IDENTIFYING BENEFITS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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College is a great opportunity for students to explore their entrepreneurial ideas since they have access to a wealth of resources that can support them in making their ideas a reality. Rodrigues et al. (2023) highlighted that experiential learning opportunities in higher education significantly develop students' entrepreneurial competencies, such as creativity, adaptability, and decision-making. These competencies contribute to deeper student engagement, stronger employability, and a mindset primed for innovation across various academic disciplines. When higher education curricula neglect industry-enriched learning models, students frequently lack the confidence to apply theoretical knowledge within practical contexts. This gap can make academic experience feel abstract and disconnected from tangible, real-world opportunities (Colombelli et al., 2022).

Many colleges and universities remain constrained by lecture-heavy, content-driven models that emphasize rote memorization and theoretical knowledge over practical, entrepreneurial skills development (Martins van Jaarsveld et al., 2025). The persistence of such models leads students to feel they have spent years learning concepts that rarely translate into workplace competencies. Furthermore, programs often lack active collaboration with industries, stakeholders, and authentic environments, limiting student exposure to real-world contexts where they will ultimately work (Leiva-Lugo et al., 2024). The absence of these connections leaves graduates unsure about how their skills align with labor market demands, reducing their preparedness for current job market realities.

Non-business programs frequently overlook embedding customer-centric principles, missing a fundamental opportunity to show students how customer insights and market viability are essential for driving revenue and sustainable success in any industry. Integrating entrepreneurial thinking throughout curricula could enable graduates to design offerings that meet actual needs, assess feasibility early, and convert ideas into market-ready solutions. These entrepreneurial competencies are crucial for thriving in today's innovation-driven global economy.

The Importance of Emphasizing Business Viability

Most college programs remain rooted in theoretical frameworks that lack the essential practical application to prepare students for entrepreneurial readiness (Mngwengwe et al., 2025). As a result, many students graduate without the hands-on skills or practical experience necessary to transform ideas into concrete outcomes. Closing this gap requires curricula to embed active projects, experiential learning, and opportunities for students to build, test, and iterate business concepts in authentic settings.

University programs should encourage direct analysis of market needs and sustained engagement with customers and relevant stakeholders (Henderson et al., 2025). When students interact with real

customers, they gain insight into authentic problems, market feasibility, and user-driven innovation. These engagements sharpen entrepreneurial mindsets by centering learning around client priorities. Consider the following short exercise designed to stimulate entrepreneurial viability, which can be effectively used with students developing business ideas (Kander, 2014):

