was to use initial categories to locate materials, such as, working papers, reports, proposals, and news articles on the website, as well as note categories in the reviewed information. Google searching tools allowed for such searches on university policies for the program. These initial categories include the university's definition of entrepreneurship education, the program's objectives promulgated by the university, and the objectives of entrepreneurship courses stated by the university. After that, this information was compared with the data collected through interviews and observations. Simultaneously, the research decided whether some of the available categories should be retained, omitted, or modified for further study. This continuous and reflexive exploration constitutes an informed process of gathering and analyzing data.

### **Participant Observation**

The researcher attended two entrepreneurship networking events on the campus, a lecture by a university administrator who played a key role in the design and oversight of the program, and a meeting with one of the chief evaluators of the program. The lecture focused on seeking for the best practices in reaching students via regular methods (i.e., email, poster, advertisement, newspaper) and new media channels (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in). The meeting concerned marketing strategies that were planned to make entrepreneurship education available to as many people at the university as possible.

After knowing a list of relevant events from the university's website, the researcher selected to observe the two because they engaged university administrators at different levels as well as instructors and students from many different disciplines. While attending the events, the researcher took detailed notes of the interactions among event participants. Special attention was paid to the university administrators' understandings of entrepreneurship education, and this data was compared with other participants' perceptions. The data gathered through this method would complement those collected from the website content analysis and the interviews. In doing so, the strategy of participatory observation provided another source of data to improve the validity of data through cross verification.

## Semi-Structured Interview

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine students' and instructors' perceptions in four selected entrepreneurship courses. The snowball sampling Strategy was employed to recruit research participants. This sampling strategy is appropriate for the situation where "the members of a special population are difficult to locate" (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). Without instructor referrals, the researcher in this study would have had difficulty locating and recruiting students for the interviews. After the researcher face-to-face introduced the research project to the instructors, they had been invited to participate. Also, they were invited to refer their students to be interviewed.

Among the four courses, a sociologist taught a graduate-level non-business course and the researcher registered for it as a regular student. The instructor was willing to be interviewed and let the researcher recruit research participants on his own. The course focused on the qualitative research methods of social science. While attending the entrepreneurship networking events at the university, the researcher identified another three instructors who were teaching three undergraduate-level courses. One instructor taught an intro-level entrepreneurship course in the business school as part of a university-wide certificate program. The course centered on applying entrepreneurial principles to planning aspects of a person's life. The other class in the business school facilitated student learning from all possible challenges encountered in the process of starting and running a business. The last course was set up in a degree program located in the public management realm.

Even though the four courses were available to students across the campus, the students were more likely to choose the classes offered in their own departments. Twenty respondents in all (four instructors and 16 students) were interviewed face-to-face. Semi-structured interview methods combine "the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level" (Schensul, S., Schensul, J. & LeCompte, 1999). Therefore, the researcher prepared a set of questions directly derived from the central research questions of this study. The questions focused on why students took entrepreneurship courses, their life/career goals, their attitudes and perceptions of specific entrepreneur-related courses and of the program as a whole. Emergent topics that arose in the interview process were identified and then the interview questions were modified to collect more detailed data relevant to new topic(s). Each interview took approximately one hour. Twelve of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and in the other eight, detailed notes were taken because the respondents were unwilling to be recorded.

## GAP IN THE PERCEPTIONS

### The University's Definition and Objectives of Entrepreneurship Education

As discussed in the methodology section, the university's website and entrepreneurship publications constituted the primary source from which the researcher gathered information on the program. That information was analyzed as an impressionistic view of the university's interpretations of its entrepreneurial initiatives. In 2002, the university set forth a new trajectory to become "a new prototype for the American public research university"- "a comprehensive knowledge enterprise dedicated to the simultaneous pursuit of excellence, broad access to quality education, and meaningful societal impact" (*citation omitted to fulfill the requirements of the Institutional Review Board*). Based on this trajectory, the potential for entrepreneurship has been

widely discussed across the campus to be a tool for redefining higher education at a large and academic research in particular. Students and faculty in every discipline and at every level have rallied to a common pursuit of research that contributes to “the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities [the university] serves” (*citation omitted for the requirements of the IRB*). In this regard, valuing entrepreneurship in academic research means an entrepreneurial mindset has been woven into the culture of research. Thereby students and faculty have adopted a solution-focused approach to research, identifying challenges the local and global communities encounter and developing real-world solutions. Basically, this approach is instrumental, and more accurately, is in accordance with the old, narrower perspective of entrepreneurship. That is to say, the university has been able to acquire funds for its survival and further development by leveraging university knowledge to advance the well-being of local and global communities.

