

River Valley Community College and ExL University pilot course around entrepreneurship

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Photo by: Courtesy Dr. Alicia Harvey-Smith, president of River Valley Community College, met with several students from Kosovo enrolled in the “Introduction to Entrepreneurship” course taught by Gregg Fairbrothers. The students came to the United States to learn about entrepreneurship and starting a business with the hope of bringing that information back to Kosovo and getting more people employed in their country. Pictured from left are Dr. Vincent Mumford, RVCC vice president of Academic Affairs, Kreshnik Ismaili, Kosovo student, Dr. Harvey-Smith, Marija Gavrilov and Arta Ponosheci, Kosovo students, Michael O’Connell, RVCC professor and business department chair.

CLAREMONT — This winter, a group of diverse students from the greater Claremont area had a unique opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship, thanks to a new course being piloted by ExL University and River Valley Community College.

“Introduction to Entrepreneurship” (IENT) was a non-credit course, offered at the Claremont campus of River Valley Community College this winter. The course was open to 25 participants from the greater Claremont region and was free for this first group of students.

“Introduction to Entrepreneurship” is an experience-based course, organized around a project or company that students work on in teams. The core content of the course was delivered by streaming live video lectures and guest speakers from ExL University (a volunteer teaching consortium based out of Hanover, New Hampshire) to a classroom of students at River Valley’s campus. The streaming lectures covered fundamental entrepreneurial concepts, and the guest speakers reinforced this content with real-world lessons from successful entrepreneurs. ExL is a teaching consortium based out of Hanover, New Hampshire.

“We want students to learn to be entrepreneurial even if they never start a company,” said Professor Gregg Fairbrothers. “For every person who starts a company, 10, 20, 50 have to work for those companies. The entrepreneurial aptitude is valuable everywhere — even when it’s not

appreciated — and that aptitude can be learned. The key question for educators is, how do you help people learn that way of thinking and executing?”

Feedback from the Claremont course seems to validate Fairbrothers’ thinking. “I enrolled in the course to learn the process involved in taking a couple ideas I have and turning them into marketable products,” said Kari Freyenhagen. “Although I learned how to take my ideas and make them a reality, the course offered so much more. The skills learned are not only applicable in the entrepreneurial world but the business world as a whole. I was learning not only how to market a product, but how to communicate, focus ideas, present and sell myself to an employer.”

Students who took the course, did the project, and saw it through to the end were afforded a unique opportunity to test the merits of their business ideas and planning. The projects culminated in a final “pitch” to a panel of expert judges — much like those seen on “Shark Tank.” Felicia Brych Dalke, a Claremont resident who works for Cisco Systems, said, “the opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship while applying the process to a real life business plan was fantastic!”

In addition to the staff and faculty at River Valley Community College and ExL University, the course is being supported by staff from the City of Claremont. The course is situated inside a renewed push for entrepreneurship across the City, including the development of the Claremont MakerSpace www.claremontmakerspace.org.

“This is the type of excellence in collaboration and partnership that River Valley Community College will become known for in our region and across the nation” said Dr. Alicia Harvey-Smith, College President. “This is an excellent opportunity for our students to learn from one of the nation’s brightest minds in this area and I commend Dr. Fairbrothers and his expert team, Dr. Vincent Mumford, the Vice President of Academic Affairs at River Valley and the City of Claremont for envisioning this effort in partnership with River Valley Community College.” said, Dr. Harvey-Smith.

“Entrepreneurship is in Claremont’s genes,” said Zach Williams, the city’s Business Development Coordinator. “The goal of the class was to offer some formal entrepreneurial education and to connect Claremont residents with some really helpful people. We hope River Valley can be the center of Claremont’s entrepreneurial ecosystem in the years to come.”

For more information, please contact Mike O’Connell at (603) 542-7744 at River Valley Community College or Zach Williams at (603) 504-3044 with the city of Claremont.