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# The Missing “Social” in Social Enterprise Education in the United States

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## ABSTRACT

This research critically examines social entrepreneurship and social enterprise curricula in the United States, addressing the following questions: What curricular models are used to educate future social entrepreneurs? To what degree do social enterprise programs reflect what the literature deems to be important aspects of social enterprise values and outcomes? And finally, what curricula should exist to enhance these values and outcomes? Methods include analysis of program descriptions, courses offered, and course syllabi of social entrepreneurship and enterprise programs. We find that the programs reviewed reflect largely performative and managerialist values and have little focus on social aspects of social enterprise, such as building social capital, community organizing, or political engagement. We conclude by suggesting changes to curricula that highlight aspects important to social enterprise values, outcomes, and democratic governance.

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## KEYWORDS

Social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, education

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Is there truly an alternative to traditional charity, corporate philanthropy, and public service when it comes to solving “wicked” social and environmental issues? Maybe!

*—From a U.S. social enterprise course description*

The market seems to pervade more and more facets of our lives, so much so that we hardly recognize it (Sandel, 2012). Within this context, a normative ideology that values market-based solutions and business-like models has become pervasive in the thinking and management of nonprofit organizations (Dart, 2004b). The result is that these organizations are increasingly adopting the language of the market, including emphasizing efficiency, customer service, and

profit (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Sandberg, 2013). Entrepreneurship has been growing in popularity even as scholars debate balancing it with democratic values. Board members, funders, and executive directors urge nonprofit organizations to be more entrepreneurial and self-supporting (Foster & Bradach, 2005), seeing social enterprises as tools to “shape up” the inadequacies and “flabbiness” of nonprofit organizations (Dey, 2006; Dey & Steyaert,

2010). With the growth of social enterprise and entrepreneurship has come an increase in social enterprise and entrepreneurship educational programs and courses. These are offered in a variety of institutional settings in the United States, but the majority are in business schools, which are focused on market, general management, and philanthropic skills rather than on political and leadership skills (Mirabella & Young, 2012).

The purpose of this research is to critically examine social entrepreneurship and social enterprise curriculum in the United States. This article adds to previous research (e.g. Wiley & Berry, 2015) that reviews social entrepreneurship programs to determine the curricular models being used to educate future social entrepreneurs. However, we extend this work by asking, To what degree do social enterprise programs reflect what the literature deems to be important aspects of social enterprise values and outcomes? What curricula should exist to enhance these values and outcomes? We address these research questions by gathering and analyzing data through several methods, including analysis of U.S. program descriptions, course offerings, and course syllabi of social entrepreneurship/enterprise-related programs. We find that these programs reflect largely performative and managerialist values and have little focus on social or political aspects of social enterprise—such as building social capital, community organizing, or political engagement—deemed in the literature to be perhaps the most important aspect of social enterprises. Based on this analysis, we argue that addressing the world's deepest needs will require a broader approach beyond performativity or market-oriented skills. We conclude by suggesting curricular elements that should exist to enhance democratic values, efficacy, and outcomes.

This research is important for several reasons. First, although social enterprise and entrepreneurship are growing in popularity, much of their attractiveness appears to be based on anecdotal evidence rather than systematic research. This study begins to address this issue through

critical examination of the curricula in social enterprise programs; that is, through what is actually being taught in the classroom. Next, as the millennial generation is now the primary “consumer” of higher education, there will be increased demand for social entrepreneurship programming. Saddled with tremendous debt, yet wanting to make a difference in their world, millennials seek to harness the power of the private sector to make a difference while also making a decent living. What does the literature tell us about the efficacy of social entrepreneurship practices and is there a cautionary tale for students fascinated by the possibilities of doing well while doing good? Finally, and perhaps most important, recent trends suggest the continued growth of social enterprise programs within the university (Wiley & Berry, 2015, p. 393). Given that what we teach in professional degree programs will undoubtedly influence the world of practice, it is imperative that we critically examine the values inherent in this approach and its potential impact on third sector and public values of pluralism and democracy.

### **THE GROWTH OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS VALUES**

Social entrepreneurship as an idea, discourse, and practice has gained prominence in the public and nonprofit sectors over the past decade or more. There has been a general acceptance of its legitimacy and its perceived ability to do what business, government, or traditional nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations on their own have not been able to do (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Hervieux, Gedajlovic, & Turcotte, 2010; Wiley & Berry, 2015). Social entrepreneurs around the world have been held up as the new heroes who will change the world through the power of new ideas (Bornstein, 2007). Stories of these individuals and their accomplishments have proliferated. They are almost always about inspiration and success, perhaps with some mention of failures along the way, and almost always are lauded as examples of the positive benefits of an entrepreneurial spirit (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Nicholls, 2010).

Despite these claims, there is no clear consensus on the definition of social entrepreneurship, and its meaning and practice appear to vary by place and perspective (Kerlin, 2013; Teasdale, 2012b; Wiley & Berry, 2015). In the United States, Kerlin (2006) notes that among academics and consulting firms,

social enterprise is understood to include those organizations that fall along a continuum from profit-oriented businesses engaged in socially beneficial activities (corporate philanthropies or corporate social responsibility) to dual-purpose businesses that mediate profit goals with social objectives (hybrids) to non-profit organizations engaged in mission-supporting commercial activity (social purpose organizations). (p. 248)

However, much of the practice termed social enterprise in the United States remains “focused on revenue generation by nonprofit organizations” (p. 248).

