



Entrepreneurs: Launch Your Business Now!

Middlesex Community College (MCC) in Lowell, Massachusetts, has rolled out “Launch Your Business Now” (LYBN), an intensive new program for student entrepreneurs. Introduced in the fall of 2018, the 16-credit certificate program is designed to be completed in a single semester, according to Stacie Hargis, an associate professor at MCC and coordinator of the college’s entrepreneurship program. “Our new LYBN certificate is a great way for students to work solely on developing a business concept,” said Hargis.

LYBN was created to meet a need in the region’s entrepreneurship education market. The local economy is in transition, and a growing number of individuals are losing interest in corporate jobs and want to create their own destiny and independence as small business owners. Many of these people still see great value in formal education, so LYBN was created to serve individuals who appreciate the structure and rigor of an academic setting, but have a clear vision for themselves as entrepreneurs.

Essential Skills

LYBN is based on MCC’s “entrepreneurship in action” approach to programming that strives to provide relevant, hands-on coursework to help students understand the essential skills necessary for the real world, according to Hargis. Like many entrepreneurship programs, LYBN



The inaugural class of the LYBN program included: (back row, l-r): Dave Clark, MJ Bujold, Lee Denis, Hilary Clark; (front row, l-r): Jessica Salani, Juan Cintron, and Alison Njoroge.

guides students through the process of defining their problem statement, jobs to be done and business model, as well as building and validating a minimum viable product. However, a basic tenet of LYBN is that a great business model is not enough to launch and operate a business successfully. For this reason, the program includes LaunchPad and Entrepreneurship in Action curriculum.

Entrepreneurship in Action is internally focused, while LaunchPad requires that students think about how to present the business to external stakeholders. LaunchPad guides students as they refine their plans and knowledge and prepares them to share their vision to future stakeholders in the form of a business plan, a video recorded elevator pitch, and a funding pitch deck. LaunchPad students also engage with an industry-specific mentor who provides guidance throughout the business plan development process.

Two additional electives are required to complete the certificate. These are selected based on the specific educational needs of the entrepreneur, either to develop the skills necessary to run the business, or to strengthen areas in which the student struggles. “The program was broken down in a way that made it easy to absorb since there is so much to learn about starting a business,” said Jessica Salani, a recent LYBN graduate.

Everyday Entrepreneur Venture Fund

Thanks to a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem and a generous grant from the Everyday Entrepreneur Venture Fund, MCC is able to provide seed funds to qualified graduate entrepreneurs, according to Franky Descoteaux, director of the Merrimack Valley Small Business Center in Lowell and an adjunct professor in MCC’s entrepreneurship program. “Graduates of the program can apply to become Everyday Entrepreneurs, through which they receive up to \$20,000 in seed funding and a three-person mentor team that will support them for an entire year after graduation,” said Descoteaux.

In spring of 2018, the Everyday Entrepreneur Venture Fund awarded MCC a \$250,000 grant to help student entrepreneurs start or grow a business. EEVF co-founders established the million-dollar venture fund to provide seed grants to community college foundations for community-based new business start-ups. MCC is one of four colleges in the U.S. to receive an EEVF grant. The award is the first venture-fund grant in Massachusetts to be used exclusively to launch small community-based entrepreneurs. It is administered through the MCC Foundation. Grant funds are limited to current students and qualified alumni.

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