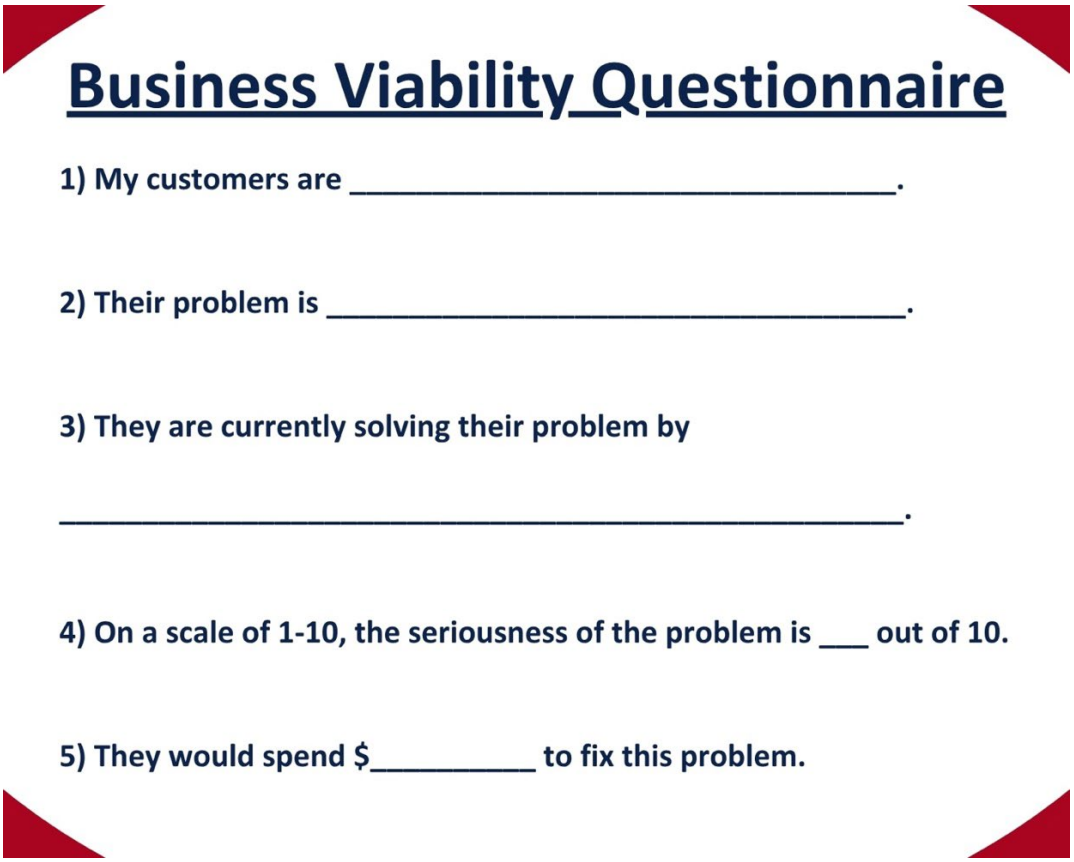
My customers are _____.

Their problem is _____.

They are currently solving their problem by _____.

On a scale of 1 to 10, the seriousness of the problem is ___ out of 10.

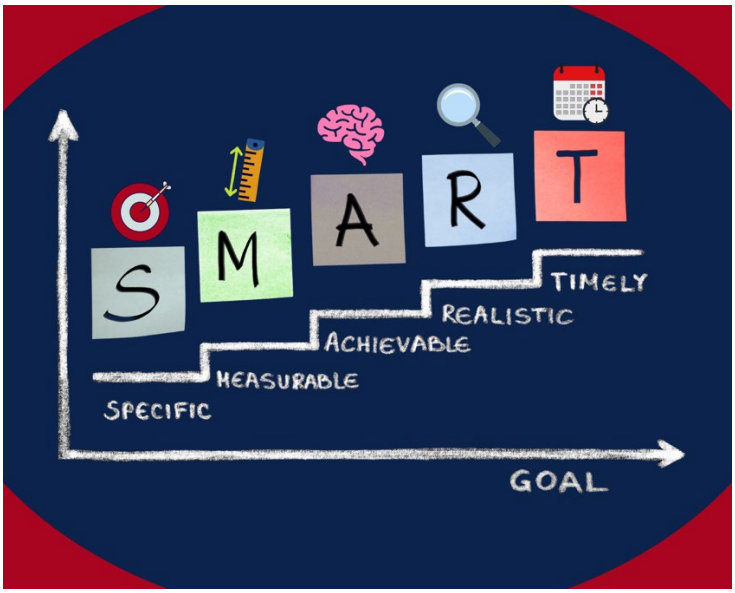
They would spend $____ to fix this problem.



Answering these five questions guides students to understand their target market, the competitive landscape, the problem's urgency, and potential price points. This reflection facilitates critical analysis of entrepreneurial viability. Such exercises foster customer-centric thinking, which is vital for informed decision-making in any startup or business venture. Educators are encouraged to adopt and adapt this questionnaire as a practical teaching tool for nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets.

Emphasizing SMART Goals to Promote Individualized Support

Goal setting is widely used in higher education as a measure to understand student perspectives and motivations. SMART goals— which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound— may provide a particularly effective framework for revealing students' intrinsic interests and fostering entrepreneurial traits such as persistence and adaptive problem-solving (Martins van Jaarsveld et al., 2025).



