

# A Surge in Entrepreneurial Thinking

All manner of college disciplines — from engineering to the arts — have incorporated entrepreneurship into their teaching.

By Amy Martinez

Andrea Little had her “aha!” moment while working as a nutrition educator for the Florida Department of Health after college. With a bachelor’s degree in food science and human nutrition from the University of Florida, she counseled needy families in the Women, Infant and Children’s program.

Meant to help low-income people stretch their food budgets, WIC serves a specific clientele — pregnant women, new moms and children up to age 5. They get a debit card that they use to purchase an allowed amount of food at grocery stores.

The WIC program is particular about what recipients can buy with the debit

cards. A loaf of whole wheat bread is OK, for example, as long as it contains no added ingredients such as raisins and nuts. Dry beans and corn tortillas must be in 16-ounce bags only. WIC recipients can buy mozzarella, but not if it contains whole or fat-free milk.

Clients often complained to Little, who was making plans to attend medical school, that shopping at a large grocery store felt like a scavenger hunt. Even if the store’s shelves carried signs designating WIC-approved items, merchandise frequently was misplaced, and Spanish speakers struggled with English-only labels.

Whenever WIC clients inadvertently picked an unauthorized item, they either had to pay for it with cash or leave it behind — “or run and try to find the right thing and come back and everyone is looking at them,” says Little, a native of Dunedin in Pinellas County. “If I met with 30 people a day, probably 17 of them had at least one complaint.”

Little did research online and learned about small grocery stores that stock only WIC-eligible items. She noted that there were WIC-only stores in California, Texas and elsewhere in Florida, but not in Tampa.

As Little began medical school at the University of South Florida in 2011, she opened a WIC specialty store called 1Apple Market in Tampa with Hector Angus, who was pursuing a bachelor’s degree in information technology at USF. They figured they could both make money and have a positive impact on people’s lives by simplifying WIC shopping.



As they started their business, Andrea Little and Hector Angus took entrepreneurship courses at USF, joined a startup incubator and participated in business plan competitions.





Little and Angus opened 1Apple Market in Plant City, which sells only WIC-approved items to low-income families.

"There's no reason that someone shopping with government assistance should feel bad about it," says Angus, who had managed a chain of cell phone stores in central Florida. "They're just trying to feed their families."

A decade ago, Angus and Little probably would have had to undertake their venture more or less on their own. In starting 1Apple Market, however, they got significant help through a source that's playing an increasing role in fostering and supporting entrepreneurs — the university. The two took business courses at USF, joined a startup incubator for student-led ventures and participated in regional business plan competitions.

The story's the same elsewhere in Florida: Over the past decade, universities have had to respond to a growing demand for entrepreneurship-related courses from students of all majors, including engineering, health sciences, education and the arts. The schools have introduced classes on creativity, writing a business plan, marketing new technologies, product design and financing strategies.

Meanwhile, more programs aim to help students make the transition from academia to business, including internships and fellowships, pitch competitions and networking events. Startup infrastructure has expanded as well — business incubators and accelerators to connect

budding entrepreneurs with experienced professionals, subject matter experts and industry leaders.

Two years ago, USF opened its Student Innovation Incubator, drawing participants from the colleges of engineering, business, arts and sciences, medicine and global sustainability. The first round consisted of more than a dozen student-led ventures, including 1Apple Market.

Michael Fountain, director of the Center for Entrepreneurship at USF, says creating successful startups is only one goal of the program. He sees a need for students to have an entrepreneurial mindset even if they don't plan on starting their own companies.

"Intrapreneurs" who take initiative, solve problems and collaborate are in demand at large corporations, he says. What's more, entrepreneurial classes can provide liberal arts graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to be "solopreneurs" — those who create their own jobs based on their talents. USF offers two undergraduate minors and a master's degree in entrepreneurship, as well as several dual degree programs and a certificate in entrepreneurship.

"We probably teach 800 undergraduate students a year. The fastest growth is from students in arts and sciences and education," Fountain says. "When I ask them, 'Why are you taking these courses?'"

the vast majority say, 'Because our parents want us to have basic entrepreneurial skills that we can use regardless of what discipline we go into.'

