Alison Lloyd describes the success of a multidiscipline approach to nurturing entrepreneurial capabilities

Benefitting from balance

In an increasingly knowledge-driven economy, encouraging entrepreneurship in higher education is regarded as fundamental to fostering innovation and nurturing the life-long learning process.

Traditionally, entrepreneurship has been a subject taught by business schools. However, the suitability of placing it *solely* under the auspices of management education has been questioned because good ideas are often spawned in other areas such as scientific, creative or technical disciplines.

All students should have access to education in entrepreneurship and development of their capabilities, encouraged through the creation of opportunities to bring business students together with those from other disciplines.

A recent review by the European Commission called for multidisciplinary approaches to building entrepreneurship capabilities.

This article describes the experience of the Faculty of Business of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) in providing an experiential learning opportunity that brings together business and physiotherapy students to develop entrepreneurial capabilities in the form of a student-run wellness clinic delivering a preventive wellness service to the community.

Rising healthcare costs are a worldwide phenomenon. One way to lighten the burden on the healthcare system is to focus on educating individuals about the importance of preventive healthcare.

Preventive health services include screenings, maintaining good health habits and physical examinations that help prevent illness before symptoms appear. Preventive healthcare provides many direct benefits to the individual: not having to deal with uncomfortable or painful symptoms, feeling more energetic and being able to fully enjoy daily activities.

However, much of our health care system is geared towards treating illness after it arises. For the wider community, learning about and practising preventive healthcare such as looking after your body and health throughout your entire lifetime is a good method to prevent illnesses from happening in the first place.

High healthcare costs have in some cases created barriers for individuals seeking treatment. One adaptive solution to this issue is the establishment of student-run clinics providing community-based treatment and health promotion services. In 2012, it is estimated there were more than 110 student-run clinics in the US alone.

Other than being a viable form of healthcare delivery, student-run clinics are internationally recognised as a sustainable model for service delivery and experiential learning.

Student-run clinics enhance education by providing students with the opportunity to become more aware of social issues, needs and health concerns in the community. Students develop appropriate interpersonal and clinical skills for working with community groups through both their formal education and service learning at clinics.

With a history as a leading provider of professional education to meet the needs of

110

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society, the Faculty of Business of PolyU joined forces with the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences of the university to set up Hong Kong's first student-run wellness clinic.

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This unique experiential learning opportunity was funded by PolyU and aimed to bring together students from the two disciplines to develop leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities needed to identify and address specific community health needs by immersing them in a real-life situation.

This unique project employed a reality-based pedagogy by giving students the chance to enhance their awareness of the importance of using a multidiscipline approach to tackle an identified community health issue.

The project was completed in two phases.

The first was an open competition in which student teams produced preventive healthcare business models based on their research into the prevailing healthcare needs of the community. The business models were judged based on their feasibility and ability to address identified needs.

To encourage creativity, students were given few boundaries on the type of preventive healthcare to deliver. A panel of business and healthcare professionals evaluated all business models.

The first phase concluded with the selection of one winning business model. The second phase of the project involved the actual implementation of the winning business model and the launch of a wellness clinic.

The winning model was one focused on preventing falls by retirees and seniors by blending physiotherapy exercises into light dance routines that were fun and yet developed a better sense of balance in individuals.

Many subsequent health problems experienced by this target group are often the result of earlier falls. As we age, our sense of balance deteriorates, leading to the greater propensity to fall. By addressing the need to boost balance and proper alignment of the body, the risk of falling can be reduced.

The winning student team formed the core

68%

68% of individuals in the programme demonstrate significant improvement in the knowledge of fall prevention

38%

38% of individuals in the programme show physical improvement

Clockwise from left:
Caption required

57%

57% of individuals in the programme are more confident about dealing with falls

management team of the student-run clinic. The physiotherapy students designed the actual fall prevention programme under the guidance of an experienced physiotherapist. The business students were engaged in the service operation of the clinic as well as well as marketing and outreach efforts.

The student-run wellness clinic is modelled as a social enterprise through the establishment of a Care Fund. Patients of the clinic would need to pay a nominal fee for the preventive healthcare service and part of the revenue would be fed into the Care Fund. The Care Fund would be used to subsidise the cost of the services for those individuals who could not afford the regular price.

This social entrepreneurship element is a reflection of the "Do well do good" ethos that is central to PolyU. The winning model employed a mobile-based delivery model, whereby instead of having patients physically travel to the site of the wellness clinic, the student team was able to go to different districts in Hong Kong to reach out to more community groups.

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Although the impact of preventive healthcare is not easy to observe, the students have made every effort to track the effectiveness of the programme using a variety of physiotherapy tests and surveys.

In the assessment of preventive healthcare, these key metrics represent a demonstrated improvement in the physical ability to prevent falls and more importantly the nurturing of a positive attitude towards dealing with falls. The student-run wellness clinic has received publicity in local newspapers and students have been praised by the community for their dedication.

New clients continue to sign up for the fall prevention programme, which is still ongoing. In the coming months the students will be delivering this service to other districts in Hong Kong. In terms of new service development, the students have created a programme to target lower back pain prevention for an expanded target group. Programme trial for this new service commenced in May 2015.

One of the greatest concerns for student-run wellness clinics is their sustainability. The students comprising the core management team of the clinic are in the midst of mentoring the next group of leaders to take up the reins and continue their work of putting their diverse skills to good use and serving the community.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dr Alison Lloyd is Director of Institutional Research and Planning of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research has been published in the Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Services Marketing, Tourism Management *and others.*