The instrumental orientation is particularly manifested in the university’s definition of entrepreneurship. As opposed to the business perspective of entrepreneurship (Mitchell, 2011; Abu-Saifan, 2012; Halberstadt & Kraus, 2016), entrepreneurship at the university is defined in a much broader sense as the innovative spirit generating and utilizing knowledge production to enhance the socio-economic competitiveness of local and global communities (*citation omitted for the requirements of the IRB*). In this sense, knowledge is seen as a significant university output that has the expected value of improving the overall well-being of the community. Due to the appeal of bridging community development and research agendas, many private foundations were attracted to invest in the program.

In 2006, after a rigorous national selection process, the university was designated by a non-profit, private foundation as a leading entrepreneurial university. The foundation awarded a \$5 million grant to the university to further expand access to entrepreneurship education. Meanwhile, the foundation proclaimed that faculty, staff, and students should be dedicated to the mission of working “with government, industry and members of the community to transform the nearby community into a global economic leader” (*citation omitted for the requirements of the IRB*). The mission suggested that the entrepreneurial spirit should not only span across business and non-business fields, but also penetrate into individual life and work. Faculty, staff, and students were all expected to adopt the instrumental mentality that they should make innovations for benefiting both themselves and outside communities. They have become a tool of applying the university output-knowledge to nearby communities and industries. In return, the university was rewarded with the funds from the foundations.

To achieve the goal, much effort has been made. The program was operated widely in 23 colleges across four campuses and there are 112 entrepreneurial courses available in 116 programs (*citation omitted for the requirements of the IRB*). As depicted by the university’s website, the program was not a single program or suite of programs but rather an innovative ecosystem. Just as an ecosystem thrives on the capabilities of adapting to different circumstances, the entrepreneurial university interacts with the outside world in a flexible, adaptable and highly responsive way. Specifically, the website summarized five strategies that the university would take to establish such an ecosystem: first, structural innovations are created across the campus at multiple levels of operation by establishing some university-wide, solution-focused enterprises; second, a vibrant connectivity between the university and the community would be constructed; third, knowledge would be linked to actions by facilitating new industries to meet the emerging demands of the society; fourth, a portfolio approach would be constructed on experimentation and hands-on experience to increase the potential of success; fifth, other



micro-strategies would be supported within many initiatives, such as transdisciplinary collaboration, experiential learning, problem-focused learning, and helping students to recognize their own personal trajectory between ideas and actions (*citation omitted for the requirements of the IRB*). As a result of establishing such an ecosystem, the university claimed that the program has moved beyond the territory of business and expanded into non-business fields to meet the demands of not only markets but also of society in general. While the program undeniably adopted a much broader viewpoint of entrepreneurship, an implicit yet essential consideration of economic ends (e.g., acquiring funds) is reflected in the instrumental orientation of the program that dovetails markets and society.

### Comparing the Faculty's Perceptions of the Program with the University's Objectives

Out of the interview data, it was clear that the university instructors took up a broader perspective of the program and its missions as the university proclaimed, but their perceptions were not exactly the same as what the university declared. The instrumental orientation of the program was not reflected in their responses. They developed and taught entrepreneurship courses not simply for the purpose of obtaining funds through knowledge production and transmission. Their understandings were commonly rooted in their areas of research and teaching, but nonetheless were not confined to them. For instance, the instructor from the social science department defined entrepreneur as “a person who identifies a social problem and applies entrepreneurial principles to organize, create, and manage a venture in order to solve the problem and drive social change.” This definition clearly takes root in his academic training and research in the discipline of social entrepreneurship.

