The Center for Emerging Business and Entrepreneurship

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**DESCRIPTION**

The mission of the Center for Emerging Business and Entrepreneurship (“the CEBE”) is to provide GGC students with guidance and exposure regarding practical issues in business ventures. The CEBE coordinates its activities through various stakeholders to create and sustain an ecosystem of services for emerging businesses, entrepreneurship, and business development. The CEBE leverages the collective experiences of these stakeholders to support student engagement, learning, and collaborative research activities. External stakeholders with whom the CEBE collaborates include Gwinnett County, the Gwinnett County and Georgia Chambers of Commerce, the Small Business Development Center, SCORE, the Advanced Technology Development Center, Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs, The Indus Entrepreneurs, I-Corps, Gwinnett Technical College, Peach State Federal Credit Union, local schools and businesses. This list continues to grow as new partnership opportunities emerge.

The CEBE launched in 2016 in response to a steady stream of student inquiries regarding entrepreneurial activities and interests. Initially, the center received financial support through a GGC Seed Grant. In total, the CEBE has garnered nearly $12,000 in competitive funding.

The faculty who work in the center share a passion for entrepreneurship and are diverse in their educational backgrounds, with areas of expertise that include marketing, business law, and management information systems. They are also all active in their own entrepreneurial pursuits. Thus, they have ample knowledge and experience to draw upon in guiding student-entrepreneurs. Of course, as needed, the CEBE faculty consult with or refer students to other GGC faculty.

The team-based method of mentoring and the research-driven approach employed by the faculty members in developing the CEBE make the center unique in that many such centers embody a single perspective or even a single administrator’s vision for the services they provide. In contrast, the CEBE is built on the collective experiences of its directors *and* the guidance derived from an extensive study of academic literature on entrepreneurship education ecosystems. This philosophy hinges upon utilizing the resources already available within the community rather than duplicating services for the sake of keeping clientele “in-house”. Hence, the CEBE can serve many more students than if its directors were trying to avoid the many partnerships it maintains.

This collaborative approach is more efficient and, we believe, yields better outcomes for everyone. One reason other centers operate differently is because they often have different motivations. The CEBE services are available at no charge to all GGC students, regardless of their area of study. Further, unlike many accelerators or incubators, the CEBE takes no interest or ownership in students’ ventures. The focus of the center, much like that of the college overall, is to help our clientele succeed.

**SOCIETAL IMPACT**

The CEBE’s reach was initially limited to GGC students, and this made sense for a number of reasons. First, the center originally relied strictly on college funds. As a state school with public funds as its primary means of financial support, regulations require that we consider our students first. Secondly, the student body at GGC is extraordinarily diverse. In fact, *US News & World Reports* recognized the school in 2021 for boasting the most ethnically diverse student body among Southern regional colleges as well as ranking GGC among the most economically diverse schools of that type.

Furthermore, many of GGC’s students are either immigrants or among the first generation of their families to be born in the United States. Thus, many students at the school do not come from backgrounds that are typically associated with access to the kinds of social and financial capital that facilitate entry into and success in the world of entrepreneurship. This is even more reason to serve these students.

The CEBE faculty engage with students in numerous ways. The first and most frequent means of interacting with students is through individual mentoring and coaching sessions regarding their business aspirations. While business creation is the ultimate goal, students’ success has been realized in other ways, such as an audition for TV’s Shark Tank and participation in TiE’s The Young Entrepreneur contest and other events such as I-corps South’s Customer Discovery Training and the Georgia InVenture Prize Competition. In addition, the CEBE faculty advise a student organization known as The Entrepreneur Network (TEN). TEN brings greater awareness of the CEBE on campus and offers students the opportunity to learn from one another’s experiences in entrepreneurship. An added benefit, as the organization’s name implies, is for social network growth and, potentially, business development through other student entrepreneurs. Lastly, the CEBE faculty collaborate with other GGC entities to support students’ career preparation through administration of a School of Business internship program, provision of student training through the Career Readiness Council, and orchestration of a business pitch competition as part of a student-organized professional development conference known as GEAR.

Since 2018, the directors have worked to broaden the center’s reach. In keeping with the ecosystem metaphor, the CEBE has established working relationships with local middle and high schools and Gwinnett County to serve both future and past students as well as those currently enrolled at GGC. In this way, we help student entrepreneurs at all stages of their education and continue that assistance after they complete a degree. These relationships take the form of Shark Tank-style mentoring events with a local middle school and the development of programs to support high school students and educate them about the opportunity to continue their entrepreneurial pursuits at GGC upon graduating. In addition, the CEBE has contracted with the surrounding county to oversee the Gwinnett Entrepreneur Center (GEC). Through this partnership and the funding source it represents, the CEBE can now offer support not only to former GGC students but also to the broader community. As a stipulation of the grant that partially funds the Gwinnett Entrepreneur Center, it will target low-to-middle-income member businesses. The CEBE director will also direct the county center and supervise a dedicated staff member hired by the CEBE to serve as operations manager.

Through the GEC, the CEBE and Gwinnett County will provide dedicated workspace, co-working space, office utilities such as copying and printing, a physical business address, and individual business coaching to approximately 48 member businesses at any given time. Businesses will rotate in and out of the center, as each member will have an individualized graduation plan to increase the odds of business success and growth. The center will also provide educational programming and information resources to both members and the general public. Ultimately, the GEC should act as an engine for economic growth transforming both individuals’ lives and the business environment in the county and the state all while operating on a not-for-profit basis for both the school and the county. Despite the pandemic, the GEC is reviewing applications for its inaugural cohort of member businesses. With roughly 60 applications submitted, the center is on track to open its doors by the end of 2021.

Beyond these relatively local activities, the CEBE faculty endeavor to contribute to the global community through knowledge dissemination. Starting with our own efforts to utilize existing research to take an informed, intentional approach to creating our entrepreneurship education ecosystem, the faculty have developed a conceptual model that serves as a catalog of the inputs to, outputs of and stakeholders in entrepreneurship education. From this basis, the directors have continued their inquiry to establish a research agenda to assess the conceptual model and various stakeholders’ perspectives on both the model and the current trends in entrepreneurship education. Their hope is that this work will guide others engaging in similar pursuits so that, much as the CEBE aims to aide entrepreneurs for greater success in their ventures, it can assist educators in contributing to the entrepreneurship ecosystems around them. At the time of this application, the faculty have published in four conference proceedings. One paper is now under review at an academic journal while three additional projects are in progress.

**TRANSFERABILITY**

As suggested by their research, the CEBE faculty believe that their method of fostering an entrepreneurship education ecosystem is one that transfers relatively easily. Any institution can make a meaningful impact in its community through having a genuine interest in helping others realize their dream of owning their own business. Like the grant that supports the GEC, other federal funding is available for these economic development efforts. Further, collaboration with the many other stakeholders can yield resources to aspiring entrepreneurs, whether they are students or other community members, which they might never find on their own.

Most businesses fail in the nascent stages of their existence, but with guidance, education, and community support, success rates can and do improve. Increased success among small to medium enterprises drives real economic growth that can raise the standard of living for the individual entrepreneurs, their families, and the communities around them. This is the kind of change the CEBE faculty seek to bring about.