

Small Business Consulting Practice – A Virtuous Circle
Bronx Business Tech Center
School of Continuing and Professional Studies
Lehman College CUNY
March, 2019



Small businesses and entrepreneurs gathered with Lehman College President Cruz, Provost Nwosu, faculty, staff, administrators and students at the Business Tech Center on January 29.

Introduction

Lehman is a CUNY senior college located in the Bronx, serving 14,000 undergraduate and graduate students per year in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education and over 13,000 per year in non-credit programs (preparation for certificates, workforce training and business development), thereby reaching over 27,000 community residents per year. More than 50% of Lehman students come from the Bronx and their demographic profile is representative of the borough. Economically they struggle; 41% come from households with an income of less than \$20,000 per year, 60% work for pay for over 20 hours per week, almost 60% receive financial support from the government or the college and almost 50% are the first in their family to attend college. Reflecting the surrounding area, over 53% of our students are Hispanic while 30% are Black/Non-Hispanic. This is a non-traditional student population in many other ways: sixty four percent of the students are aged 18-26 (36% are over 26), 68% are female and 80% have transferred from a two-year college, usually with an associate's degree.

Lehman College's mission

Lehman College serves the Bronx and surrounding region as an intellectual, economic, and cultural center. The College's numerous partnerships with schools, hospitals, social service and governmental agencies, small businesses, major corporations, and cultural and scientific institutions all contribute to the economic development of the region and it is in the context of economic development that the impact of funding from the city council is considered here.

For the past three years Lehman College's School of Continuing and Professional Studies has received funding from New York City Council to set up and maintain a Business Tech Center in the Bronx for tech freelancers, local small business, and entrepreneurs from underserved communities. **The Bronx Business Tech Center's** mission is to foster technological development by providing a unique work-space (offices and access to conference rooms and classrooms) as well as access to technology and to training that

local entrepreneurs otherwise would not be able to afford. The Bronx Business Tech Center provides local small businesses and startups with the resources to bring their business plans from concept to reality and move them up to the next level. State-of-the-art equipment and space enables the current 16 entrepreneurs to be nimble and responsive inhabitants of the digital economy.

The Bronx Business Tech Center provides a core of talent and the foundation to attract high-tech startups in the Bronx while enhancing Lehman's academic excellence and student success. It also fosters collaboration and leverages the resources of the college for Bronx businesses. For a detailed list of current startup businesses and entrepreneurs please visit our website: <http://lehman.edu/techincubator/tech-incubator.php#program>

A major source of support for the Business Tech Center is the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Lehman College, which has operated since 2000. Last year its economic impact exceeded \$5 million; 456 clients were counseled, thereby creating 54 jobs and saving 79; the SBDC served 1,610 Bronx entrepreneurs at over 50 training and information events. The support services provided by the SBDC, including counseling, business plan guidance and technical assistance with procurement and loan acquisition, give new and start-up businesses help with issues such as what to charge for their services and what sort of social media best match their goods and services. The SBDC provides the needed boost to move their businesses forward, to hire staff and expand their operations.

With the technological infrastructure of CUNY on the Concourse, counseling support from Lehman's Small Business Development Center and the extensive resources of Lehman College, the Bronx Business Tech Center provides an environment for companies to turn innovative ideas into profitable realities, that is, to bridge the gap between dreams and execution.

In addition to supporting these entrepreneurs the Business Tech Center has provided the infrastructure for additional innovative projects such as the Virtual Reality Training

Academy and the RLAB, located at Brooklyn Navy Yards. SCPS has been awarded a 3-year grant (\$200,000/year) from the NYC Economic Development Corporation and the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment that will enable SCPS to serve over 2,000 community residents per year as part of the NYU RLAB. This expands Lehman College’s existing Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality Training Academy and enables the development of the local workforce with short-term training, thereby increasing familiarity with the possibilities of VR/AR among local entrepreneurs. (See [http://lehman.edu/vr/.](http://lehman.edu/vr/))



Dean Jane MacKillop introduces Lehman students in the Small Business Consulting Practice and welcomes Councilman Andrew Cohen.