#### Economic trends

Indeed, the growth in entrepreneurship education statewide is part of a bigger trend fueled by U.S. economic changes. The dot-com boom of the 1990s brought a rush of new money to young technology companies, raising student interest in startup careers. By 2008, college campuses in the United States were offering more than 5,000 entrepreneurship courses, according to the Kauffman Foundation.

The Great Recession only accelerated the trend as students saw their parents get laid off, and traditional entry-level jobs fell away. Students increasingly looked "to their own talents and 'personal brands,' not to corporate paychecks, as the basis for a sturdy future," wrote the Kauffman Foundation in a 2013 report titled "Entrepreneurship Education Comes of Age on Campus."

Today, more than 400,000 students annually take courses in entrepreneurship, and nearly 9,000 faculty members teach it, according to the report. Of about 1,250 business incubators nationwide, a third are at universities, up from a fifth in 2006.

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institution that gives you a complete retirement package is just not there," says Randy Blass, executive director of the Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship at Florida State University. "Students are charting their own course."

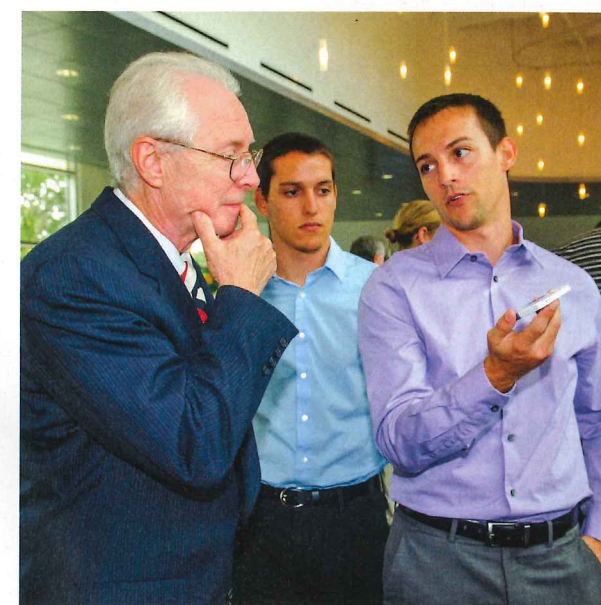
In 2011, FSU embarked on a mission to become an "entrepreneurial university," calling for an entrepreneur-in-residence at every college. "Entrepreneurship is not the exclusive domain of business schools," Blass says.

This fall, the University of Central Florida will add a two-course entrepreneurship sequence for select students across multiple disciplines to increase their exposure to different talents and expertise, says Cameron Ford, academic director of the university's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

"We just believe this is how important things get done in any kind of work environment," he says. "I love our business students, but they don't know how to design or build anything other than business services, just like engineering students are not trained to sell or market stuff."

A year ago, 1Apple Market faced its toughest challenge yet when a new land-

Randy Blass, executive director of FSU's Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship: "The old model of graduating from college and going to work for a paternalistic institution that gives you a complete retirement package is just not there."



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— Michael Fountain, director of the Center for Entrepreneurship, USF

lord began altering the store's structure without obtaining necessary permits, Angus says. He and Little turned to USF's Student Innovation Incubator to connect them with people who could provide real-world business advice.

Being a part of USF also has given them an edge with pregnancy-care clinics and other community organizations that can help spread the word about 1Apple Market to potential customers.

"We'll say, 'we're one of the inaugural companies at USF's business incubator, and we'd like to network with you.' They hear the name 'USF,' and they say, 'sure, why not?'" Angus says.

Little is pursuing not only a medical degree, but also an MBA. She plans to get her M.D. next year and become a plastic surgeon, hoping to eventually apply the lessons learned from 1Apple Market to her own medical practice.

She says the store is profitable — and available for the right price.

"Both of us are getting toward the end of our studies. If we find the right person who wants to come in and carry it on, that would be great," she says.