In my GEN 101 course, I provide individualized support by helping students align their professional SMART Goals with real-world opportunities. This stimulates active engagement with entrepreneurial thinking during classroom discussions. Supporting students to set SMART, values-driven goals enables them to strategically approach challenges, breaking down complex business concepts into manageable steps. This mirrors the approach real entrepreneurs apply in launching and growing ventures.

For example, my former student, Samantha, aimed to start an automotive repair business with her father, overseeing logistics, scheduling, location selection, and legal compliance. Samantha's SMART goal can be outlined as follows:

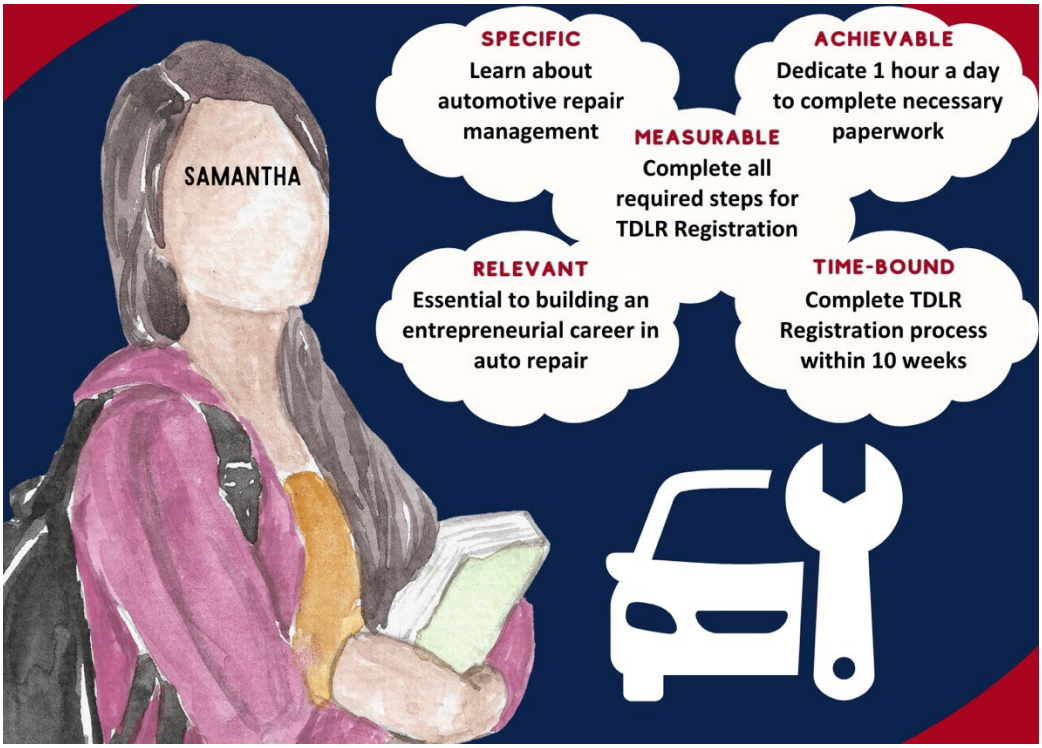
Specific: Learn automotive repair management.

Measurable: Obtain the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) Registration, necessary for becoming a vehicle inspection station.

Achievable: Dedicate one hour each weekday (five hours weekly) to completing the required paperwork.

Relevant: This aligns directly with her entrepreneurial objective to operate an auto repair shop with her father.

Time-bound: Set a deadline of 10 weeks for completing all necessary paperwork, with the goal of finishing earlier if possible.