In spite of this, he still noted a possible application of entrepreneurship to the business field. As he said:

*“Even though the business school is a significant site for [the program], it is not the only one...Now, we are trying to get as many students as possible to be involved in entrepreneurship...and to inspire them to be innovative in their own interested fields.”*

It is interesting to find in this response that his support of the university's advocacy of associating business with entrepreneurship is not completely for the purpose of acquiring funds. Rather, he believed that it should constitute no more than a small portion of the university's entrepreneurship education initiatives that in fact cut across both business and non-business fields. Likewise, when a business school faculty was interviewed, his understanding of the program and its objectives largely depended upon his teaching and research experiences in the business field but was not limited to them:

*“A businessman can be an entrepreneur, but an entrepreneur is absolutely not synonymous with a businessman... I am teaching and researching in the business area... [So] I definitely know that business is an important but not the only place where you would find many entrepreneurs ...If I have to use one word to sum up what entrepreneurship education means, I would agree with the university in using the term “impact”. While getting engaged in [the program], every individual should be able to go out there when whatever others are doing, and actually has a change and has an influence on other people, making something meaningful out of what you are doing.”*

Undoubtedly, he admitted that business is a fertile ground where entrepreneurship can thrive. Entrepreneurship education, however, is more than business education. It primarily prepares people to make social impacts beyond the business field.

Another interesting finding from his response is that he borrowed the word-“impact” from the university’s propaganda to epitomize his definition of entrepreneur, which provides evidence for the effectiveness of the university’s policy implementation. To put it differently, he has been influenced by the program to weave the entrepreneurial spirit into his daily life and work, and thereby make social changes. Importantly, he felt obliged to transmit and expand such influence of the program to someone else and nearby communities.

Such a ripple effect was also evident in the responses from all the other instructors, further pushing the impacts of entrepreneurial principles out of the boundaries of business. For example, another business school faculty was a fervent advocate of utilizing entrepreneurial principles to influence people’s life planning and many other aspects of life:

*“Since I am teaching a 100-level entrepreneurship course and it is a required course for a university-wide entrepreneurship certificate program, I have found it necessary to give students much more freedom and choices... Many non-business major students are taking this course to either get the certificate or meet general studies requirements. Even for business-major students, some of them will possibly change their majors in the future and switch to some other non-business ones. As a result, I cannot simply adopt a business perspective of entrepreneurship in the design and teaching of this course... Actually, the university’s entrepreneurship education initiatives serve as a good case in point to illustrate a much broader perspective of entrepreneurship, and I have tried to make full use of them to ... [introduce my students to] how they can incorporate entrepreneurial mentality in planning their personal and professional lives, and make social changes surpass the often assumed boundaries of the business field”.*

As is revealed by this response, his appreciation of a much wider perspective of entrepreneurship nicely illustrates one of the most important learning objectives for the course: students are required to adopt an “entrepreneurial mentality” in planning their personal and professional lives. Such objective, as he described, coincides with the program’s intention of bridging higher education and community development. The course objective of advancing the overall well-being of an individual’s life, however, differs from the program’s instrumental mission of acquiring funds.

Significantly, applying entrepreneurship to developing a personal life plan is a central issue that has been frequently addressed by both business and non-business major courses. The public administration instructor said that he also set it as a central course objective for his course:

*“I think the first thing that they should do in the class is starting thinking about themselves... So students have to talk about the life as an adventure... What do you see maybe kind of twenty years or thirty years down the road? What is your life plan? How do you think you will get there? ... We talk about what good goals are. How do you go through the process of setting goals, prioritizing goals for themselves? And then along that way, we bring examples from the area of entrepreneurship and that of business... but we use those to analyze students’ own lives.... to get prepared to achieve what they want to achieve in a unique manner...”*

With no regard to the course content, the students enrolling in his course were required to learn from role models for entrepreneurs, uncover their most deeply held life goals, and create a practical plan to make them happen. It is noteworthy to point out that he concurred with the university’s much broader perspective of entrepreneurship and used business role models for entrepreneurs for non-business purposes.

