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Entrepreneur Identifies Need for Practical Small Business Academy; St. Petersburg College Turns Idea into a Reality

A business case analysis addressing how an entrepreneurial academy was created and the technology used to support it.

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An Augusoft Strategic Partner

With 10 primary learning sites and many smaller venues in Florida's Pinellas County, St. Petersburg College (SPC) attracts approximately 65,000 credit and non-credit students each year. Located in the most densely populated county in the Southeast, SPC serves a community of 1 million people and offers two-year programs and a limited number of four-year programs. In January 2009, SPC's Corporate Training Department implemented Lumens, Augusoft's web-hosted Lifelong Learning Management System, to harness state-of-the-art Internet technologies that enabled the department to eliminate repetitive and time-consuming tasks so staff can focus on more critical activities. Part 1 of this case study describes how the Small Business Practical Entrepreneurship Academy got started, and Part 2 describes how Augusoft Lumens assisted SPC with this program.



Part 1

Genesis of an Idea

In 2007, a local entrepreneur approached James Olliver, provost of SPC's Seminole/eCampus, with a new idea. The entrepreneur, who prefers to remain anonymous, saw a need for a practical entrepreneurship program that would help people in Pinellas County who were interested in starting businesses.



St. Petersburg College, Seminole/eCampus

Olliver was intrigued. "We are a very entrepreneurial institution in terms of how we operate," he says, "but up to that point we hadn't done much in terms of offering entrepreneurship education. The entrepreneur worked with a group of small business owners and saw how people would come up with a business idea but didn't have a clue about some aspects of operating their

business. He also happened to have a son right out of college who had decided he wanted to start his own business.

"The entrepreneur told me our community had a need that wasn't being met, and he had an idea that he would like to run by some folks for a practical entrepreneurship program. He wanted a hands-on, nuts and bolts program that would connect people who have business ideas with people with business expertise. He also envisioned having mentors for participants. He said he had approached a number of people in the community about this, but he didn't think he was being heard. He wanted us to act quickly because he felt there was a need for quick action."

Olliver soon brought together a group from the Seminole Chamber of Commerce and SPC's Corporate Training Department for a meeting with the entrepreneur about his vision of an entrepreneurship academy. "He wrote a check for \$25,000 on the spot!" recalls Olliver. "His passion led us to move forward on the need he had identified."

Formulating a Plan

The group considered initiating a credit course, but it soon became clear that they needed to think differently. According to Olliver, it was about how to meet the needs of the people in the community, so they looked at this matrix:

- Need for a rapid response: The framework you have to go through to offer a credit course wouldn't fit with a rapid response.
- Audience: Did they want or need college credit? Some of them might, but most people just needed the skills and information a course could provide.
- Potential for synergies later: Could a course be structured in a way that it could be morphed into a credit course fairly quickly?

"We ultimately decided we could fit this program into our Corporate Training Department in terms of logistical support, and we'd be able to do that faster than we could if we tried to create something on the credit side," Olliver says.

Program Outline

After a year of planning that involved SPC and the Seminole Chamber, and with strong support from the local Economic Development Corporation and the City of Seminole, the pilot program for the Small Business Practical Entrepreneurship Academy was launched with 20 students in the fall of 2008.

The 15-week program consists of weekly three-hour sessions with a focused curriculum that takes students from the idea stage through to the completion of a capstone presentation suitable for potential investors or business partners. Participants receive grades based on the quality of their business plans and on their capstone presentation.

