

Campus Connections

Practicing, Helping and Studying Businesses

By Charlee Beasor

Butler Students Take Learning Into the Real World

Making an effort to be “green” isn’t always easy. More people would probably recycle and grow their own organic fruits and vegetables if it were. Thanks to a company started by Butler University students, Indianapolis area residents now have the benefits of compost for a reasonable price – and all they have to do is keep their kitchen scraps.

Back to Earth Compost, led by Butler junior Thorn Murphy, provides its customers with a bin and trash bag for their compostable waste. It is picked up once a week and turned into compost on the Butler campus; after a 10-week cycle, the compost is returned to the customers as garden fertilizer.

Though he says he’s not overly environmental, Murphy believes in the mission of Back to Earth Compost. Still, as a busy college student, why would he elect to run a composting business?

The answer is simple: It’s a class project.

The class, known as the Real Business Experience, focuses on experiential learning for sophomores to create their own business plans. The first semester has the students working in teams to create a business model, which is eventually presented to a financing board that can approve up to \$5,000 for the operation.

The second semester allows the students, with the assistance of a business mentor, to implement the plan and run the company.

“It’s as much of a real model as we can possibly make it within the constraints of a semester,” course coordinator Dick Halstead says. “We ask the students to take a viable plan and go out and actually execute the business.”

Halstead notes that at the end of the year all students present their business exit strategy, though some decide to sell their business to incoming students. Murphy, for example, is the second CEO of Back to Earth Compost, having purchased the business from creator Conner Burt.

At least one group of students decided to keep its business following graduation. The owners of Strike a Pose have taken their class project and turned it into a part of their post-graduation livelihoods. The company rents out a 16-person capacity mobile photo booth for various events such as weddings, reunions and proms.

But Halstead explains that entrepreneurship isn’t the point of the program.

“We’re not looking to grow the next Google or Microsoft. This isn’t a curriculum in entrepreneurship for college,” he stresses.

Butler College of Business Dean Chuck Williams shares that the Real Business Experience is just one part of the school’s education efforts.

“At Butler, every undergrad gets a great liberal arts education and a professional education. At the College of Business, they get a great business education. ‘Real Life. Real Business’ means our students also learn business by experiencing business,” he describes.

Murphy agrees: “This is the most beneficial class I’ve had at Butler so far. In no other class are you going to interact with people in the business world. It’s all about selling yourselves and your project.”



Conner Burt is creator of Back to Earth Compost, one of the businesses formed by Butler University students.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Dick Halstead and Chuck Williams, Butler University, at www.butler.edu/cob
Thorn Murphy, Back to Earth Compost, at tmurphy@butler.edu

Female Business Owners Key to New Initiative

Though an initiative at Saint Mary's College in South Bend benefits the school's business students, its main target is local female entrepreneurs.

The Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative (WEI) works on behalf of local business owners and women who dream of starting their own companies by providing business and financial education services, as well as support.

Susan Vance, the professor in charge of the academic side of WEI, and Martha Smith, WEI project director and local entrepreneur, have teamed up to provide the all-female student body at Saint Mary's with an experiential knowledge of being a business owner or associate, while serving as a resource for local women.

"One of the things we're trying to do is bring more of a small business focus to the department (of business economics)," Vance explains. "We wanted to know how we could bring some academic opportunities to the students in terms of classes we might offer and how we might interact with business women in the community."

Vance says that the college applied for and received \$245,000 in funding from the Small Business Administration to support women's entrepreneurship in the South Bend area. WEI was started in early 2010.

The initiative has provided several programs, such as one on personal finance strategies, which was hosted by Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman. Seminars on tax tips and health care, as well as workshops for women seeking state certification for their businesses, also took place in 2010.

"We run the gamut from someone who's starting a business (to someone who already owns one), and we don't stop with business-related topics. Also, how to handle the personal life and mix it with business, how to keep life in balance," Smith adds.

The students are engaged by speakers – such as a recent presentation by Vera Bradley co-founder Pat Miller – and by getting involved with business owners. Smith relates a story about students who worked with a salon owner to resolve an issue that was costing the owner five extra hours of work per week.

"The students came around and solved it so they (salon workers) can do those sections in a couple of minutes. It was a huge success," Smith declares.

A March 16 resource fair at the college is geared toward minority- and women-owned businesses. Previously, those interested in such programs would have had to travel to Indianapolis.

"The under-resourced have aspiring ideas as much as anybody else and letting them know we're here for them to assist in any way we can, it's one more resource available to them," Smith notes.



Saint Mary's College business student Kathleen Mills (left), worked with Sonia Stancombe, owner of Nicholas J Salon and Spa in South Bend, as part of the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Martha Smith and Susan Vance, WEI at Saint Mary's College, at WEI@stmarys.edu

Notre Dame Studies the Science of Generosity

The act of selfless giving might seem simple enough: You're probably not expecting anything, for example, in return from the homeless person on the street when you give him or her a dollar bill.

But researchers in the University of Notre Dame Science of Generosity Initiative want to know more about generosity: how it originates and spreads within social settings, how it evolves within families and what impact different religions have on such acts of kindness.

The Science of Generosity Initiative was established in 2009 with a \$5 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation. It asks the question, "Why do some people practice generosity, while others don't?"

The idea for the initiative grew out of Notre Dame sociology professor Christian Smith's research for his book, *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money*.

"While he was doing research for the book, he was interested in the question of generosity in general," comments JP Shortall, communications specialist for the initiative. "While there had



Generosity – how it evolves and its ultimate impact – is the focus of various University of Notre Dame research projects.

been lots of studies of charity and philanthropy in separate fields, there had not been a focused study on generosity. He thought it might be more effective if there was a field where people who studied these topics could come together and know what everyone else in the field was doing.”

The university has funded 14 research projects on different topics under the umbrella of generosity, including: “Causes, Manifestations and Consequences of Generosity”; “The Family Cycle of Kindness and Generosity”; “The Inherent Sociality of Giving and Altruism”; and “The Causes and Effects of Workplace Generosity.”

“There has been enough study to show that generosity is both good for those that receive it and those that perform it. We’re trying to define generosity as generally as possible – not just giving money, but giving time and attention and all sorts of things,” Shortall explains.

The initial grant was for three years, and Shortall says the plan is that the research will be completed in the summer of 2012.

One part of the study is the focus on the impact of generosity on business, something that could prove useful in this era of tight budgets.

“There’s a lot less funding for a lot of social programs, so we’re trying to find out how else generosity might function. And if some of this research provides evidence that generosity does wonders in small communities, it might encourage the business community to be more generous,” he adds.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: JP Shortall, Notre Dame Science of Generosity Initiative, at <http://generosityresearch.nd.edu>

heads up



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