Equally important, doing this way does not involve any instrumental consideration of obtaining funds. Additionally, his discussion on the course elaborates “entrepreneurial mentality” which was touched upon by the other instructors:

*“Through this course, my students would get to know that entrepreneurial mindset does not mean a business model... My job is to facilitate them to embark on a path to get an entrepreneurial mindset... In this way, they will learn how this mindset can enable them to break through the status quo, reallocate resources, and innovatively address their communities’ challenges... Whether they work in a public service organization or are looking for a new door in their personal life, this course will help them to develop an entrepreneurial mindset that can open new directions”.*

As he stated, another course requirement is that the students should be able to realize that entrepreneurship is no longer a quality characterizing the stereotypical image of an entrepreneur—an exemplar of such personality traits as visionary, risk-taking, aggressive, opportunistic, and possibly heroic. Entrepreneurship, in his terms, is in fact about assessing a new situation, designing multiple alternatives, choosing a new way (or perhaps a combination of ways) that we believe will bring us a better result, and ultimately acting on a new course of actions. To put it succinctly, entrepreneurial mindset refers to a specific way of living that orientates people to think innovatively and act on that innovation.

To sum up, the four faculty members who were interviewed generally agreed with the university’s broader perspective of entrepreneurship, promoting wider application of entrepreneurial principles to both business and non-business fields. Nevertheless, the program’s underlying pursuit of acquiring funds cannot be found in their responses. As they claimed, they developed and taught entrepreneurship courses for the purpose of urging their students to spend their lives innovatively and become social change makers through expanding the impacts of entrepreneurial principles to someone else and nearby communities.

### **Comparing Students’ Perceptions of the Program with Faculty’s Perceptions and the University’s Objectives Respectively**

Through interviewing students from the four different entrepreneurship courses, their perceptions of the program were found to fall into two general categories running parallel to their differentiated areas of study. The eight business major students defined entrepreneurship primarily from the business perspective despite three of them mentioning its possible application into the non-business field. In contrast, the remaining eight non-business major students interpreted entrepreneurship more broadly in stressing the impacts that entrepreneurship has had on both business and non-business areas. This disparity suggests that the university’s policy implementation has influenced these students differently.

The students from the business school were passionate about the business world, and they were pursuing business degrees with the hope of gaining comprehensive, systematic business training. As was narrated by a newly enrolled first-year undergraduate:

*“The only reason I chose to pursue a business degree is because I dream of being an entrepreneur—a successful businessman... A professional curriculum in business can provide me with necessary knowledge, experience, and skills which will help me start my own business in the future.”*

According to this student, university-wide entrepreneurship education is almost synonymous with a production line for which successful business owners are end products.

When the researcher asked the business school students about the program’s objectives, their responses were found to largely deviate from what the university officially claimed. One student replied:

*“I think the objective of the program fits my own career goal very well. After the study, we will become aware of tiny business opportunities and risk-taking to seize the opportunities when others hesitate.”*

Another student even said:

*“Sorry, I am afraid that I have never heard of it yet”.*

When the researcher read the objective quoted from the website information to him, he said:

*“Wow! That is cool! I thought it did a lot with the business or money, but it is better if [this objective] can be achieved... At least, more students will join in the [program].”*

Though these students participated in the program through taking relevant courses, these responses basically revealed a narrowly conceived concept of entrepreneur or entrepreneurship predominantly confined to the business sphere and therefore clashing with the wider concepts promulgated by the university.

Despite the striking disparity between the business major students' definition of entrepreneurship education and the university's, some of the students were still aware that business major students are absolutely not the sole beneficiaries of the program. One junior marketing major claimed:

*“By taking a few entrepreneurship courses, I have become aware that social entrepreneurship is another important part of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education... A social entrepreneur, similar to a business entrepreneur, builds up strong social enterprises to drive social change and innovation in various non-business fields, such as education, health, and environment, etc.”*

Her response suggests that she took a few relevant courses and thereby was influenced by the program. Due to this influence, she was able to recognize that entrepreneurship can be not only applied to business areas but also make social impacts outside of the business world.