Research suggests that there are competing discourses within social enterprise and entrepreneurship between those who practice it and those who set policy and fund it (Dey, 2006; Dey & Teasdale, 2013; Froggett & Chamberlayne, 2004; Hervieux et al., 2010; Parkinson & Howorth, 2008; Teasdale, 2012b). Parkinson and Howorth (2008), for example, found among the discourses of practicing social entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom a preoccupation with local issues, collective action, geographical community, and local power struggles. As these authors write, “These findings are at odds ideologically with the discursive shifts of UK social enterprise policy over the last decade, in which a managerially defined rhetoric of enterprise is used to promote efficiency, business discipline and financial independence” (p. 285). Others have noted that the people and organizations with the most influence on the paradigmatic development of the field (funders, policy makers, etc.) have a particular discourse that promotes market-based initiatives as a legitimate means of

funding a social mission (Hervieux et al., 2010, p. 37) and business-model ideal types led by the “hero” social entrepreneur (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Nicholls, 2010; Nicholls & Cho, 2006). Dey and Steyaert (2010) write that this dominant discourse is chiefly buttressed by what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard calls performativity (rationalism, utility, progress, and individualism).

In response, several social enterprise scholars have called for rejuvenating the “sociality” or relational ethic of social entrepreneurship (Bull, Ridley-Duff, Foster, & Seanor, 2010; Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Hjorth, 2009; Humphries & Grant, 2005; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006). For example, Hjorth (2009, p. 227) wants to re-establish a “public” entrepreneurship—an entrepreneurship belonging to society and not simply the economy. Ridley-Duff and Bull (2013) propose a “communitarian pluralist approach” to constituting social enterprise. Given the emphasis social enterprise practitioners already put on local issues and collective action, many social entrepreneurs may already be implementing such a perspective: “it appears that political engagement and collective action still have currency to those operating on the ground and that democratic structures may be equally as prominent as the focus on social activity” (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008, p. 305).

### THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Claims about the impact of social enterprise are wide and varied. Grenier (2009) identifies four main arenas in which social entrepreneurship is thought to make a potentially critical impact: community renewal, voluntary sector professionalization, welfare reform, and democratic renewal. Teasdale (2010) notes that some profess that social enterprises are effective at delivering services in areas characterized by market failure, providing employment opportunities for excluded groups, and creating more enterprising communities. Proponents claim that these impacts are linked by social enterprises’ ability to mobilize and reproduce social capital.

However, according to published accounts, the actual efficacy of social enterprise is mixed. Contributions of social enterprises to local economic development do include providing goods and services that the market or public sector is unwilling or unable to provide, developing skills, creating employment (focused particularly on the needs of socially excluded people such as ex-convicts, people living with disabilities, and the homeless), offering work and educational experience to young people, creating and managing work space, and providing low-cost personal loans. But Peattie and Morley (2008) also show that social enterprises appear often to be providers of relatively low-skilled jobs and practice creaming (Teasdale, 2012a, p. 519). Blackburn and Ram (2006) write:

Generally, employees in small firms have lower wages and inferior employment terms and conditions than in larger firms. ... Small firms are also shown to experience higher rates of physical injury and fatalities than larger organizations, although this is partly accounted for by the sectors in which they operate. ... They are unable to offer childcare facilities, are renowned for their inconsistent employment practices, and have to operate in a structure and market environment over which they have limited and varying influence. ... What evidence that is available suggests that even the most recent attempts to combat social exclusion through enterprise have yet to demonstrate convincingly that they are an effective route to combating social exclusion. (pp. 77–80)

The authors argue that the recent expectations of the role of small firms and entrepreneurship in combating social exclusion are overly optimistic (p. 73).

The literature seems to suggest that social enterprises may have an equally important im-

pact on building social capital, infrastructure, and engagement (Bertotti, Hardin, Renton, & Sheridan, 2012; Borzaga & Depedri, 2012; Smallbone, Evans, Ekanem, & Butters, 2001). Teasdale (2010) found in several case studies, for example, that social enterprises can help build participation, social interaction, political engagement, and bonding social capital and they sometimes help individuals escape exclusion altogether. In addition, in their examination of seven case studies of the “most successful” social enterprises, Alvord, Brown, and Letts (2004) show that some social enterprises build social movements to deal with powerful actors and shape activities of decision makers, and some transform economic circumstances and increase voices of marginalized groups. The authors characterized four of the cases they examined—Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Grameen Bank, Self-Employment Women’s Association, and Highlander Research and Education Center—as high reach and high transformational impact (p. 280). In addition, social enterprises can often support other social enterprises through their involvement in networking activities (Smallbone et al., 2001, p. 33).

But there is a noted challenge in balancing the competing demands of economic and social outcomes within social enterprises (Dart, 2004a; Teasdale, 2010; Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). Bertotti et al. (2012) found in a case study of a social enterprise café that it builds “bonding” and “bridging” social capital while also addressing “downside” social capital; however, the role of the social enterprise in building “linking” social capital was minor. Teasdale (2010) notes further that it is “unclear whether encouraging the development of social enterprise in deprived communities creates social capital, or whether existing social capital in an area is a prerequisite for social enterprise to flourish” (p. 95). Garrow and Hasenfeld (2014) suggest that when the work integration social enterprises they studied are dominated by a market logic, they commodify their clients as production workers and erode social rights.

