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## Reflections on Applied Social Enterprise Education: Using Weaver's Social Enterprise Directory to Teach Social Entrepreneurship

### Introduction

While there are competing definitions of social entrepreneurship (Mair & Marti, 2006), the term usually refers to the process of using revenue-generating commercial activities to foster positive social change (Weaver, 2019; Luke & Chu, 2013). Social enterprises are the organizations through which this process occurs (Weaver, 2017). One of example of a social enterprise is The Women's Bean Project in Denver, Colorado in the United States. The Women's Bean Project is a nonprofit organization based in Denver, Colorado that sells gourmet beans and jewelry to the general public in order to employ and produce professional development training to chronically unemployed women (Weaver, 2020). Their goal is to break the cycle of poverty among low-income women in an effort to increase their economically self-sufficiency. While the Women's Bean Project is a nonprofit organization, social enterprises may also be for-profit businesses (e.g. or a combination of a for-profit and nonprofit organization (e.g. Newman's Own and Newman's Own Foundation) called a hybrid organization (Mitra, Kickul, Gundry, & Orr, 2019).

The flexible legal structure, revenue-generation capabilities, and the potential to combat pressing social problems have inspired a growing number of people to engage in and study social entrepreneurship. As such, social enterprise educational programs are on the rise (Mitra, Kickul, Gundry, & Orr, 2019; Murdock, Tekula, & Parra, 2013). Around the world, there are more and more examples of universities and colleges that are developing courses, full academic majors, institutes, business incubators, and student pitch competitions that focus on educating

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**Dr. Rasheda L. Weaver** is the first Assistant Professor for the new [Hynes Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Iona College](#). She conducted the first large-scale empirical study on the social, economic, and legal activities of social enterprises in the United States and is the Creator of Weaver's Social Enterprise Directory.

prospective social entrepreneurs (Murdock, Tekula, & Parra, 2013). These educational programs and initiatives aim to give students content knowledge about unique concerns in social entrepreneurship such as managing a social and economic bottom-line, determining stakeholder accountability, and general business planning (Tracey & Philips, 2007). However, practical training is also essential to training prospective entrepreneurs, of any focus, to create successful businesses (Smith & Holcomb, 2018).

In an effort to inspire and discuss more applied ways to foster social enterprise education, this article shares reflections from students and a faculty member related to the development of an educational resource called the Social Enterprise Directory. The Social Enterprise Directory is a national, online directory that provides the contact and business information for over 1,000 social enterprises across the United States. Educators and student users utilize the directory for identifying service-learning sites, field visit sites, case studies (e.g., social enterprise profiles), guest speakers for classes and events, socially conscious businesses, and employment and internship opportunities. However, this reflection article explores how the experience of developing the directory, in and of itself, is an educational and practical training experience for students. In doing so, this article speaks to previous research that suggests student entrepreneurial capabilities may be developed through engaging them in new universities and college initiatives (Lee, Kreiser, Wrede, & Kogelen, 2018). After reflecting on the development of the Social Enterprise Directory, we learned that engaging students in this initiative:

- Deepen their understanding of the complex nature of social enterprises.
- Apply their knowledge about social entrepreneurship directly towards the development of the field.
- Are provided practical business training, as students engage in decision making discussions related to transforming the [tool name] database into a revenue-generating entity.
- Engage in research and increased their understanding of the practical importance of research in real-world business practices.
- Acquire a larger network through engaging in meetings with social entrepreneurs, grant opportunities, professional conferences, and academic publishing opportunities.

The next section of this article describes the directory and motivation behind its development. The following section describes student and faculty reflections on developing the directory. The final section outlines the conclusions of this article.

### **Creating the Social Enterprise Directory**

While pursuing her Ph.D. in Public Affairs/Community Development at Rutgers

University, Professor Weaver sought to conduct a national study on the social, economic, and legal activities of social enterprises in the United States. Being that there are few empirical studies on social enterprises (Granados, Hlupic, Coakes, & Mohamed 2011; Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik, 2010), it is difficult to thoroughly train students or anyone else to develop them. Social enterprises have distinct features that, at times, can make it more difficult to design and operate than traditional commercial businesses. Social enterprises differ from commercial businesses in regard to their: average staff size, staff structure (e.g., reliance on volunteer work), financial management (e.g., more diverse funding streams), legal structures, and marketing (e.g., they work with vulnerable populations) (Conway, 2008).

The lack of knowledge about social enterprise business models and more stems from the difficulties identifying social enterprises in general (Granados, Hlupic, Coakes, & Mohamed 2011; Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik 2010). In order to overcome this issue, she reviewed the websites of social enterprises in public membership directories and contacted various secretaries of state to obtain information on self-identifying social enterprises. She identified and reviewed over 2,400 websites from social enterprises in the country. However, because the goal of the data collection was to identify social enterprise email addresses for an email survey, she created a database with the business and contact information for 942 social enterprises. Only information about the businesses whose emails she could find were kept. After successfully conducting her national dissertation study on the social, economic, and legal activities of social enterprises, she decided to make the data in the database public.