Though not every one of the other seven business major students knew or even heard of social entrepreneurship, they agreed with her to the extent that entrepreneurial principles can afford social entrepreneurs the leverage to solve many of society's most difficult problems. For example, a freshman supply chain major stated:

*“I do not care what the university says about [the program], let alone to know what it says about social entrepreneurship...But I learn from the university's website that business skills or spirits can be used to drive social change and deal with tough social problems like poverty... Actually, I am excited about [this possibility]”.*

Despite being excited about the universities' broader perspective, it was obvious that these two students' perceptions of the program still remained restricted within the business domain. For them, social entrepreneurship was either an extension of the business-centered view of entrepreneurship or a by-product of applying entrepreneurial principles to the business field.

More accurately, the business school students believed that business must be at the core of entrepreneurship and the program. As was said by a senior accounting major:

*“[The university] says that entrepreneurship is sexy and amazing for our whole lives... No matter what values entrepreneurship has brought to non-business fields, I think the most significant purpose of promoting entrepreneurship education is for bringing values to business... We used to believe entrepreneurs are mom and pops. They replicated what has already been done and they finally failed. They really created jobs, but meanwhile, they created many problems for themselves... Entrepreneurship education dispels the meaning that not all businessmen add values. Only entrepreneurs add values”.*

It is interesting to point out that the intro-level entrepreneurship course, which he was taking, constituted a part of the university-wide entrepreneurship certificate program. The instructor, as previously mentioned, stated the course objective as enabling students to apply entrepreneurial principles to planning their professional and daily lives. In this regard, the student's perception of the course objective fundamentally differs from his instructor's in an over-emphasis on business value creation though he acknowledged a much broader impact that entrepreneurship has had on his life.

In a stark contrast, all the eight non-business major students understood the program and its missions in a way that goes well beyond the boundaries of the business field. A sophomore sociology major illustrated this point in saying:

*"I know a lot of people may believe entrepreneurship education is only for someone who wants to start his own business and make a lot of money someday...But you know it turns out to be the other way around here. As is said on the university's website, entrepreneurship courses and workshops are available to all students across the four campuses... Business training is only part of [the program]"*.

This statement is consistent with the university's definition of entrepreneurship education. By getting all students involved in the program, the university has moved university entrepreneurship education beyond the business school and has adopted a much wider perspective of entrepreneurship entirely different from business education.

The responses from the non-business major students expose another difference between the program and business education—making social change and innovation to benefit society in general. For example, a senior computer science major discussed his dream of creating a new video game:

*"It is like nobody thinks of the game or the game design in that way, being kind of the way I will push it towards. For me, the entrepreneurship is doing something new; doing something like everybody says that I've never thought of it."*

Despite designing a brand-new video game that might produce business profits, the respondent stressed concern with and enjoyment of the innovation process. It is of great significance to note that the theme of making social change and innovation was also interpreted and elaborated by the four instructors as a unique way of living. That is to say, the non-business major students perceived the program and its missions in the same way as their instructors did. By either taking relevant entrepreneurship courses or coming across the website information on the program, the non-business major students have been affected by the program to understand entrepreneurship from a much broader perspective.

Like the instructors, the non-business major students also dismissed the instrumental tendency underlying in the objectives of the program. Nevertheless, their perceptions of entrepreneurship courses and the program differed from the instructors' in emphasizing problem solving through innovation rather than making social impacts through an entrepreneurial mindset. They all asserted that entrepreneurial spirit would enable them to recognize problems and seek unique ways to solve them. For instance, a graduate student majoring in social justice discussed how entrepreneurship can advance her research on racial and ethnic inequality:

*"Getting involved in [the program] has reminded me to keep trying alternative theories and methods from multiple different disciplines... It just allows me to go much more trans-disciplinary."*

Entrepreneurship, as she described, can enable her to pursue a unique Tran's disciplinary approach to her research topic.

Unlike applying entrepreneurship to non-business areas, utilizing entrepreneurship in the business field, according to these students, inevitably involves for-profit motivations or considerations. Another graduate student majoring in social justice drew a clear line between the use of entrepreneurship in non-business fields and that in the business field:

*"In either the for-profit or non-profit sense, I would say the definition [of entrepreneurship] remains unchanged. The real difference is that, in the for-profit sense, it goes with deliberate economic calculations, but in the much broader social sense, with no for-profit consideration."*

A graduate student majoring in communications touched upon the difference as well:

*"The division of labor fundamentally decides different tasks different people specialize in... Businessmen specialize in maximizing economic interests, but our social entrepreneurs are good at producing non-economic benefits."*

Their discussions on the difference actually complicate the instructors' discussion on making social impacts through promoting an entrepreneurial mindset in creating a personal life plan. While the instructors advocate leveraging entrepreneurship to advancing the overall well-being of an individual's life in general, the non-business major students specifically highlight how applying entrepreneurship to business and non-business fields can cause two completely different outcomes to both individuals and communities. As the two graduate students discussed, business entrepreneurs produce economic benefits, but social entrepreneurs create non-economic impacts.