## THE GROWTH OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ENTERPRISE EDUCATION

U.S. universities and colleges offer a growing number of courses in social entrepreneurship and enterprise. Business schools in particular have embraced social entrepreneurship (O'Connor, 2006). In the late 1990s, there were only four social entrepreneurship courses offered, while today there are over 100 courses offered (Seaton Hall University, <http://academic.shu.edu/npa/>). According to Mirabella and Young (2012), in the United States there are more than a dozen social entrepreneurship programs, from the certificate program jointly offered by the School of Public and Environmental Affairs and the Kelley Business School at Indiana University, Bloomington; to the full Master in Social Enterprise program within the School of International Service at American University. Most frequently, universities offer a concentration or specialization in social entrepreneurship or social enterprise within the master's degree program. Almost three quarters of the programs Mirabella and Young (2012) examine are offered within a business school. Mirabella and Young further show that as the number of social entrepreneurship courses within a business setting have grown, there has been an accompanying decline in nonprofit courses offered by these programs. In other words, nonprofit courses are sometimes being replaced by social entrepreneurship or social enterprise courses. In addition, when business schools retain their nonprofit course offerings, it appears that they are also adding an increasing number of social innovation and entrepreneurship courses to their catalogs.

Although there is a vast literature on education for entrepreneurs, far less has been written on the special case of educating social entrepreneurs. Business scholars can publish in more than 40 English-language entrepreneurship journals (Katz & Boal, 2002), two of which exclusively address education issues—the *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education* and the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship Development, Education and Training*. Those studying social entrepreneurship from the

vantage point of public affairs have far fewer platforms for publication. Although a few articles on social entrepreneurship have been published in nonprofit journals such as *Voluntas* and the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, most of these are recent publications and only two articles engaged questions specifically related to pedagogy (Andersson, 2011; Wiley & Berry, 2015).

Professor Donald Kuratko (in Bielefeld, 2009, p. 82) identifies some of the challenges facing those who would create education programs for social entrepreneurs, including the lack of academic respect for faculty teaching in this area, the incongruence between business and academia, the administrative reliance on these programs as “cash cows,” and a lack of quality research on the efficacy of the approach. In 2007, the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* journal published a special issue on the role of management training for entrepreneurs but neglected to include an entry on social entrepreneurship. In their rejoinder to this special issue, Tracey and Phillips (2007) argue that business schools must pay attention to growing interest in the field, particularly as there are an “increasing number of social entrepreneurs entering business schools in order to learn the skills and competencies required to build sustainable businesses” (p. 265). The complex balancing act facing social entrepreneurs creates tensions for curriculum development:

The challenges of social entrepreneurship education are compounded by the considerable disagreement, both within the social enterprise movement and among scholars, about how to balance social and commercial objectives. For some social entrepreneurship is fundamentally about social change and developing community capacity, and this must take precedent over building competitive advantage. For others business development and profitability must be prioritized. (Tracey & Phillips, 2007, p. 265)

Tracey and Phillips (2007) identify three key challenges for curriculum development around social entrepreneurship, owing to the “hybrid nature” of these activities, including “managing accountability, managing a double bottom line, and managing identity” (p. 266). Social entrepreneurs must consider various stakeholders when managing accountability, specifically those of the community in which the social enterprise takes place. The authors next discuss the difficult balance between earning income and making expenditures to support services to the community (p. 267). The third key challenge is one of identity; those moving from the nonprofit sector to a hybrid model of business may experience discomfort with the commercial side of the enterprise, while those moving from the private sector may have difficulty identifying with the a ventures social mission (p. 267). Tracy and Phillips take the position that social entrepreneurs should not be separated from other future entrepreneurs in the business school setting; rather they should be educated alongside their for-profit peers, and the curriculum should incorporate course content on social entrepreneurship.

Others argue that social entrepreneurs, regardless of interdisciplinary home, need business skills but must also be “conversant with philanthropy, government, and volunteerism and the skills required to successfully negotiate these institutions ... areas of expertise now emphasized ... in nonprofit management education” (Young & Grinsfelder, 2011, p. 564; see also [Mirabella & Young, 2012](#)). More recently, Wiley and Berry (2015) suggest that public affairs programs “focus on empowering students who work in the governance arena to be social change agents and to understand the existing tools and development process for creating radically new programs or organizations,” rather than preparing students to be “professional social entrepreneurs” (p. 294).

Considering these tensions, what curricular models are being used to educate future social entrepreneurs? To what degree do social enterprise programs reflect what the literature

thinks are important aspects of social enterprise values and outcomes? What curricula should exist to enhance these values and outcomes?

## METHODOLOGY

To address these questions, we conducted a content analysis of 17 social entrepreneurship and enterprise programs in the United States, examining how each describes itself and the courses offered in its program description as well as various aspects of course syllabi. Content analysis is a detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings (Berg, 2008, p. 338). We used a “directed” approach to analysis ([Berg, 2008](#)), identifying both analytic codes and categories derived from existing literature relevant to the research focus but also noting other themes that emerged.

We compiled the programs under analysis from a database of nonprofit education programs maintained by Seaton Hall University (<http://academic.shu.edu/npo/>) and from a wider Internet search. All of the programs examined lead to a master’s degree, and only programs with a stated concentration or specialization in social entrepreneurship were included. Most of the programs are located within a business school, many of which have created centers of social entrepreneurship and enterprise. One of the programs is a joint venture between a business school and a school of public administration, while the remainder are in various other institutional settings (see Table 1).