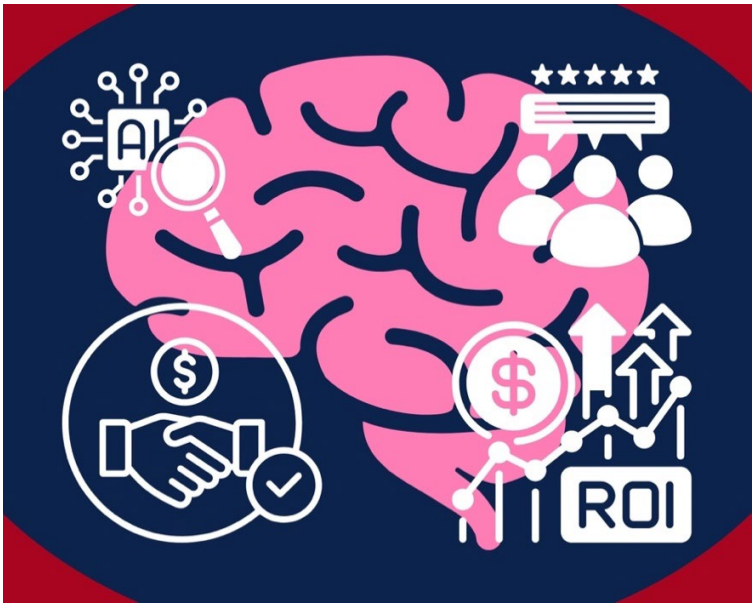
Once Samantha developed this professional SMART goal, I guided her to relevant Open Educational Resources (OER), including step-by-step YouTube tutorials for acquiring a General Business License and articles detailing the success of comparable auto repair ventures. This personalized approach has become a routine part of my course, where we develop practical skills and strategies for academic and entrepreneurial success.

Overall, the reflective practices associated with SMART goals encourage students to align their ambitions with tangible, real-world opportunities. This promotes an entrepreneurial mindset focused on identifying problems worth solving and taking concrete steps to address them.

Encouraging Sales Enablement Principles and the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Incorporating sales enablement into coursework shifts the educational focus from purely theoretical knowledge to practical, customer-centric business skills (Peterson et al., 2020). This fosters a mindset attuned to identifying and solving problems customers will pay to have resolved.

AI tools can further enhance learning by simulating real-world entrepreneurial scenarios and customer interactions. Current basic AI models can help students cultivate adaptive problem-solving abilities and iterative learning processes that underpin business success.



Returning to Samantha's example, she could use AI tools to analyze the local competitive landscape of auto repair shops. AI-based search results would inform her understanding of viable markets and niches for her family's business.

Sales enablement also involves prospecting and lead generation— efforts to identify and connect with new potential customers. I advised Samantha to contact her auto insurance agent to inquire about service gaps, asking questions such as, "in what zip codes are you struggling to find reliable auto repair shops?" and "What towns lack dependable auto repair services?" Based on the insurance agent's insights, Samantha's family could strategically open their repair shop in an underserved area. Once operational, Samantha could follow up by emphasizing to the agent that their new auto shop fills a critical market need, fostering referrals and expanding their customer base.

This strategy epitomizes the importance of business owners making data-driven decisions to gain a competitive advantage (Huber, 2025). Contacting insurance agents to uncover market gaps serves as a repeatable, effective method for discovering new customers and areas of expansion. Opening a new business, or in Samantha's case, an auto repair shop, represents a substantial investment; leveraging relevant market data maximizes the likelihood of success. Ultimately, utilizing modernized sales enablement strategies and the power of AI to simulate real-world business scenarios can be critical in providing a sense of experiential learning in the college classroom.

Conclusion

Embedding entrepreneurial thinking principles across higher education programs worldwide offers substantial benefits, enhancing student retention, employability, and engagement. Experiential learning, SMART goals, and tools like the Business Viability Questionnaire develop essential entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, adaptability, and practical decision-making for today's innovation-driven economy. Integrating industry-enriched learning and customer focus builds students' confidence to turn concepts

into viable businesses, while sales enablement and AI foster data-driven success. When students perceive a clear return on investment from their degree through practical, career-relevant experiences, they are more likely to value their education and feel connected to their institution. This educational shift deepens the role of higher education in preparing proactive, resilient, and market-ready graduates equipped to drive societal and economic progress.

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