Small Business Consulting Practice Initiative

The Small Business Consulting Practice (SBCP) is one initiative that has developed from the Business Tech Center’s linking of the college with local entrepreneurs. Higher education today faces the challenge of equipping students with the workforce-ready skills that are expected by employers. Consequently, incorporating experiential learning and

building the skills which only hands-on experience can teach is increasingly becoming an important component of college curricula and learning. This is the realization that led to the development of the Small Business Consulting Practice. The goal of this program, which started in March 2018, is to provide the business and accounting students of the Department of Economics and Business at Lehman College with applied business training and experience to help support small business entrepreneurs and startups in the Bronx.

The **Department of Economics and Business** is one of the largest departments at Lehman College with over 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students in Economics, Accounting and Business majors. It is committed to providing a solid foundation in accounting, business management and economics within a hands-on, experiential learning environment. Additionally it provides students with small classes while also promoting opportunities for them to intern with organizations in the Bronx and surrounding local and regional areas. Thus, the Small Business Consulting Practice program aligns well with the overall goals of the department. This initiative, which bridges classroom learning with hands-on experience in various business functions, provides students with opportunities not only to develop and deepen their business knowledge and skills, but also gives the students an edge in the job market through acquisition of business experience. “Students need to know more than core subjects,” said Economics and Business chair, Dr. Dene Hurley. “They need real world knowledge and experience.”

Students who are selected for this program receive 60 hours of hands-on training in several business areas, including web design and development, marketing and social media, sales, preparation of business plans, and presentation. This is followed by a 5-week paid internship with local small businesses and entrepreneurs/startups in the Bronx, during which the students also take an online internship course.



The small businesses and startups that are interested in receiving the consulting services of the SBCP student consultants, at no cost, are identified and recruited by SBDC, which is also responsible for monitoring the services provided by the young consultants in collaboration with the coordinator. The businesses receiving interns are required to be M/WBE-certified or in the process of becoming certified, credit worthy start-ups, or an existing business ready to launch or looking to expand. Many of these businesses are housed at the Bronx Business Tech Center at CUNY on the Concourse itself.

Upon completion of the SBCP program, in addition to acquiring business skills and work experience, students receive seven college credits for the 60 hours of training and the internship course as well as a digital badge to certify their command of the subjects covered in the program. Fifteen (15) students who made up the first cohort of recruits began the program in March 2018 and completed it in August 2018. None of the students dropped out and attendance was mostly 100%, reflecting the tremendous value students placed on applied learning opportunity presented by this program. Another fifteen students are currently in the second cohort of the program, which began in October 2018.

The curriculum content of training is assessed after each cohort and modified accordingly. For example, based on the feedback

THE STUDENTS TELL US:

Through the Small Business Consulting Practice I learned how to better use PowerPoint to create presentations, how to create a business plan that'll turn an idea into an actual business, the legal aspects of a business that I used to wonder about, how to build a website and I've strengthened my skills in marketing.

I'm *very* excited to work with SBCP clients. With this opportunity I'll be gaining real world experience where the work I do will have a direct impact on their business.

In the next few years I plan on owning my own business, starting a non-profit, or finding a way to do both, relating to the mentorship of minority minors.

One major thing that the SBCP did for me was help me grow, as a student, as a person and as a professional and I am forever grateful for the opportunity given to me by the SBCP and all those involved.

The work ethic I developed through this internship helped me push on through one of my physics class, a class that I was going to drop but decided that "No, my internship taught me that when things get tough you've got to push on through or else you will always give up when it's tough."

Before the SBCP I wasn't so confident in myself and wasn't so knowledgeable in the mechanics of a successful business.

from the first cohort of students, the curriculum for the second cohort of students placed greater emphasis on web development and social media marketing as many of the small business sell products online and thus need greater online presence. Additionally, due to a need for greater understanding of financial planning and loan application process, those areas of training were strengthened to emphasis business presentations and “soft” skills, such as interviewing and workplace interactions.



Councilman Cohen meets future entrepreneurs.