The committee spent about six months working on the curriculum and then it was fine-tuned by Eric Paul Engle, executive director of Ketchcom Development, a local consulting firm specializing in professional and organizational communication development. Engle serves as the instructor for the course, which focuses on applied resources and practices for creatively, constructively, and opportunistically addressing paperwork,

Customer: St. Petersburg College

Location: St. Petersburg, FL, United States

Programs: Entrepreneur Program
Seminole/eCampus

Corporate Training Program, The EpiCenter

Website: spcollege.augusoft.net

Students Serviced: 65,000 Credit and
Non-credit Students

ERP: Oracle PeopleSoft®

Augusoft Product: Lumens ENT

Augusoft Services: Online Class
Integration and Customized ERP Integration

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James Olliver, Provost
Seminole/eCampus

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James Connolly, Director of
Corporate Training

products, services and people. Specifically, the curriculum covers:

- Business planning
- Legal
- Finance
- Employee management
- Marketing
- Disaster planning
- Technology
- Capstone presentation

Mentoring and networking are also key elements of the program. “In addition to subject matter experts, volunteer mentors are a key part of the equation,” says Olliver. “The nature of the mentorship is such that the mentors attend almost all of the classes and really became friends of their mentees. In addition, we put a lot of focus nurturing community-oriented entrepreneurial relationships through networking. We obtained additional funding that enabled us to offer every participant a membership in the Chamber. We also had a mixer with the Chamber.”

Making the Numbers Work

Knowing that many would-be participants are out of work and may not have a lot of funds, the program team worked to make the Academy free or nearly free by offering scholarships paid for by the original program funding. The cost for the Academy is just \$280. “We are able to offer a quality program at an affordable price, but still have it be revenue generating for the Corporate Training Department,” says SPC’s Corporate Training Director James Connolly.

“It took a true group effort to make this happen,” Olliver says. “In addition to our external partners, we had internal partners at the college. Both the credit and non-credit sides have been able to promote this program and support it as something that serves the needs of the community. We also worked with all of our partners to identify students for the course. And the Chamber of Commerce co-marketed the program with us.”

In addition to the initial funding donation, SPC obtained Federal stimulus money that was earmarked for entrepreneurship. This money came via the local workforce board, WorkNet Pinellas.

With the pilot producing positive results, SPC and its Chamber partner opted to run a second session beginning in January 2009; that program attracted 12 participants. In the fall of 2009, another 22 participants were enrolled in the Academy.

According to Olliver, based on the success of the Academy, SPC has made a commitment to take its entrepreneurship education efforts several steps further. In January 2010, SPC hired a Business Chair on the Seminole Campus who has her MBA concentration in entrepreneurship and who will be developing credit curriculum in the area. Also on board in another new position is an Entrepreneurship Center Specialist who will provide the mentoring, linkages and events/activities components of the equation.

Part 2

Enter Augusoft Lumens

When it came time to register students for the second Academy, SPC was able to take advantage of its new capability to enroll participants online thanks to its investment in Lumens, Augusoft’s web-hosted Lifelong Learning Management System. Lumens is being used for all of SPC’s Corporate Training Department’s courses.



St. Petersburg College Corporate Training, The EpiCenter

“The first Small Business Practical Entrepreneurship Academy was run under PeopleSoft®, our campus-wide ERP solution, but by January 2009, we were able to enroll people using Lumens,” says Connolly. “When

a student registers, that student is then populated into the course and has access to information that is posted online that is specific to the Academy, such as extracurricular reading and the students' capstone projects.

"Having the capability to do online registration has been a significant improvement for us," says Connolly. "Bottom line, we now have a seamless system that has allowed us to average 75 percent monthly online enrollments. Previously we did no online enrollment. This has freed up the staff to complete other tasks, limited the number of staff needed to answer phones, except for answering questions, and shows us daily our cash flow status.

"To implement Lumens, we used our full-time staff on a part-time basis over the course of three months for training and implementation," reports Connolly. "This time also included customization and testing with our Administrative Information Systems Group (AIS) here at St. Petersburg College to ensure Lumens worked with our PeopleSoft system. By working closely with the personnel at Augustsoft the process of training and implementation was convenient and relatively smooth."

Benchmarks
Before Lumens: 0% online registrations
With Lumens: An average of 75%

Major Benefits

According to Connolly, the top three significant benefits SPC has gained from using Lumens are:

- Having a shopping cart allows for collecting revenue immediately in open enrollment courses.
- The contract training module allows for the use of tracking revenue by client.
- Within this framework all Corporate Training customers are in the same system, which links to the college's PeopleSoft database.

