

Preparing Students for the Future: Studying Entrepreneurship

The knowledge, skills, creativity, and thinking required to be an entrepreneur are the foundation of the Big Picture College philosophy. The essence of Big Picture College is entrepreneurial and it follows that the first academic major offered will be entrepreneurship. It is not enough that our students “lend” their ideas or creativity to corporations, projects, industry, etc. We intend for Big Picture College graduates to be prepared to chart a new path for jobs and technologies that do not yet exist. Our students’ education will not be outdated by the time they graduate four years later. Instead they will be prepared to generate the new knowledge required to solve complex problems and compete in the global economy.

Entrepreneurship education helps develop the skills that students need to be successful regardless of the career path they choose—students graduating from the Big Picture entrepreneurial program will be prepared to see opportunity and solutions where others are prepared to see the “right” solution. This allows for career flexibility that students might not have if they studied another discipline. Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, has said that jobs in the new economy—the ones that won’t get outsourced or automated—“put an enormous premium on creative and innovative skills.” In 2006 Tucker’s center published a report called *Touch Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. That report argued that “The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services. This will be true not just for the top professionals and managers, but up and down the length and breadth of the workforce.” Entrepreneurship education is about developing and promoting that creativity and innovation that is so valuable. These are the skills that Big Picture College will help its students build.

In addition, we are committed to entrepreneurship education to promote and support minority business development and ownership. Many large companies often look to urban youth to “sell” their products; we will instead prepare urban youth to own the products. A November 2004 *BusinessWeek* article stated that “Although minorities represent roughly 27% of the U.S. population, minority-owned outfits represent just 14% of U.S. businesses.” The Minority Business Development Agency says that in order to promote overall U.S. economic growth, it is critical to promote medium to large businesses enterprises that can have a significant impact on employment and the tax base in urban communities. Increasing the number of medium and large minority businesses is in the short and long term strategic interest of creating wealth. Big Picture College is committed to educating its students so that they have the knowledge and skills to start their own enterprises which in turn will have an impact on their own financial well-being and that of their communities.

The Big Picture design is in and of itself entrepreneurial. Students at Big Picture high schools do not sit in classes, reading from textbooks, and listening to teachers lecture. Dennis Littky, co-director and co-founder of The Big Picture Company, states in his book *The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business*, that the real goals of education are for students to: be lifelong learners, be passionate, be ready to take risks, be able to problem solve and think critically, be able to look at things differently, be able to work independently and with others, be creative, care and want to give back to the community, persevere, have integrity and self respect, have moral courage, be able to use the world around them well, speak well, write well, read well, and work well with numbers, and enjoy their life and their work. The most important element of the education at a Big Picture School is that students learn in the real world. The main component of every student's education is the Learning Through Internship program. In this minimum 10-12 hour, two-day-a-week internship with an expert mentor in the field of the student's interest, the students complete authentic projects that benefit the student *and* the mentor. These projects are the main root to deepening learning and academic growth and investigation in the curriculum. These authentic projects are connected to the student's interests and needs and are "real to" or meet the needs of the mentors at the internship site. Students have an internship each year they are in school.

All Big Picture College programs will prepare students for life and work after college. As Judith Cone wrote in her article *Teaching Entrepreneurship in Colleges and Universities: How (and Why) a New Academic Field is Being Built*, "Students know they have to build a wide range of interdisciplinary skills that give them maximum flexibility and preparation for the future." Big Picture College programs will ensure students build those skills. The outcomes we have adopted take into account all of the Essential Learning Outcomes published by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise: oral and written communication, quantitative reasoning, teamwork, collaboration and community, ethics and professionalism, critical thinking and problem solving, knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, lifelong learning and continuous improvement, leadership and project management, application of knowledge, information technology application, information literacy, creativity and innovation, and personal responsibility.