We gathered data for the 17 program descriptions in August 2014. While program descriptions will not always reflect exactly what goes on in a program, how programs describe themselves to the public is in itself an important reflection of how a program perceives itself and is perceived by others (Fairclough, 1995). Additionally, websites play an increasingly prominent role in the process of choosing a college program (Anctil, 2008). To try to address the limitations of looking at program descriptions only, we also examined specific courses and their syllabi.

**TABLE 1.**  
**Institutional Location of Social  
 Entrepreneurship Programs**

Institutional location	Number	Percent
Business	12	71%
Education	1	6%
International service	1	6%
Interdisciplinary: Business and public administration	1	6%
Public administration	1	6%
Social work	1	6%

*Note.* N=17.

We copied and pasted text from websites Microsoft Word documents and then used MAXQDA software for qualitative data analysis. Our analysis involved an iterative process of contextualizing and categorizing strategies. This process included reading text completely to get a sense of the whole, rereading and coding segments, and then recoding and grouping codes into broad clusters of similar topics or nodes, primarily around emergent topics. We then iteratively recoded these clusters into more specific and simplified nodes, creating “trees” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29).

A request to program directors resulted in syllabi for 10 of the 17 programs, collected from August to November 2014. We used ATLAS.ti software for qualitative data analysis of the syllabi, using the iterative process outlined above. Analyzing syllabi gives insight into the choices faculty make regarding readings, learning goals, course content, and evaluation methods. Taken collectively, the syllabi for these courses can highlight the areas considered

most important and the resources selected to complement class sessions. However, there are limitations to using syllabi review as a measure of curriculum content. Understanding the content of the course and the knowledge that students obtain during the course is quite complex, and syllabi provide a somewhat limited insight into the knowledge and skills actually contained within the course curriculum (Madson, Melchert, & Whipp, 2004, p. 559). Syllabi also give no basis for understanding the complexity of the interactions between instructor and students as the course progresses. Nonetheless, triangulated with analysis of program descriptions, reviewing the syllabi for these courses provides some important clues as to the topics and approaches considered most essential by faculty who deliver social entrepreneurship curricula.

## FINDINGS

Among the 17 programs reviewed, program descriptions were dominated by these main description areas:

- “change” (97 mentions in 15 programs)
- “effective” (41 mentions in 15 programs)
- “social impact” (40 mentions in 8 programs)
- “innovation” (36 mentions in 11 programs)
- “global” (36 mentions in 11 programs)
- “application of tools from private sector/management” (23 mentions in 10 programs), and
- “sustainability” (19 mentions in 16 programs)

See Table 2. As an example, using several of these key words, the social enterprise program at Duke University notes the following in its program description:

Frustration with traditional governmental and charitable approaches to social problems has prompted social sector leaders to tap into the strengths of the business and entrepreneurial world in their search for more sustainable and systemic solutions. Thus, homeless shelters are starting businesses to train and employ their residents; environmental

**TABLE 2.**  
**U.S. Social Entrepreneurship Program**  
**Descriptions: Key Areas and Terms**

Key areas and terms	
<b>Most frequent (16+ mentions in half or more programs)</b>	Change Effective Social impact Innovation Global Application of tools from private sector/management Sustainability
<b>Less frequent (6-15 mentions in half or fewer programs)</b>	Collaborative/collaboration Policy Social and financial returns Ethics Diversity Root causes
<b>No or little mention (5 or fewer mentions in 1-3 programs)</b>	Social justice Empower Social capital Democracy

organizations are partnering with corporations to find economically sound ways to protect natural habitats; and arts groups are exploring new ventures that promise stabilizing revenue and enhance community development. Many philanthropists are increasing their focus on outcomes and strategies for sustainability. Numerous nonprofits are adopting the language and tools of business and some are actually converting to for-profit status. At the same time, for-profit firms are competing directly with nonprofits by moving into social sector arenas, ranging from education to economic development to environmental conservation. This rash of sector-blurring activity has created an opportunity for leading business schools to have significant social impact by constructively exploring the adaptation of business concepts for the social sector.

Less frequently mentioned in program descriptions were areas such as:

- “collaborative” or “collaboration” (15 mentions in 8 programs)
- “policy” (15 mentions in 7 programs)
- “achieving social and financial returns” (13 mentions in 8 programs)
- “ethics” (14 mentions in 7 programs)
- “diversity” (14 mentions in 6 programs), and
- “root causes” (6 mentions in 4 programs)

One of the programs that mentioned policy and diversity was at Northwestern University, in the Kellogg School of Management:

The education received in the distinct Social Enterprise courses provides an understanding of the concerns and issues of a diverse constituency, the values-based approach to management underscored at the Kellogg School, key public policy issues and specific nuances of managing in a nonprofit or governmental setting.

There was very little to no mention in these areas:

- “social justice” (7 mentions in 4 programs)
- “empower” (5 mentions in 3 programs)
- “social capital” (2 mentions in 2 programs), or
- “democracy” (1 mention in 1 program)

If any of these were mentioned, it was mainly in the program at American University. Among the programs studied, American University’s Master in Social Enterprise in the School of International Service seemed the most comprehensive and socially and critically engaged, including providing information about its core values.

Regarding curriculum or competency areas specifically, many programs emphasized “experiential learning and doing” (24 mentioned in seven programs) as a pedagogical approach, often linking students to social enterprises in a local or international community. For example,

American University notes that its program “is oriented at developing practitioners. Its focus is more on the doing of social enterprise than its study as a subject of inquiry.” Several programs also focused on teaching various business-related skills or techniques (18 mentions in six programs), such as designing an implementable social enterprise action plan, evaluating financial outcomes, or practicing presentation and selling skills. Rarely mentioned were “understanding context and applying theory” (five mentions in four programs) or “critical thinking” (five mentions in one program).

