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DESIGN ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR THE RURAL UNIVERSITY STUDENT

This presentation will recount my journey creating and teaching a course in Design Entrepreneurship to students at a rural, state university. From inception to research, butting heads with the business department to a successful proposal through the university curriculum committee, and teaching the course for the first time in our inaugural year of the Covid-19 pandemic, I will share what I have learned and how other programs might find similar successes.

Whether picking up occasional freelance work or aspiring to full-time self-employment, entrepreneurship is an inevitability for many designers. BFA students graduate well-versed in color and form but void of practicalities like business permits and taxes. My students were hungry for this information. Each semester they asked more questions about these topics than anything we ever covered in class. The demand for a course on design entrepreneurship was apparent.

It was essential to construct and frame this course from a critical perspective. We exist in a capitalist society and therefore must trade services and goods for currency to meet our basic needs. I sought to give my students the tools they needed to provide for themselves. However, it is imperative not to glorify the toxicity of hustle culture. In my work, I hope to reinforce that my students' value as human beings is more significant than their capacity for productivity. Their worth is not determined by the number in their bank account or the likes on their latest Instagram post. That means teaching them to be hard workers to a reasonable extent while also listening to their bodies and honoring their personhood.

Pulling from the frequently asked questions of my students and my own experience as a business owner, I began an outline of this hypothetical course. Lecture topics included budgets, pricing, proposals, business plans, licensing, branding, contracts, workflow, communication, taxes, accounting, financial health, adaptability, and competition. But wait, isn't this just business fodder? Would my students be better served to get a minor in entrepreneurship from the business department? What is the benefit of housing a course like this in the art department?

The specificity of this course is its greatest asset. Learning to navigate client relationships from a professor who has worked in the industry; discovering tax write-offs specific to creative entrepreneurs; confidently communicating pricing and the importance of

educating our clients; this material is not shared in classrooms of accounting majors with aspirations of corporate grandeur.

What makes an art course different from many others on campus is its delivery method. Rather than a 50-minute lecture, art courses are delivered as three-hour labs to facilitate the act of making. To teach this as a studio art course, students must produce artwork. Logically, a course such as this necessitates the production of artwork with the intent to market and profit. Subsequently, the course culminates in a pop-up shop rather than a final exam. This event provides a real-world experience wherein students showcase their works, interact with the public, and gain first-hand experience with sales tax and special events licensing. I believe the event is significant for my rural students, who may not otherwise have an opportunity to participate in a similar event in their small communities.

BIO:

Leslie Moore Parker is an Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at Arkansas State University, a practicing graphic designer, illustrator, and writer. After receiving her BFA in 2009, she worked as a graphic designer and creative director for both advertising agencies and in-house marketing teams before eventually founding her own studio. In 2015, she began teaching graphic design courses at Arkansas State University as an instructor. She was promoted to Assistant Professor in 2019 after completing her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts, one of the most innovative programs in the world. Her current work focuses on the intersections of design, education, and privilege.