

Business Class Hopefully First of Many

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Staff Writer

In the United States, family firms represent 89 percent of all business and three-quarters of all business worldwide is family owned. With family businesses making up such a large portion of business, Meredith College has seen the need to delve into the field itself.

Dr. Tony Bledsoe is leading the Family Business and Entrepreneurship drive on Meredith's campus. Two and a half years ago, Emily Richardson approached Bledsoe about doing an independent study to fill her final three hours of graduation credit. The two discussed what course the study could take and they agreed upon a family business study.

Robinson's parents both owned businesses and as it turns out, many other Meredith students' families do as well. Using Robinson's research, they found out just

how many.

"In 2001," Bledsoe says, "Thirty percent of all incoming freshman came from families that owned businesses. For 2002 and 2003, the numbers are basically the same, between 27 and 30 percent."

The study also found that many Meredith students were interested in owning their own businesses.

"We saw the statistics and asked 'Is there something we can do to enhance [the education of entrepreneurship to those interested]? Then we asked 'If we offered a course, what would it be?'" stated Bledsoe

Bledsoe then developed a model for a curriculum based on family businesses and entrepreneurship. He hopes it will soon become an interdisciplinary minor.

"My interest is in the long-term growth of the program."

This semester, the first class in the model is taking place. It is Business 940, Family

Business Issues. There are seventeen students in the class.

"I like to call them pioneers because that's really what they are."

All the students at the moment are from the business department, but Bledsoe hopes and plans to have students of all majors and interests in the program eventually.

While the class does have a textbook and lectures, what makes it unique is the partnerships that have been created between the current students and Meredith alumnae.

"Each woman has to identify and work with a partner. Partners are Meredith alumnae who own their own business. They can also have worked in their family's business. This class is really about getting classroom experience as well as outside experience," says Bledsoe

At the moment, there are six partners that the students are

working with, but Bledsoe plans to have a larger base soon.

"I want this to be all within the Meredith community. By community I mean the alumnae, the families of students, and women who are currently going to school and owning their own business."

The next course in the model, offered in the 2004 fall semester, is Entrepreneurship. How far the program continues to go after that is dependent on the response and interest generated from students Bledsoe says that there has been some interest generated in the students he's talked to in what he likes to call a "hallway survey."

While on-campus interest in the program is growing, it is also growing in the business community.

"In January of 2003 we received a Coleman Foundation Grant. In January of 2004 we received a Hughes Foundation Grant. We also

have received two grants from the SBTDC [Small Business and Technological Development Center], one in April of 2003 and another in January of 2004" stated Bledsoe

Meredith College is not the only school looking into the family business and entrepreneurial field. Bledsoe notes that "Duke is involved with this [field] and Wake Forest has a strong program." UNCH also has a program in the area as well as many major colleges across the country.

Despite the attention to entrepreneurship nationally, Bledsoe is committed to keeping the Meredith community the main objective in the program.

"The focus is on women. The main focus is on Meredith women. We have women within the community that are doing great things and we can use them to improve the education of the current students."

Raise Your Voice Homelessness Awareness Week A Chance to Get Involved and Make a Difference

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Three years ago, mayors from across the United States met at their National Conference and passed a resolution to make fighting homelessness a top priority, according to USMayors.org. Now, the City of Raleigh and Wake County are joining the national initiative to end homelessness in 10 years.

Tomorrow, Thursday, February 19, Meredith College will host the first of five public forums, entitled, "An Education of Diversity."

History and Politics professor, Dr. Barbara

True-Weber has been working with Dr. Liz O'Sullivan, director of the Masters of Public Administration program at North Carolina State University, on the initiative since September.

"Dr. O'Sullivan gathered a group of professors from Raleigh colleges and we explored ways that we could be involved in the process," True-Weber said. "The primary approach was to develop connections between students and the advocacy groups and city officials."

The group expects between 150-200 community leaders and public officials to attend the forum that will strive to

raise awareness of homelessness in Raleigh and Wake County.

Homelessness statistics from the Raleigh City Government are astounding. There are between 1,450 and 1,500 persons who are homeless on Raleigh's streets on any given night. Seventy-five to eighty percent of the homeless work in a part-time job at the lowest end of the wage scale, according to Wake County Community Assessment in 2000.

Wake County's statistics correspond with those of North Carolina.

"From July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000, 47,475 homeless people were

served by 134 facilities in 55 counties," one report based on Emergency Shelter Grants program funding stated, "Of the 47,475 people served during that period: 64 percent were single adult males and females, 23 percent were children between ages birth to seventeen years, 36 percent were members of families, and 8 percent were veterans."

Also working on the project are Meredith's VISTA representative, Winter Brown, and Volunteer Services director, Lynne Wheatley.

Brown believes that this conference, in conjunction with the Campus

Compact National Teleconference just minutes before the forum, will bring publicity and credibility to what Meredith's volunteers are trying to accomplish.

"It is a unique opportunity: the city coming to its citizens saying, 'we want your input'," Brown said. "This is an exciting moment to get involved. It's a chance you don't get very often."