Examination of courses and course syllabi provided further insight into the themes emphasized in these programs. Within the 17 programs examined, 83 courses were connected to the social enterprise/entrepreneurship concentration, specialization, or master’s degree; 37 (44%) were a course either in social enterprise or social entrepreneurship. Another eight (10%) focused on tools for social innovation (i.e., the skills needed to create social change or a social venture) and two (2%) focused on leading social change. In all, more than half the courses (56%) in these programs fall within the social entrepreneurship and enterprise category. In other words, most courses in these programs provide direct instruction on preparing students to undertake innovations and enterprises for social change.

An additional 14 courses (17%) involved examination of the double or triple bottom line, where the double bottom line accounts for the economic and social impact of a venture, while the triple bottom line adds assessment of its environmental effects. A few courses (8%) connected to the social enterprise concentrations were more generic business courses (e.g., accounting, marketing, information technology), and 7% covered coursework more traditionally found in nonprofit management programs (e.g., planning and program evaluation, political economy, community organizing, nonprofit management). The remaining 12% of courses addressed specific issues related to the environment of the social entrepreneur,

including courses in globalization, poverty, and international development, and several discussed the triple bottom line of sustainability.

Our analysis showed only one course in ethics as part of a social entrepreneurship concentration, Pepperdine University’s Faith, Ethics, Diversity and Philanthropy course, described as follows:

The central focus of this course is on an examination of personal values that guide those engaged in change in their ethical decision making and their motivation to participate in providing essential services to their communities. This examination will be guided in part by a review of historically important and still significant theoretical approaches to ethics. Students will critically examine ... their individual faith and belief system plans that may guide them toward purpose, service and leadership in change and philanthropy. At the heart of this examination lies the role [that] a commitment to diversity and promoting social justice plays in our approach to philanthropy. Finally, the knowledge acquired in the course will be used to examine contemporary societal issues such as poverty, social justice, famine relief and crime and punishment.

We conducted a more in-depth analysis of 10 syllabi, in which we assessed course descriptions, learning goals, readings, and weekly topics for discussion. A review of the course descriptions reveals a clear focus on helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, and mind-set for social entrepreneurship; 9 of the 10 courses highlighted this aspect in their descriptions. The following description from one program was indicative of most:

This course enables students to master the fundamentals of social entrepreneurship. It explores how entrepreneurship has become a driving force in the social enterprise sector, provides tools for devel-

oping and evaluating new ventures, and explores the blurring line between for-profit and non-profit social initiatives. The course also teaches hands-on social venture business plan development tools, from assessing markets to developing financial and operating plans.

The only outlier was the course offered at Indiana University, Bloomington, in a collaborative program between the School of Public and Environmental Affairs and the Kelley Business School. This course examined the value of social entrepreneurship through the lens of political economy, using a more critical approach informed by social science:

We will take a critical look at social entrepreneurship by rigorously examining what value is, what value various organizations create, for whom they create value, how they create value, why they create value, and where and when they create value. This process will be more than an intellectual exercise. In applying the business model canvas to numerous organizations, you will be exposed to a number of novel approaches to problem solving in the hope that you can move beyond critique and into the far more challenging task of designing organizational solutions to social problems. ... Although a political economic approach to dissecting the institutions of capitalism is helpful, it is insufficient. Social, psychological, and moral issues interact to enable and constrain these institutions, the action of individuals and groups, and the efficacy of social entrepreneurs' initiatives. ... Even when benign, failure to consider social, psychological, and moral issues may lead social entrepreneurs to introduce innovations that, while otherwise economically beneficial, fail to diffuse owing to the cultural contradictions they introduce.

Additional topics explored by most programs included the social enterprise field in general

and the blurring of boundaries between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

Seven of the 10 syllabi identified as learning goals the ability to understand social enterprise and its role and to understand how social entrepreneurs create value. More than half the syllabi also included the ability to execute a plan for a social enterprise. Among other outcomes were learning to access funding, identifying market failures, evaluating the impact of social ventures, and understanding the players involved in social enterprises. Grading and evaluation were closely aligned with these learning objectives, and team-based papers on the blueprint for action were the primary mechanism for determining course grades. Case write-ups were also a component of the final grade, as was class participation (the latter from a low of 10% of the final grade to a high of 50%).

Once again, the Indiana University course was an outlier: midterm and final exams were the major components of the course grade. This reflected the course emphasis on the theory of political economy rather than the "doing" of social entrepreneurship. Most of the courses we reviewed emphasized learning how to do social entrepreneurship, with seemingly little or no critical analysis of the approach. Similar to our findings concerning the program descriptions, a keyword search of the 10 syllabi found no mention of social capital, democracy, or citizens (with one exception in the latter case: use of the term *citizen sector*, coined by the Ashoka organization to replace *nonprofit sector*).

An examination of assigned readings provides additional insight into the focus of these courses. Instructors relied on a variety of materials, articles, and cases and less on textbooks. Key individuals associated with the social entrepreneurship movement were represented, including 12 works by J. Gregory Dees, a pioneer in social entrepreneurship from Duke University; six works by David Bornstein, the journalist and author who writes on social

innovation; articles by Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka; and the book by Stephen Goldsmith with a foreword by Michael Bloomberg, elected leaders of the civic entrepreneur and re-inventing government movement. Instructors assigned quite a few readings from the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* and the *Harvard Business Review*.