Benefits of Small Business Consulting Practice Initiative

This program is a prime example of the intersection of small businesses and undergraduate students and how this synergy can be an engine for economic development in the Bronx. All participating parties have gained tremendously in a number of ways. Through participation in this program, **students** receive opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in finance, accounting and marketing while enhancing their business competencies. This is conducted under the guidance and supervision of John Frias, the

SBCP coordinator, who himself has spent 10 years working in the private sector in South Korea. In the reflections papers they wrote for their internship course, students also reported the value of this experience in helping them learn essential soft skills such as time management and interpersonal communications in a professional setting. Consequently, they reported becoming more confident and articulate. As first generation college students, as well as in many cases first generation Americans, Lehman students need opportunities such as this for the practical experience that they gain to help position them to be more competitive for career opportunities while also providing insights into business operations. For example, during his internship in the entertainment industry at Lewis and Kirk, Fernando Fernandez, whose goal is to own or manage a nightclub or restaurant, saw what it takes to mount a performance from behind the scenes.



Entrepreneurs and small business hear from Chaplain Marisa Estrella, of Worldwide Veteran and family Services, which is located at CUNY on the Concourse.

For the **businesses**, the benefits have been wide-ranging. They were able to access valuable information and skills for marketing and promoting their businesses while gaining additional manpower at no charge at the Bronx Business Tech Center.

Business owners in the Business Tech Center are effusive about the assistance they have received from the student consultants/interns. Jessica Marcano, owner of The Marcano Agency, Inc. writes: "*The Small Business Consulting Practice internship program was phenomenal.*

I had the pleasure of working with one of their consulting interns, Robert Johnson, who helped me build a pricing matrix, which told me the profitability of a potential contract. Having this tool handy has stopped me from accepting unprofitable bids. I now bid with confidence and no longer regret turning down offers. Because of this matrix, I have no doubt that my business will be 30% more profitable in the first quarter of 2019. I want to thank Lehman College, The Bronx Business Tech Center, the consulting interns and Mr. John Frias for giving me the resources and inspiration to push my business forward.

Sheila Baptiste of Lewis and Kirk Expeditions Incorporated reported that "*Interns Fernando Fernandez and Quaylan Barker assisted in researching partnerships and sponsorships for signature events such as the 2018 Martha's Vineyard Jazz and Blues Summerfest by contacting businesses, venues, hotels and local resources to facilitate execution of complex elements of festival production.*

They assisted in on-site coordination of performance staging and presentation at new 400,000 square foot campus of Fresh Direct corporate headquarters in the South Bronx, NY with more than 2,000 guests and dignitaries in attendance; and assisted in social media campaign marketing material development, radio promotions and relationship building relative to the Martha's Vineyard Jazz and Blues Summerfest resulting in contacts with five major stations and advertising campaigns on two stations which allowed the festival to reach approximately 60,000 additional patrons and resulted in a record event attendance of approximately 2,400 people over four days. They assisted with hospitality at advance street team promotions, greeting and registering guests at designated venues, capturing guest contact information and feedback at the Yonkers Waterfront Jazz and Blues Concert Series produced by Lewis and Kirk

Expeditions for the City of Yonkers Downtown BID and New York City's premiere jazz Concert Series presented by Jazzmobile.



Small business owner, Branden Baskin, Provost Nwosu (Lehman College) and Councilman Andrew Cohen.

Branden Baskin, of Vivid Imagination Inc., noted the impact that the interns had on his bottom line: *“Thanks to Helen’s hard work and forward thinking, we currently have two contracts with NYC DOE schools through the College Access for All initiative worth over \$20,000.”*

The Bronx Business Tech Center has enabled Lehman College to create the infrastructure to be a major provider of space and training for the Bronx, to link a number of programs and resources and to be the focus of innovation that has enabled the college to create partnerships and receive other grants.

The key to Lehman's approach and success has been to combine basic business skills development with a full range of entrepreneurial supports and technical trainings, followed by real-world experience. This combination of training and internship becomes

self-propagating as it becomes a virtuous circle, looping in and benefitting the small businesses in the tech incubator, providing them with enthusiastic, skilled assistants at no cost. Funding from the city council has for enabled the Bronx Business Tech Center to amplify its impact as an engine of economic development many times over, changing the lives of small businesses and entrepreneurs as well as Lehman College students and moving the Bronx closer to a renaissance.

More information and all reports can be found on:

<http://lehman.edu/techincubator/tech-incubator.php>

<https://sbcpnyc.squarespace.com/>

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