In general, the analysis above reveals that the students perceived the program and its objectives differently while experiencing entrepreneurship education through either taking relevant courses or being exposed to the university's propaganda. The business school students' perceptions of the program and its objectives are largely consistent with the old, narrower perspective of entrepreneurship. For them, entrepreneurship remains a field primarily occupied by business entrepreneurs and the affects it has on non-business fields appears to be marginalized. In contrast, the non-business major students' perceptions are similar to the instructors' in adopting a new, broader understanding of entrepreneurship and dismissing any economic consideration. Further, these students slightly differ from their instructors in focusing more on problem solving through entrepreneurship. They complicate the instructors' arguments concerning the impacts of entrepreneurship upon business and non-business fields respectively. Given the nearly same influences that the program and the instructors imposed upon these students, it would be necessary to explore why their perceptions tend to vary widely.

### REASONS FOR THE GAP

Unlike prior studies with a sole focus on relatively static factors such as course content, academic background, and similar issues, this analysis was particularly interested in the dynamic process in which social interactions impact the effectiveness and efficiency of education innovation initiatives. Also, the researcher attempted to shed light on the social context where the program is implemented. Informed by active audience theories, the students and the instructors are active interpreters of the complicated influences caused by the struggle between the broader perspective of entrepreneurship and the narrower one. The new, broader perspective of

entrepreneurship influenced them through the university's implementation of the program, but they evidently did not interpret the influence in the same way. Such variation in their interpretations implies that the old and new concepts of entrepreneurship co-exist in the social context of the program.

Analysis of the business major students' responses revealed that the old, narrower perspective of entrepreneurship was still pervasive in popular culture such that students, especially those from the business school, may still restrict their perceptions of the new entrepreneurial university to the business field. In light of active audience theories, they decoded and re-interpreted the influence of the new, broader approach to entrepreneurship in a resisted way so that their discussions on entrepreneurship did not always correspond to the university's (Hall, 1981). Their viewpoints were deeply rooted in their common career goal of being a successful business entrepreneur. Undoubtedly, this goal derives from their past life experiences where the old, narrower definitions of entrepreneurship are prevalent. As is indicated in the narratives above, the students mentioned that they enrolled in the business school and took entrepreneurship course(s) to continue chasing their career dreams.

The data did reveal another perspective on the origins of student's views on entrepreneurship in that there were a few other business major students who ascribed their ideas of entrepreneurship to the influences of the mass media where the narrower perspective of entrepreneurship thrives as well:

*"My understanding of entrepreneurship almost comes [entirely] from the mass media... [It] would tell you that business is pretty cool... Sometimes, a well-known businessman would say, 'Come on! Starting your business can make you as wealthy as I am.' This would motivate you to keep going entrepreneurial."*

This narrative indicates that the mass media associates entrepreneurship closely with the business world and projects a stereotypical understanding of entrepreneurship limited to a business-centered perspective. To put it more broadly, this restrictive influence combines with some business major students' responses above, revealing that instrumental thinking urges individuals to maximize wealth creation through economic self-sufficiency.

Though most business students marginalize non-business fields to the peripheral edge of entrepreneurship, one of them suggested that talking with the researcher had inspired him to take more seriously applying entrepreneurship to non-business areas:

*"I have to change what I said a little bit. I should not say that entrepreneurship cannot be applied to any non-business field... Entrepreneurial spirits can definitely be used anywhere you like, but entrepreneurship is absolutely about business... about making profits. No business can survive without making a profit."*

This response suggests the possibility that the new, broader viewpoint of entrepreneurship influenced the student's perception. Nevertheless, it also focuses more on the resiliency of the impacts imposed by the old, narrower perspective of entrepreneurship. Similar to O'Connor's (2013) reconceptualization of entrepreneurship, this resiliency serves as another example to illustrate that the old, narrower concept of entrepreneurship has been disguised as a new, broader one while being expanded to new, non-business contexts. Namely, it is only the same concept being applied to a new context.