The reading requirements for the 10 courses examined included 100 cases. In almost all courses, cases were presented each week as part of the coursework. Multiple courses assigned several of the same cases, including New Profit Inc., a social innovation and venture

philanthropy fund (included in all 10 courses); City Year, a service corps of young people engaged in the charter school movement (included in all 10 courses); Kiva: The Fee-Lee Broker of Microfinance, a microfinance nonprofit that lends money to people in over 70 countries (included in six courses); the Ben & Jerry's Foundation (included in five courses); Grameen Bank, a microfinance organization in Bangladesh (included in five courses); and the Robin Hood Foundation, a nonprofit created by hedge fund and financial managers that provides grants to nonprofit organizations (included in four courses). While the case method is an appropriately used pedagogical approach in graduate education, the use of cases as empirical evidence for the generalizability of the efficacy of social entrepreneurship is dubious. Lounsbury and Strang (2009) posit that "the key empirical cases are the success stories of particular individuals and organizations around the world that are identified as 'social entrepreneurs'" (p. 73). In other words, cases seem to be used as evidence that social entrepreneurship is a successful approach, with apparently little systematic empirical evidence to support this.

Further, in his review of social entrepreneurship literature in top management journals, McKenny (2014) found that as the field has evolved, researchers have increasingly drawn on a variety of techniques in their studies: "While case studies remain the most popular analytic technique ... as the research questions asked in social entrepreneurship research continue to become more complex, so too will the methods used to test them" (p. 291). He further argues for more use of longitudinal studies to determine the efficacy of the social entrepreneurship approach over time. Given the increasing sophistication of the knowledge base on social entrepreneurship and its efficacy, we argue that the pedagogy in social entrepreneurship should likewise move beyond the sole use of cases as proof of efficacy and expose students to a more comprehensive set of studies regarding the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in practice.

**TABLE 3.**  
**Weekly Topics in U.S. Social Entrepreneurship Courses**

Weekly course topics (N = 98)	Percent
Social capital markets, the role of profit, and impact investing	19%
Presentations, consulting skills, networking, and pitch training	18%
Social change theory and structures	18%
Scaling up and mission lock	8%
Social enterprise approaches, operating plans and making ventures work	7%
Defining social entrepreneurship	7%
Assessment, performance, and accountability	6%
The role of social entrepreneurs	5%
Social innovation in the public and philanthropic sectors	4%
Introduction	3%
Institutional failures	3%

A review of the weekly topics covered in the courses (Table 3) showed them to be quite closely aligned with the program descriptions. The most frequently covered topics involved assessing the market and identifying sources of income for the social venture. About one fifth of course content focused on markets. This included discussions of innovative impact investing and moving beyond the role of profit. One syllabus described this as follows:

Innovations in Capital Markets analyzes approaches to identifying and acquiring critical resources for high performance and scale. The course examines two types of capital markets: nonprofit capital markets dependent on philanthropy, contracting, and donations; and, the emerging impact investing markets that combine nonprofit and for-profit models including venture philanthropy. The sources of capital and the users of capital interact under conditions and standards that differ markedly from those of the business sector.

Given that these courses are focused on experiential approaches and doing social entrepreneurship, it is not surprising that about 18% of class sessions were concerned with presentations, discussion of consulting skills and networking, and training to “pitch” a venture. Another 18% of the sessions also focused on creating social change, through discussions of theories of change, finding a preferred vehicle (nonprofit, for-profit, or hybrid), and designs of social innovation, as typified in this syllabus:

For a social enterprise to be successful in achieving its goals, it should have a clear picture of how the goods and services it offers contribute to changing the lives of its target clients. Such a “theory of change” should present a cogent and compelling argument about the links between what the organizations does—and the human and financial resources

invested—and the social outcomes it hopes to achieve.

About 8% of the weekly meetings discussed creating permanent social change through scaling up and “locking in the mission” or examined emerging legal forms for social enterprises that require assets to be used only for mission purposes. Understanding social entrepreneurship and social enterprise approaches, including the role of social entrepreneurs, comprised about 19% of course content. For example, the first week of classes at a prominent business school covered this topic: “What is social entrepreneurship? A new kind of service provider, a new kind of funder, and venture philanthropy.” Assessment and performance measurement made up an additional 6% of syllabi content. For example, as explained in one syllabus:

We will examine different approaches to impact assessment. The “gold standard” of impact assessments is the academically rigorous approach employed by many scholars and policy makers: the randomized control trial (RCT). An RCT addresses “the fundamental evaluation question . . . : ‘How are the lives of the participants different relative to how they would have been had the program, product, service, or policy not been implemented?’” We will also explore other—less rigorous, but perhaps more practical—ways of developing metrics to gauge social outcomes.

Little attention appeared to be paid to critical perspectives on social ventures or failures; only about 3% of class sessions were dedicated to such discussions.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings show that U.S. social entrepreneurship and enterprise curricular models were dominated by areas such as innovation, application of tools from private sector/management, and effectiveness, with a heavy emphasis on

experiential learning and doing as a pedagogical approach. These findings are similar to those of Wiley and Berry (2015, p. 391) in their review of social entrepreneurship courses. There was very little to no mention of areas such as ethical reasoning, critical thinking, social justice, democracy, or social capital. In addition, most coursework in the programs we reviewed provided direct instruction that prepared students to undertake innovations and enterprises for social change; there was only one course in ethics in the 17 social entrepreneurship programs analyzed. The most frequently covered topics in social enterprise courses focused on assessing the market and identifying sources of income for the social venture. Critical perspectives on social ventures or failures received little attention.