After working with a website developer and receiving funding, the directory was launched in April 2018 (website homepage shown in Figure 1). The original directory featured over 1,000 social enterprises across the country. The directory features social enterprise information such as the goods and services they sell, their social activities, target beneficiaries, their contact information, information regarding their director/CEO, and a link to their website. While there are other directories for social enterprises in the nation, they have a much smaller number of social enterprises and they cater to niche audiences. The Social Enterprise Directory differs in that it is inclusive of organizations within the entire scope of social entrepreneurship. Our social enterprises all focus on combating social problems, but they differ in regard to their legal structure and how they generate revenue. This inclusivity enables the directory to cater to the diversity of social enterprise business models.

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Figure I. Website homepage for Weaver's Social Enterprise Directory

<http://socialenterprisedirectory.com/>

It has been two years since the Social Enterprise Directory and it would not be possible without the amazing contributions of two students who helped Professor Weaver turn her database into a publicly accessible platform that aims to connect, educate, and support the field of social entrepreneurship. The next section of this article offers student reflections on their experience developing the Social Enterprise Directory. In addition, Professor Weaver reflects on how one of her own graduate school professors inspired her to become the entrepreneurial professor that she once dreamed of becoming.

### **Maimouna Mbacke's Reflection**

As a research intern for Professor Weaver I was not only able to assist with research on social enterprises and the impact they make in a variety of communities, but I was also able to develop an understanding of the logistics and operational processes of establishing and maintaining a social enterprise. Through assisting with expanding the Social Enterprise Directory, I learned that social enterprises are effective and can make an impact while generating revenue. Through exposure to numerous social enterprises, I learned how broad the field is and the freedom it allows for individuals to decide how they want to make an impact. Social

enterprises around the world serve in a variety of ways. Some aim to improve issues surrounding social and economic concerns, while others combat issues involving environmental concerns.

I also learned that despite the variety of social enterprises, the process in which is necessary to sustain any social enterprise is similar across the board. Specifically, through my experience I was able to develop a strong understanding of the financial resources needed to establish a social enterprise. Through my research on grant opportunities to support the directory, I developed an understanding of how organizations distribute grants and how to identify which grants align with the mission and goals on one's social enterprise. I also developed skills that allow me to research and analyze social enterprises through exploring the functionality of various social entities and how they operate and remain sustainable.

Lastly, the Social Enterprise Directory has allowed my peers and me the ability to research social enterprises in our geographical area when searching for internships that have a social impact in a variety of communities and industries. It can also serve as a tool for student leaders who wish to invite social enterprise executives and staff for campus events. The Social Enterprise Directory also serves as a tool for my peers and I when searching for socially conscious businesses for shopping purposes.

### **Kati Gallagher's Reflection**

During the fall and spring semesters of 2017, I assisted Professor Weaver with the initial development of the Social Enterprise Directory. She collected self-reported social enterprises and their contact information, and I built off that data to create the directory spreadsheet (shown in Figure II) and added each social enterprise's associated information including their field or industry, legal form, types of goods or services provided, and examples of target beneficiaries. In order to develop a consistent and accessible directory, I worked with Professor Weaver to develop appropriate codes for a number of included fields, such as target beneficiaries. This work provided me with an in-depth look into the field of social entrepreneurship. In order to gather the information needed to complete the directory, I had to search through each social enterprise's website; consequently, I gained a relatively in-depth look at each organization. Several things stood out to me as I completed this research:

1. Those who considered themselves social entrepreneurs or their organizations social enterprises can be found in almost every field, from investment, to construction, to culinary training. While the academic literature, individuals, or an institution may have a specific definition of a social enterprise, it is important not to exclude those who may not fit a siloed understanding.

2. Just as social enterprises operate in many fields, there is a varied understanding of what it means to be a social enterprise. Some function under a specific social enterprise legal form, some are branches of a for-profit or non-profit organization, and some support beneficiaries through the goods and services they offer (i.e., the social enterprise exists to provide employment for individuals with disabilities) while others provide goods and services as a means to support beneficiaries (i.e., the social enterprise provides a service and uses the income to support individuals externally).

3. Social enterprises tend to be clustered in certain states. This may be due to a number of factors, but can be seen through the number of social enterprises identified.