In contrast, the non-business major students and the instructors were far more willing to embrace the new, broader conceptions advocated by the university. In light of Hall's (1981) theories on the three hypothetical decoding-encoding positions, they adopted a dominant-hegemonic encoding/decoding approach to interpret the new, broader perspective of

entrepreneurship. To a large degree, they agreed with the university's advocacy for applying entrepreneurial principles to both business and non-business fields.

It was also necessary to find that they simultaneously developed and practiced a negotiated strategy of encoding/decoding to reinterpret the influences of the program. As discussed earlier, the implementation of the program constituted an essential part of the university's efforts to create new revenue streams in the wake of the global financial crisis. As a result, it involved an instrumental pursuit of acquiring funds through incorporating the new, broader perspective of entrepreneur in the university's educational policy implementation. However, this instrumental influence was found in neither the non-business major students' perceptions nor the instructors' perceptions. They did not adhere to the instrumental orientation underlying in the university's program delivery.

Lastly, it is worthwhile to point out that there were salient differences between the instructors' perceptions of entrepreneurship and the non-business major students' though they were generally proponents of the new, broader perspective of entrepreneurship. While the instructors emphasized how the entrepreneurial spirit can help people to plan their professional and personal lives, the students stressed the process of making social change and innovation as a central component of entrepreneurship. This disparity just serves as another example to illustrate the students' use of the negotiated strategy of encoding/decoding to selectively learn from their instructors.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the limited and non-representative nature of the sample from which this research was drawn, the data analysis nonetheless generates some intriguing and significant findings that can serve as hypotheses for future investigations. By comparing the students' perceptions of entrepreneurship education and instructors', the researcher found that the business school students adopted a business-centered approach to entrepreneurship, but the others agreed on a much broader perspective. As Van Ewijk and Al-Aomar (2016) also suggest, the diverging influence entrepreneurship education had on students' perceptions in this case is a gap in the academic field of entrepreneurship education that would benefit from future research. This study identified this gap, and in so doing could help school administrators to improve entrepreneurship education strategies and policies. In addition, the openness of one business major student to the expanded notion of entrepreneurship once getting to know the program's objectives through the interview, suggests the educational and reflexive nature of social science research as well as the possibility of expanding students' understanding through more intentional communication of the program's objectives.

Other factors offering possible explanations for the competing perceptions of the program can be attributed to the instrumental orientation underlying in the university's policy implementation. While the business major students embraced the old, narrower concept of entrepreneurship, the instructors and the non-business major students agreed with the university's position in applying entrepreneurial ideals and concepts to nonprofit and government spheres. Active audience theories help to understand this point. The students and the instructors were active interpreters of the influences imposed by the program. By assuming different encoding/decoding positions, they reinterpreted the received messages in different ways. The business school students resisted the broader perspective of entrepreneurship promulgated by the university and their instructors. By contrast, the non-business major students



and the instructors attempted to negotiate the influence of the program, partially agreeing with the university's advocacy for the new, broader perspective.

Lastly, limitations in this study are discussed for future studies. First, due to the difficulty in recruiting research participants, the researcher had to select some courses for the sake of convenience. Additionally, only one instructor in the sample allowed the researcher to recruit research participants from her students. The other three referred their students to the study but did not allow active recruitment. All of these factors may have added some bias to participant recruitment. Future researchers may benefit from trying to recruit all student participants on their own without instructors' involvement. Second, follow-up interviews were not conducted, and for this reason, several insightful findings that emerged from the first round interviews were not sufficiently addressed. For example, it would be of great importance for future researchers to further address the question whether the business school instructors realized that some of their students had a different view of entrepreneurship from theirs. Despite these limitations, the research findings suggest hypotheses that might be examined in further research with larger and more representative samples to improve understanding of the vibrant and expanding field of entrepreneurship education.

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