



# Building an Entrepreneurial Pathway One Campus at a Time

A promising effort is underway in California's Central Valley to create a replicable model for how community colleges and four-year schools can partner to build an entrepreneurial education pathway that takes students all the way from high school through to successful self-employment. Now nearing the end of the second year of a three-year initiative funded by the Coleman Foundation, the program is already producing promising results.

Known as the Community College Entrepreneurial Pathway project, the program unites 10 community colleges with the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at California State University, Fresno. The Pathway is an effort to build curricula, classroom content, and community support for the delivery of knowledge, skills, and actions for students seeking self-employment.

The program is the brainchild of Timothy Stearns, Coleman Foundation Chair in Entrepreneurial Studies at the Lyles Center. "Two fundamental considerations led me to the Pathway model," he says. "First, we are a center of entrepreneurship and innovation that is focused on the Central Valley, which is a very large footprint of 100 miles in length. We have been trying to find ways to reach into communities outside of Fresno to provide programs and foster development for entrepreneurs. Having had opportunities to work with

community colleges, including several in the valley, I began to realize they provided an excellent platform for engaging with people to reach into the community to foster more and more entrepreneurial opportunities.

"The second factor was that about 35 or 40 percent of our students are transfers from community colleges," Stearns adds. "I was getting a number of transfers into my Entrepreneurship program, but there was a real mix in the types of skills and knowledge that they were bringing with them. I was interested in getting more uniformity in the message that would make these students much better when they got into the Fresno State program."

## Getting Started

Funded with just over \$300,000 from the Coleman Foundation, the Pathways program began by identifying and supporting Coleman Scholars on community college campuses. These faculty members are the driving force behind the development and nurturing of entrepreneurship programs on their individual campuses.

The program has met its goal of putting Coleman Scholars in place at 10 community colleges. Through their collaboration – which includes nine group meetings per year to share best practices and other information – they are laying the foundation for a network of courses and programs that will form a consistent

entrepreneurship pathway across the campuses. Coleman Scholars undergo National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) training and must attend the NACCE conference annually during the three-year program.

Program Director Marianne Dunklin has been in charge of recruiting the Coleman Scholars. "The program has been very positively received on the campuses," she says. "The people who tend to teach entrepreneurship education at community colleges are really interested in making a difference in the lives of their students and entrepreneurship is a way to do that."

"Becoming a Coleman Scholar attracted me because it was an opportunity to work closely with faculty from similar institutions on a subject about which I am very excited," says Eric Nasalroad, Coleman Scholar at Reedley Community College. "Not only was it a medium for developing best practices and for gaining insight, it also provided a network of individuals who provided accountability and support. At Reedley, we have developed an Intro. to Entrepreneurship class, a CEO club, a Certificate in Entrepreneurship, articulated our intro class with Fresno State, and generated entrepreneurship 'buzz' on campus. We are currently developing an Entrepreneurship Center in hopes of launching an incubator in the future. Our outreach to high school and to disciplines other than business

# CEO CHAPTERS OFF AND RUNNING



has increased dramatically. These things would not have been possible without the guidance, accountability, and support that comes with being a Coleman Scholar.”

## A Moveable Model

The Coleman Foundation is pleased with the progress they've seen in the California program and is already beginning work in Chicago that is loosely based on the Pathways program. “There will be tweaks and modifications as necessary for the unique aspects of the geography as the model is put into use in other parts of the country,” says Coleman Foundation Program Manager Clark McCain. “But in broad strokes being able to connect a four-year school, a community college and high schools is a good model that can take a variety of forms.

“We are very supportive of making these connections between community colleges either upstream or downstream,” he adds. “We want people to know that there is an interest at the four-year setting in what happens at the two-year setting. It's important to communicate that there are four-year schools out there that have an interest in working with people at community colleges.”

For additional information on the Community College Entrepreneurial Pathway, contact Genelle Taylor, associate director of the Lyles Center, at (559) 294-2045 or via e-mail at [genellet@csufresno.edu](mailto:genellet@csufresno.edu).



*High school students who participate in NFTE programs listen to a speaker at a forum on entrepreneurship developed and hosted for them by Fresno City College's new CEO Club. The highly successful event drew nearly 100 students along with faculty and CEO members.*

One of the duties of the Coleman Scholars is to found Collegiate Entrepreneur's Organization (CEO) chapters on their campuses. Although still in their early stages, these chapters are proving to be a powerful tool for attracting students to entrepreneurship education and for empowering them to follow their entrepreneurial dreams.

“I have never been in a club of any kind before so I was reluctant to join CEO,” says Sarah Douglas, a Fresno City College student who is mother of two who returned to school at age 30. “When I realized that it is an active organization helping students to achieve their entrepreneurial goals, I was hooked. I enjoy the interaction with fellow students, all the different projects we have going on at once and, of course, the sometimes insane chaos that is followed by the overwhelming joy when what you're working on actually comes out brilliant.” One of the projects Douglas is proud to have participated in was a forum the Fresno CEO organized for local high school students participating in the NFTE program. Held on campus at Fresno City College, the event attracted nearly 100 high school students who heard from entrepreneurs, including young people who have been successful in pursuing their entrepreneurial dreams. CEO members and faculty also attended.

“This CEO chapter has been up and running for less than a year and to see them put together an event of this caliber was amazing,” says Genelle Taylor, who is deeply involved in the Pathways program through her role as associate director of the Lyles Center.

CEO members are encouraged to attend the annual national CEO conference. About 75 students from the Central Valley attended last year's conference, with about 50 coming from the community college campuses. Under the Coleman grant, each CEO chapter is provided with \$300 scholarships to support conference attendance. Students are required to generate an additional \$300 from other sources if they want to attend with costs fully covered. This has led the students to set up on-campus businesses to help fund conference attendance and other activities of their clubs.