

ENTREPRENEURIAL TEACHING: AN AUC CASE

By Ashraf Sheta

The concept of entrepreneurship is not novel to the economic discipline. In fact, its role in economic development has been recognized since the early works of Adam Smith and Joseph Schumpeter. It has, of late, reached great importance at the national level in Egypt for several reasons: individuals aged 18 to 29 number 19.8 million (nearly 25 percent of the total population), 700,000 new graduates enter the labor market each year, and the public sector is no longer hiring large numbers of new graduates. At the country level, although almost 17 percent of university graduates in Egypt are involved in entrepreneurial activity, Egypt has one of the lowest penetrations of entrepreneurship education in the formal education system. Most of those starting businesses in Egypt are doing so without any formal training in the entrepreneurial process or knowhow of starting a business. The large proportion of young people making up Egypt's population gives it a strong entrepreneurial advantage. One of the main problems is how to realize and utilize the potential of these youngsters through an institutionalized educational system. So let's explore the challenges faced when teaching is the basis upon which the foundation of success is built. AUC has been a pioneer in the field since 2009 when it offered its first course in entrepreneurship, entitled Management 413. The course was followed by introducing a minor in entrepreneurship for non-business students with an introductory course under the title of Entrepreneurship 203. AUC intends also to offer a concentration in entrepreneurship in the near future. The main challenge for any instructor was and will always be how to introduce the topic of study in the most efficient and effective manner. This is to say nothing of honing an appealing pedagogy that fosters the learning process of the students as well as letting them explore their hidden skills and enhance existing ones. This problem is apparent especially in entrepreneurship education because an introduction to business and material related to business plans encompasses many business disciplines that require a comprehensive knowledge from the instructor. Another challenge is that WE NEED STARTUPS, BUT WE ALSO NEED PEOPLE WHO CAN THINK IN AN UNORTHODOX MANNER, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT ACTUALLY STARTING A BUSINESS. - HSS

- Opinion courses at AUC are taught mainly to students with little to no background in business concepts. Yet another challenge is introducing the practical insight of entrepreneurship, which is difficult with instructors without that practical experience. But one of the most compelling problems is how to deliver the course in an entrepreneurial manner that attracts attention and modifies the behavior of the students. The main outcome of the course is to unleash their entrepreneurial thinking potential. But is the main aim of entrepreneurship education to produce startups? The answer is an evident no. We need startups, but we also need people who can think in an unorthodox manner, even if they are not actually starting a business. Additionally, should a professor focus on traditional knowledge funneling or foster a participative learning and critical thinking atmosphere? With these questions in mind, several premises needed to be set to teach entrepreneurship effectively. The first premise that becomes evident is realizing that as instructors, we do not own the absolute truth and will never be able to give dichotomous answers to most of the questions asked by students. The concept of a liberal arts education becomes ever more important in this field where the first thing an educator must convey is that there are no right or wrong answers. Most answers to inquiries are contingent on the situation. This foundation helps students think freely without exerting the effort to find the supposedly right answers. The second premise is to agree that we are obliged to respect opinions even if they seem farfetched. The methodology for which a class is taught does not have to lay on an infallible foundation set out before classes begin, but can be built as one goes with the interjections of seemingly alien points of view that teach students to think more broadly. The third premise is to convey the fact that the instructor does not monopolize the knowledge transfer in class and that contribution is taken into consideration and rewarded. The fourth is to let students realize that the course is not only related to entrepreneurship as a scientific concept, but about discovering and fostering their entrepreneurial skills. An extensive presentation and opinion pitch helps develop students' critical thinking capabilities. The fifth and last premise emphasizes a learning experience and not a dry academic course, meaning there is always room for improvement. In the AUC setting, there are no exams

and pop quizzes. Students write -HSS Courtesy of AUC Opinion up a case or develop a complete business plan throughout the course that they submit in exchange for constructive feedback before handing in their final projects at the end of the course. The best of the bunch are shared with other class participants. With all of these foundations put in place, the atmosphere of the class becomes more relaxed through fostering inclusion and participation and hosting the maximum number of ideas. But while we can set these premises as the foundation for courses, we also need to translate them into operational action. This brings out of the woodwork another major challenge, with students demanding knowledge as well as fun and entertainment in class. Experience has taught us that there are some key things that will maximize learning as well as entertainment in class. The first is to diversify, offering a set of different activities throughout the course. For example, group presentations enhance team building as well as the presentation skills of participants. Inviting keynote entrepreneurs to present their experience in class helps develop an understanding of startup dynamics hands on. Class debates with teams on varying sides of an argument build not only presentation skills but critical thinking and that there is more than one side to an argument. The second is to involve. Instructors often use Powerpoint presentations to explain the concepts under study. Unfortunately, this may not be a suitable method for the varying types of learners in class. A better method is deductive reasoning, which presents a concept as an abstract and then through discussion, students understand and define it more clearly. Question and answer sessions hone ideas much more effectively than slides on a board, and student involvement is eventually rewarded in grades. The third is to innovate. Don't stick to one visual technique in class. Additional tools like mind maps and schematic maps have had excellent results. Even analogical drawings can be part of the learning process. Students should be encouraged to draw how they visualize a certain concept, helping to internalize the knowledge they are gaining throughout the course in a simple, yet novel way. Videos can also be introduced to maximize learning. Even videos that are not completely about the topic under study can be good to reflect and reenergize. The fourth is to compete. Providing small incentives for students for contribution and participation is especially useful. One of the most important exercises used in the AUC example was presenting a cup for the best case at the end of the course. Non-candidate contestants were involved in the judging process and the result fostered the learning experience of the participants and the contestants as well. The fifth and final aspect of teaching an effective class is to play. Learning by playing is one of the most effective methodologies for learning, particularly when it comes to entrepreneurship, which involves quite a bit of creativity. Financial planning games and guerrilla marketing challenges can be a good start here, and students should always be encouraged to suggest other ways to gamify the learning experience. With all the knowledge gained from experiences and experiments in entrepreneurial teaching comes one important factor: there can be fun as well as learning in class. Students' attention, discipline and entertainment, although superficially disparate, can be consolidated. And while most of the foundational premises can be applied to teaching most social science topics, they are key when teaching entrepreneurial business. The only missing link in teaching entrepreneurship is drumming in the most important advice an entrepreneur can be given: love what you do. ABR