"Another plus is that the Lumens reporting system allows us to track account receivables, custom financials, course management, instructor or consultant payroll, and student enrollments," says Connolly.

Lumens has also helped SPC's Corporate Training Department meet its goal of not operating any courses at a loss. "By using a 30 percent productivity rule, we jettisoned several open enrollment courses that did not meet the established criteria," says Connolly. "From the Lumens perspective, the reports that we run assist us in making those decisions."

SPC also uses Lumens for enrolling participants in several courses it offers in conjunction with partner organizations. These include the U.S. Green Building Council/Florida Gulf Coast Chapter, the SolarSource Institute and the World Instructor Training, which offers courses for fitness professionals.

More Sales and Greater Productivity

Like Connolly, SPC's Anita George is very enthusiastic about Lumens. George is program development and marketing manager for the Corporate Training Program. She lobbied long and hard with school administrators to be able to adopt Lumens as her department's business registration system. Since Lumens was put in place, George and her staff of salespeople have reaped big benefits in terms of a streamlined sales process and increased productivity.

"Because we do contract training with clients, we do things by company name," George explains. "The academic system that follows individual students does nothing for us. We had a lot of disparate systems trying to run this particular program because we didn't fit the college model. Lumens eliminated a lot of duplication of effort, gave us the ability to do the contract training side and could accumulate information by the company versus just the students."

George reports that she was able to eliminate three different databases—one for instructors, one for room management, and one for the Web site—and now has all this information in one central place, thanks to Lumens.

“Because I deal primarily with our sales organization and the contract training, I just love having information by client,” she says. “The second big benefit of Lumens is the ability to do everything—whether it’s contract training or open enrollment public class—all in the same system using the same process. It has streamlined things considerably.

“Lumens gives us more time to sell,” she adds. “Our sales staff is not spending a lot of time on the paperwork side and spending more time selling.”

New Uses Ahead

“Prior to the purchase of Lumens, I was tasked with streamlining the Corporate Training Department,” says Connolly. “The expense of Lumens coupled with the

rightsizing of the department made the purchase a ‘no brainer.’ The system matches the business model our corporate customers expect and what was needed for the non-credit departments within the college.

“We’re looking forward to using Lumens to enroll the 1,100 students we have coming to our College of Kids Camp this summer,” says Connolly. “We can have parents register online, and we won’t have to have all the paperwork that’s been involved in the past.”

Learn More

To learn more about how SPC got its Small Business Practical Entrepreneurship Academy off the ground and how Lumens benefits this program and the school’s Corporate Training Department, select the free webinar entitled “Successfully Leverage Your Entrepreneurship Program and Continuing Education to Boost Enrollment and Community Relations” at augusoft.net/webinar. To learn more about Augusoft, please visit augusoft.net or call (763) 331-8300.

About NACCE: The National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE) fosters economic development by serving as the hub for the dissemination and integration of knowledge and successful practices regarding entrepreneurship education and student business incubation. As a membership association, NACCE helps community colleges nationwide link their traditional role of workforce development with entrepreneurial development. The results are innovative programs and courses that advance economic growth and prosperity in the communities served by the colleges. NACCE members benefit from: an annual conference and symposium, quarterly journal, monthly webinars and podcasts, dynamic membership list-serve, grant proposal tips specific to entrepreneurial endeavors, entrepreneurship curricula and syllabi for faculty via shared web resources, and beginning and sustaining entrepreneurship and student business incubation program guides. NACCE continues to experience phenomenal growth, and now has over 1,000 individual and institutional members. To learn more about becoming a member or to make a tax deductible donation to this important work, visit nacce.com or call (413) 306-3131.

About Augusoft: Augusoft, Inc. the leader in non-credit education software, develops and maintains Lumens - the first entirely web-hosted Lifelong Learning Management System. Augusoft Lumens is designed for the unique needs of continuing, community, corporate education and workforce development programs in the US and Canada. Complementing institution-wide ERP solutions, Lumens increases online registrations, streamlines business processes, reduces overhead and provides easy data analysis with proven ROI.



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