

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Development of an Alternative Spring Break Experience Focusing on Social Entrepreneurship and Discernment

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Overview of Alternative Spring Break Experience

This alternative spring break experience is designed to have equal numbers of students from Social Work and Management/Entrepreneurship working together in pairs on a social entrepreneurship project over the course of the week of spring break. The joining of students from both departments represents the two aspects of the field of social entrepreneurship, which is typically defined as the application of entrepreneurial principles to the achievement of social objectives. By having students of each discipline working together to help achieve social goals, each will have the opportunity to learn from the other, while producing a beneficial outcome in the social sector. The students will be housed at a retreat location for the week, away from their typical daily environments in the Cincinnati area or on campus, so they are fully immersed in the program for its duration.

Potential Projects

Students may be assigned to work on a social entrepreneurship project associated with alleviating a social problem in an underprivileged context such as a neighborhood or community which is in need of some support to achieve a desired end. They may also be assigned to work with local entrepreneurs in need of social and entrepreneurial expertise to assist in getting their businesses off the ground. Another alternative would be to provide support and assistance for a nonprofit organization in seeking funds and/or in assessing its performance. Projects for at least the first year of the program will be in the Cincinnati area. Nominations for the project will be sought from local organizations and campus sources.

Potential Structure of the Alternative Spring Break

Initial Weekend

Saturday and Sunday preceding the social entrepreneurship project will be spent in workshops and events to increase teambuilding and self awareness among the participants. Potential activities include a Strengths Assessment Workshop conducted by Tim Kloppenborg of the Management and Entrepreneurship Department. This workshop would help students develop personal consciousness of their strengths as individuals and present an opportunity for them to share this information with others. This would be particularly helpful as an initial exercise in preparation for the discernment component of the program. Other potential workshops for the initial weekend period include (1) an introduction to the social entrepreneurship project for the upcoming week, (2) material and activities related to social entrepreneurship and (3) speakers and activities regarding the process of discernment. Evening hours would be spent in activities encouraging participants to become familiar with each other's backgrounds and interests, as well as discussions of anticipated outcomes of the program.

Weekdays

The tentative structure of the weekday time for the students' alternative spring break is as follows:

Morning: Classroom time on social entrepreneurship, discernment, project site

Afternoon: Work at project site

Dinner: Debrief and discussion of day's activities; guest speakers

Evening: Time for discernment journaling and group discussion

Discernment Component of Program

Because of the nature of the program, focusing on accomplishing social objectives through the use of entrepreneurial techniques, the Jesuit process of discernment is a complementary activity that will help students reflect on what they are learning and how it may be changing their views of what is important to them in their lives. Discernment can take on a variety of forms, but according to the writings of Elizabeth Liebert in The Way of Discernment (2001), discernment literally means discrimination; in this case, faithful discrimination related to decision making. Discernment is a process of assessing how one's desires and decisions fit into God's life plan for us as individuals. "Because our identity is formed in part through our decisions, the making of decisions is actually a privileged moment for growing in discipleship" (Liebert, 2001: 7). The process of discernment provides a semi-structured means to examine one's life experiences and decisions in a way that attends to the wishes of God for us. To be effective, discernment relies on noticing and awareness of one's surroundings, which is an avenue for students to incorporate their social entrepreneurship experiences into their personal discernment journeys.

A journal will be designed for use during the program which will guide students through a series of thought provoking discernment questions that they can use to reflect on the day's experiences as well as the decisions they face in their lives. In addition to personal journaling, group discernment activities that involve sharing individual observations (in a way that is comfortable for each person) will help bring participants closer to each other and provide an opportunity to learn more about the discernment process.

Conclusion

The social entrepreneurship alternative spring break program is designed to provide a unique dual opportunity for students: to work on a meaningful project that incorporates partnering with a student from a sister discipline at Xavier as well as to gain personal awareness of their life direction through the Jesuit tradition of discernment.