As noted in the methodology section, there are limitations to our content analysis approach, such as missing content that occurs in lectures and discussion between students and instructors. The key descriptors of the social enterprise programs studied nevertheless clearly related to managerialism and performativity rather than democracy, community organizing, or political engagement. More than half the courses we reviewed were dedicated to social entrepreneurship and social venture knowledge and skills, with little if any attention paid to community building or developing social capital. A review of syllabi confirmed the focus on managerialism, reflecting the discourse of performativity and the market. Few if any of the weekly class sessions provided critical perspective on the outsourcing of government functions to the private sector, empirical or critical analysis of the social enterprise and social entrepreneurship approach, or assessment of the implications of this trend for democratic systems of governance.

The dominant discourse of these programs, then, is the one promoted by funders and policy makers rather than that used by practitioners (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008). Students in social entrepreneurship and pro-

grams seem to be learning very little about community organizing, engaging citizens, building social capital, or changing public policy, even though these are areas in line with the work of social enterprise practitioners and key areas of contributions for social enterprises, as noted in the literature review. This also despite the literature's being scant and quite mixed on the impact of social enterprise (Blackburn & Ram, 2006; Peattie & Morley, 2008; Teasdale, 2012a). The literature suggests that social enterprises may have an equally (or perhaps even more) important impact on building social capital, infrastructure, and engagement than on creating jobs and sustainability (Bertotti et al., 2012; Borzaga & Depedri, 2012; Smallbone et al., 2001; Teasdale, 2010). In addition, even though scholars note the complex balancing act of social entrepreneurship for curriculum development (Tracey & Phillips, 2007), the programs and courses seem to do little to acknowledge such complexities.

Some public administration scholars have argued for democracy and citizenship to be the basis for public administration theory and practice (e.g., Box, Marshall, Reed, & Reed, 2001; Dahl & Soss, 2014; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). There is also a growing body of literature that highlights the importance of the sociality of social enterprise (Bull et al., 2010; Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Hjorth, 2009; Humphries & Grant, 2005; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006) and calls for an infusion of politics and values into social enterprise discourse (Cho, 2006; Durking & Gunn, 2010; Hjorth & Bjerke, 2006; Kerlin, 2009; Musso, Weare, Bryer, & Cooper, 2011). We concur that enhancing these aspects, rather than the performative and managerialist focus of funders and policy makers, is essential for democratic governance and the place to begin to address this is in the classroom. To this end, we recommend a starting place for curricular revisions to social entrepreneurship and enterprise programs and courses, in whatever their disciplinary home.

### **Acknowledge Social Entrepreneurship as a Political Phenomenon**

As understood by Cho (2006, p. 36), the domain of social entrepreneurship includes choices that are political in nature. As currently taught in our classrooms, social entrepreneurship is an activity of the individual entrepreneur, a leader or visionary pursuing innovative ends. However, we must see it as a subset of civil society, achieving stated aims but not replacing public deliberation “that could produce more inclusive and integrative systemic solutions” (p. 53). Young and Grinsfelder (2010) find that the skill set for social entrepreneurship should be over and above that required in generic entrepreneurial programs:

Social entrepreneurs must be conversant with philanthropy, government, and volunteerism and the skills required to successfully negotiate those institutions. These are areas of expertise now emphasized in the hundreds of programs in nonprofit management education that have developed in U.S. universities, largely in schools of public administration. (p. 562)

In comparing social enterprise approaches in European Union nations with those in the United States, Kerlin (2006) maintains that

governance in social enterprise is an ... area the United States can learn from Western Europe, specifically in its multi-stakeholder approach and democratic management style. Governing boards in Europe are made up of multi-stakeholders and operate according to democratic management style, build civil society and strengthen democracy. (p. 260)

### **Transition from Social to Public Entrepreneurship**

The curricular content of social entrepreneurship programs are “overly economic and individualistic in orientation” (Hjorth & Bjerke, 2006, p. 119). The result is that students come

to understand problems in the community as economic problems requiring only an infusion of money from investors. Students are taught to frame the problem, develop an innovative solution, acquire funding, and scale it up for greater impact. For the most part, pedagogical approaches are devoid of sociological, political, and historical dimensions of entrepreneurial decisions and approaches.

We believe that courses must emphasize and prioritize the local concerns of communities in crafting solutions to public problems. Bellone and Goerl (1992) refer to this as a civic-regarding entrepreneurship, where citizens have “a greater opportunity [for] design and delivery of their public goods and services” (p. 132). Hjorth and Bjerke (2006) describe the transition that must take place, first from social to public and second from consumer to citizen:

Entrepreneurship belongs to society and not primarily to business. We have to understand how everyday living is made possible through entrepreneurship as forms of social creativity, as the creation of sociality in local settings. Local history and culture is far too important to allow for a generalized template as the one circulated in the “social entrepreneurship” discourse. ... We believe creativity is a genuinely social force. Our focus should be on the in-betweens, the relationships, and not on individuals. Entrepreneurship is about the everyday, daily life, the civic practices of living, rather than an extraordinary accomplishment. (p. 119)

