Missouri Real Entrepreneurship Program to Educate Students, Teachers

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo., June 6, 2008 – The Center for Entrepreneurial Studies in the Southeast Missouri State University’s Harrison College of Business will offer a new program aimed at promoting entrepreneurship education among elementary and secondary students and teachers.

The Missouri REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) Entrepreneurship program, developed by Dr. James Stapleton, director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, will make it possible for more elementary and secondary students in the region to study innovative and entrepreneurial concepts.

“Our regional and national economic future is dependent upon our young people,” Stapleton said. “In order to be successful in the increasingly competitive global economy, the stakeholders of southeast Missouri must work together to create an entrepreneurial culture and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset in our young citizens. They need to understand that the new economy may not provide for them the same opportunities the former economy did their parents. We need young entrepreneurs to create new, innovative and durable enterprises. We also need young entrepreneurs to lead existing businesses through an entrepreneurial transformation,” he said.

“The Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship program will inspire and train students to reach beyond simple service business concepts and provide them tools to create and lead enterprises that make significant long-term contributions to the regional economy. While the ‘lemonade stand’ served to plant the entrepreneurial seed in many of us in the past, we think this more advanced programming is needed to prepare our young people for the new economy,” he added.

The Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship program will enhance economic growth and global competitiveness in Missouri by offering teachers and students hands-on entrepreneurial education, according to Stapleton.

The program will provide training, curricula and resources to elementary and secondary teachers and students through a partnership with North Carolina REAL Enterprises, which has been providing curriculum and training since the 1980s, Stapleton said. The REAL program is taught in 43 states and foreign countries, and NC REAL provides hands-on entrepreneurship education to more than 10,000 students of all ages annually, he said.
“After assessing various program models around the United States, I was very pleased to reach an agreement with NC REAL to obtain exclusive rights for Missouri because of the unique experiential learning model of their program and the comprehensive, hands-on nature of their curriculum,” Stapleton said. “It is a fantastic program.”

The Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship program consists of three primary elements – educating teachers through Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship Teacher Institutes; providing hands-on curriculum which help students learn, think, plan and act as entrepreneurs; and linking students interested in entrepreneurship with their communities.

The Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship Teacher Institutes, which will be held annually at Southeast, will introduce teachers to curriculum and teaching strategies which develop entrepreneurial talent in students from kindergarten to 12th grade.

“Teachers will complete rigorous hands-on training that prepares them to teach stand-alone courses or to integrate activities using the Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship curriculum,” Stapleton said. “Entrepreneurship education encompasses all academic subjects, so teachers of any subject or discipline will be invited to become certified REAL teachers.”

The teacher institutes will be led by regional facilitators, classroom teachers who receive in-depth training at the National REAL Teacher Institute in North Carolina, and who also use the curriculum in their own classrooms. The first facilitators, selected from a pool of applicants, will be trained this month. Applications will be accepted during the upcoming academic school year for participants in the first Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship Teacher Institute, planned for June 2009. In addition to offering the summer institutes, Southeast also will host regional meetings and conduct annual site visits to support teachers and students using the program.

The Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship curriculum will help students develop skills, expand their knowledge and create tangible products, Stapleton said.

“The curriculum includes nearly 200 group and individual activities, a business planning journal and an integrated technology component,” he said. “As a subject, entrepreneurship does not lend itself well to traditional teaching and learning methods. Student entrepreneurs are more interested in ‘getting down to business’ than in reading about it. The program is designed to be taught and learned through experiential methods, which successfully educate entrepreneurs because they promote ownership, self-direction and responsible decision-making – all qualities needed to develop an entrepreneurial mindset.”

The program also will link students and their communities by...
encouraging them to use their communities as "laboratories" in which to develop their skills and ideas, according to Stapleton. Students also will be offered opportunities to collaborate with other students, entrepreneurs and community leaders in southeast Missouri.

In addition to providing curriculum, support and training for teachers in the region, Southeast also will play an active role in the future development of the REAL program, Stapleton said.

"As a member organization of the national REAL group, we will participate in future curriculum development and program enhancements," he said.

For more information on the Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship program, contact Stapleton in the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at (573) 651-2010 or jstapleton@semo.edu.

**About the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies**

The Center for Entrepreneurial Studies directs a diverse number of entrepreneurship academic programs to business and non-business students across campus, including an undergraduate entrepreneurship minor that compliments any major, an entrepreneurship option within the business administration major and an option in entrepreneurship within the nationally acclaimed master of business administration degree. Center faculty recently created a new interdisciplinary course that is available to any student on campus. Missouri REAL Entrepreneurship is a strategic initiative to extend the Center’s reach to better serve elementary, secondary and postsecondary students in southeast Missouri. It expands on these existing programs, providing access to entrepreneurship education for any student at Southeast.

The Center also collaborates with the College of Education to provide secondary business and marketing teacher education. The program is one of two in Missouri that offers dual certification in business and marketing subjects and is one of the largest business teacher education programs in Missouri. Furthermore, the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies is identifying ways to connect with the University’s Innovation Center/Business Incubator to strengthen practical, experience-based activities for students interested in innovation, new venture creation.

The Center also provides access to several resources to support the entrepreneurial needs of students, entrepreneurs and organizations. Current initiatives include a campus-wide student organization; an international Start-Up Café, which is a physical and virtual space for students interested in entrepreneurship; and a campus-wide business plan competition.

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