Timestamp	#	SE Name	Parent Company Name	Website	Main Street Address	City	State	Zip Code	Main Phone Number	Director
Apr-18	43	Chinook Enterprises		<a href="https://chinookenterprises.org/">https://chinookenterprises.org/</a>	2026 N Laventure Rd	Mount Vernon	WA	98273	(360) 428-0140	Rob M
Apr-18	44	Chrysalis Enterprises	Chrysalis	<a href="http://www.changelives.org/">http://www.changelives.org/</a>	13545 Van Nuys Blvd. #1	Pacoima	CA	91331	(818)794-4200	Mark L
Apr-18	45	Chrysalis Enterprises	Chrysalis	<a href="http://www.changelives.org/">http://www.changelives.org/</a>	1853 Lincoln Blvd.	Santa Monica	CA	90404	(310) 401-9400	Mark L
Apr-18	46	Chrysalis Enterprises	Chrysalis	<a href="http://www.changelives.org/">http://www.changelives.org/</a>	522 S. Main St.	Los Angeles	CA	90013	(213) 806-6300	Mark L
Apr-18	47	Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired		<a href="http://www.cincyblind.org/">http://www.cincyblind.org/</a>	2045 Gilbert Avenue	Cincinnati	OH	45202	(513) 221-8558	John M
Apr-18	48	Civcorps Recycling	Civcorps	<a href="http://www.cvcorps.org/">http://www.cvcorps.org/</a>	101 Myrtle St.	Oakland	CA	94607	(510) 992-7800	Alan L
Apr-18	49	Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative		<a href="https://www.cincinnatiunioncoop.org/">https://www.cincinnatiunioncoop.org/</a>	215 E 14th Street, Rm 232	Cincinnati	OH	45202	(513) 549-3881	Kristen
Apr-18	50	Event Centre	CLIMB CDC	<a href="http://www.climbcdc.org/">http://www.climbcdc.org/</a>	1316 30th Avenue	Gulfport	MI	39501	(228) 864-6677	Lori V
Apr-18	51	Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired		<a href="https://www.clovernook.org/">https://www.clovernook.org/</a>	2693 Union Avenue, Suite 101	Memphis	TN	38112	(901) 523-9590	Christophe
Apr-18	52	Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired		<a href="https://www.clovernook.org/">https://www.clovernook.org/</a>	7000 Hamilton Avenue	Cincinnati	OH	45231	(513) 522-3860	Christophe
Apr-18	53	CoBiz Cares Foundation	CoBiz Financial	<a href="http://www.cobizfinancial.com/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.cobizfinancial.com/Pages/default.aspx</a>	1401 Lawrence St., Ste. 1200	Denver	CO	80202	(303) 312-3412	Steve B
Apr-18	54	Solutions SE	Community Housing Partnership	<a href="https://www.chp-sf.org/">https://www.chp-sf.org/</a>	20 Jones Street, Suite 200	San Francisco	CA	94102	(415) 852-5300	Gail G

**Figure II.** Weaver’s Social Enterprise Database

One research issue I learned through working on the directory is the balance required when working with data, specifically when coding information. In the case of developing codes for directory’s database, we needed to develop a limited number of categories so that the directory was accessible for users. At the same time, we had to accurately honor and describe the work

done by the social enterprise. This could be particularly difficult when the social enterprises encompassed such a wide range of occupational fields, beneficiaries, and services and goods provided. In summary, this research helped to highlight the relative newness of the field of social entrepreneurship – but more importantly, it highlighted the incredible *growth* of the field and just how many social entrepreneurs across the country are dedicated to helping people, animals, and the environment in practical and innovative ways.

### **Professor Rasheda L. Weaver's Reflection**

Developing this directory has been exciting, encouraging, enlightening, and fulfilling. When I developed the directory, my main goal was to create a public resource for researchers studying social enterprise and entrepreneurship. However, I quickly learned that the directory could be used for so much more. Students reached out to me about how they were using it to find internships and jobs in other cities. A government official invited me to discuss the directory and its value to social entrepreneurs in her municipality. Major leading organizations in the field have reached out to me to purchase the data downloads to recruit social entrepreneurs to accelerator programs. Lastly, social entrepreneurs have reached out to me just to say “thank you for creating this amazing resource.”

This qualitative feedback has been rewarding. However, it is important to note that my experience receiving my Doctor of Philosophy from an applied program and working with a professor that is also a social entrepreneur aided in my development of this resource and venture. As a student in the Ph.D. in Public Affairs-Community Development program at Rutgers University, I worked with Dr. Gloria Bonilla Santiago in my first semester. My work with Dr. Santiago focused on how she created her, five school, LEAP Academy University Charter School empire while being a professor at Rutgers University. Specifically, I learned about how she utilized resources at the university and her local network in Camden, New Jersey to acquire the funding, land, and human resources to develop the Community Leadership Center through which her schools were run. This experience reflects Lee et al. (2018)'s suggestion that engaging students in university initiatives can enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities and confidence. Working with one of my professors on the development of their evidence-based business venture gave me the knowledge, tools, and courage to launch my own.

### **Conclusion**

As the demand for social enterprise education grows throughout the world, creating educational opportunities that foster student learning is essential. In higher education, social enterprise education programs are usually offered through courses offered in business schools, public affairs, and nonprofit organizations programs (Wiley & Berry, 2015). However, this

article outlines an innovative approach to social enterprise education that may supplement student work in the classroom called the Social Enterprise Directory. Being a directory for social enterprises in the United States, it has been used to identify service-learning sites, field visit sites, case studies (e.g., social enterprise profiles), guest speakers for classes and events, socially conscious businesses, and employment and internship opportunities.

While the Social Enterprise Directory may be used by students and faculty for the educational purposes described above, this article outlines student and faculty reflections related to engaging students in its development. As demonstrated by the faculty reflection of her own educational experience, engaging students in such initiatives may help increase their entrepreneurial capabilities, confidence, and network (Lee et al., 2018). As such, this article hopes to serve as an inspiration for future faculty and student entrepreneurial endeavors.

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