Our college will apply many of the successful, innovative programs from existing institutions (such as Alverno's digital portfolios and ability-based curriculum, Berea's labor program, Hampshire College's concentration statements, etc.) but will not add them onto a traditional curricular model. These innovative programs will combine with our own innovative curriculum to create a college program that is completely new and different. Our curricula will emphasize a course of study centered on students' interests, uniting personal motivation and discipline with progressive coursework and real world learning. Much of the students' college experience will take place in the real world, where they will eventually apply their skills. Starting in their freshmen year, our students will work in companies alongside cutting-edge mentors who will help evaluate their performance. Our internship program will be different than the internship programs offered at most institutions because every student will have a mentor at their internship site that will work closely with Big Picture College faculty and staff, and commit to ensuring students gain the skills and academic knowledge they need through their internship projects. In many ways this internship mentor will act as a teacher. Our program will weave in international experiences and internships abroad to enrich our students' understanding of other cultures and the global economy. At select points during the program students will be grouped into teams that will work together on real-life, collaborative projects. We will support each student emotionally as well as academically. Each student will have an individual study/work plan as well their own personal "Prime Time" tutor (a retired entrepreneur or business person who commits to working closely with students in their academic endeavor). The

personalized group and individual work will enable students to learn deeply and become liberally educated adults well prepared to meet 21st century challenges. Every student will design and run their own business during the four years, including writing the business plan, obtaining financing, getting necessary technological support, and keeping the business running. Students will be evaluated through formal exhibitions of their work. Panelists will include college faculty, professionals from the business and international community, as well as local community members and other students. Panelist will assess academic rigor, personal growth, and evidence of progress toward mastery of Big Picture College Learning Outcomes. Other assessments will also occur in the form of papers and projects (individual and team). In addition, we will use the Collegiate Learning Assessment to measure the value-added that the Big Picture College provides to students.

Students in all of the Big Picture College programs will be grouped into small cohorts. The students in each cohort will study entrepreneurship. The cohort members will study together, live together, and immerse themselves in exploration of entrepreneurship. They will take part in team projects, attend workshops, and engage in common academic work guided by their faculty advisor. The residential learning community will offer students an opportunity to support each other in the social and academic transition to college. Students will be able to get feedback from each other about internship projects, discuss issues of professionalism and ethics that arise in their day-to-day work, and engage in monthly evenings with and presentations by invited entrepreneurs and leaders in the field of business.

Big Picture College students will graduate prepared to effectively participate in the global economy. Students, over their four year experience, will have demonstrated the skills (ability to solve complex problems, work in teams, communicate effectively, apply concepts across disciplines, etc.) sought after by businesses, corporations, and organizations. Students will have an outcomes-based portfolio that employers will be able to examine. Because students will serve in intense internships from freshmen year on—including internships in foreign countries—they will have a number of professional experiences behind them. Businesses and organizations in the community will have access to student interns that will bring commitment, enthusiasm, professionalism, work ethic, and an eagerness to learn with them to their internships. Even more important than this, after four years of community and professional experiences, Big Picture College graduates will have a global perspective and be prepared to participate in the workforce and our democracy. In their book, *What Business Wants from Higher Education*, Diana Oblinger and Anne Lee-Verville state that American businesses spend millions of dollars on remediation for what their employees need to bring to the workplace. Big Picture College graduates will not need remedial training.

As our program grows, we want to build the capacity for students to develop skills in design technology, patent law, etc. We will build partnerships with information technology centers, law schools, etc. to ensure that our students have the skills not only to come up with innovative ideas, but also to create products and protect themselves and their products in the process.

In keeping with the mission of The Big Picture Company, Big Picture College is committed to disseminating our knowledge and experience in order to benefit the larger community of colleges and universities across the country. The Big Picture College concept and results can be replicated. We plan for Big Picture College to serve as a model to be used at other colleges and universities throughout the country. With the experience of starting its first few programs under its belt, the Big Picture Company will work with other institutions to create similar programs that will serve a wide range of students. This will include engaging in research and documentation of our planning process in order to help others who may start a program based on our design, and having materials

developed and disseminated over the internet so that those who do want to replicate our design have access to them.

The Big Picture Company is prepared to demonstrate that minority students can achieve at the same rates as their counterparts; that college-level work does not mean traditional, lecture-based regurgitation; that our students can be prepared to chart a new path for jobs and technologies that do not yet exist and generate the new knowledge required to solve complex problems; and that this program can be replicated in a variety of different college and university settings. Armed with the most current higher education research and the success of Big Picture, we are capable and confident in our ability to extend our mission to educate and prepare today's students for tomorrow's world.