### **Integrate Ethics into Social Entrepreneurship Curriculum**

Tesfayohannes and Driscoll (2010, p. 92) suggest that we weave into our courses questions concerning the common good, the purpose of business and its connection to questions of life, the meaning of work, and social justice. Although the authors were specifically addressing generic courses in entrepreneurship, their

suggestions are applicable to the social entrepreneurship classroom as well. As they note,

The fundamental tenet ... logically advocates [that] entrepreneurial education should not deal with profit and enrichment only, but also with ethical and social responsibility attributes that are vital for promoting and nurturing the resourcefulness of entrepreneurship as an engine of economic growth and competitiveness, as well as of ethical business practice and ecologically sustainable development. (p. 93)

Williamson, Burke, and Beinecke (2011) further suggest incorporating ethics and entrepreneurship as “bridging” topics within our curricula, giving students opportunities to discern important similarities *and* differences between public and private approaches.

#### **Instruct on Both the Good and the Bad**

Social enterprise programs seem to embrace the assumption that social entrepreneurship is good by definition. However, Mitchell and Scott (1987) argue that “there is simply no empirical support for the idea that certain traits (such as vision or risk taking) lead to either innovation or success” (p. 447). Dart (2004b) contends that the moral legitimacy of social enterprise can better explain its emergence and growth than its pragmatic legitimacy based on demonstrated outcomes. That is, because of the consonance between social enterprise and the probusiness ideology that has become dominant in the wider social environment, the moral legitimacy perspective frames social enterprise not merely as something that earns revenues or achieves outcomes but as a preferred model of organization.

Engaging faculty from multiple disciplines may be one way to add this critical perspective. One study on the views of diverse faculty regarding the increase of entrepreneurial courses on campuses in the European Union found differences in attitudes between the engineers

and material scientists and the social scientists and liberal arts faculty. The latter group

voiced concerns regarding the potential implications of entrepreneurship on the curricula and the students ... [and] center[ed] on the migration of societal and humanitarian roots of their primary fields of study towards more capitalist ideologies. Additionally, concerns related to the potential student attrition and conflicts of interests linked to an increase in market initiatives sponsored by the university were voiced by this group of faculty. (Mars, 2007, p. 43)

Finally, Terry (1998) argues that public (and social) entrepreneurs are “oblivious to ... values highly prized in the U.S. constitutional democracy” (p. 198). Thus our coursework must point out the pitfalls of neomanagerialism and the oversized influence of public choice theories and behavioral economics.

#### **Discuss Entrepreneurship Toward the Other**

Dey (2006) argues that to truly become “social, social entrepreneurship must be able to exceed the economic and performative circles of input-output relations” (p. 141), embracing the other (those who are jobless, disabled, living in poverty, etc.). This postmodern understanding of entrepreneurship transcends the boundaries of neoliberalism and its dominant discourse. Social entrepreneurship must eliminate the current model with one where entrepreneurial acts are for the benefit of the other. We must revise our curricular models to transcend the neoliberal approach and its instrumentality, replacing it with an openness toward those who will be served. In his understanding of ethics as “hypernorms,” Simms (2006) asserts that two forms of respect emerge:

One is the respect for the unique identities of each person independent of gender, race, and ethnicity. The second is respect for the practices and worldviews associated with and valued by members

of minority groups and cultures. ... This awareness informs present and future ethical corporate practice. (p. 175)

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to critically examine the focus of social entrepreneurship and enterprise curricula in the United States. We did this through analyzing program descriptions, courses offered, and course syllabi as well as a review of literature on social enterprise and its impact. Our findings show that U.S. social enterprise programs reflect largely performative and managerialist values and do not focus on social aspects such as building social capital, increasing participation of the marginalized through community organizing, or boosting political engagement. We recommend that social entrepreneurship and enterprise programs and courses provide an understanding of social entrepreneurial activities as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, processes of governance and deliberation; transition from social entrepreneurship in which economic values describe recipients as consumers to a public entrepreneurship in which beneficiaries are embraced as citizens in full partnership with entrepreneurs; integrate ethics, critical thinking, and reflection into the curriculum; familiarize students with the good and the bad of entrepreneurial efforts, warts and all; and imagine social entrepreneurship as an act addressed to the other.

The results of our research serve as a cautionary tale for nonprofit and social enterprise practitioners, or students who want to be practitioners, who increasingly embrace social enterprise and entrepreneurship as a model for creating social change. Focusing on the managerialist and performative aspects of social entrepreneurship without paying equal attention to sociality or social capital building may jeopardize the historic role that nonprofit and voluntary organizations have played in building civil society and democratic governance (Eikenberry, 2009). Such practitioners or want-to-be practitioners should also be cautious in assuming that social

enterprise will unquestionably lead to good outcomes. Students who desire to create social change might be better off seeking out social enterprise, nonprofit, public affairs, or other programs that do more to emphasize social aspects such as organizing for collective action, enhancing political engagement, and building social capital. Finally, nonprofit and public affairs programs might do more to emphasize the social role of public and nonprofit organizations; for example, they might follow Mirabella's (2013) advice to implement a curricular approach that reframes authority to include a positive understanding of freedom, embraces interdisciplinarity and connections, includes democratic feminist theories of management, shifts our understanding of accountability from individual competition to collaborative discourse, and ends lip service to praxis by focusing outward on governance issues and on viewing and practicing administration through multiple lenses.

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## NOTE

- 1 *Creaming* means to work with clients who have the greatest chance of success rather than those who have deeper-seated problems.

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