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UNCG Launches Program to Promote Entrepreneurship

GREENSBORO, NC – A sweeping new program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will engage students in entrepreneurship.

Building Entrepreneurial Learning for Life, or BELL, is starting this fall and will ensure that students, regardless of their majors, will be exposed to the world of starting and operating not-for-profit as well as for-profit enterprises.

“This is one of the most important efforts that UNCG has undertaken in recent years,” said Dr. Rosemary Wander, associate provost for research and public private partnerships. “North Carolina needs more entrepreneurship, and initiatives such as this one are necessary for this region and the state to prepare for the future.”

BELL is founded on efforts already under way in the Bryan School of Business and Economics and support is widespread across the rest of the UNCG campus, Wander said. She believes that BELL will help shape a culture of creative confidence, competence, and courage that “weaves entrepreneurship into the fabric of the campus.” The approach is a broad one that includes business, social, civic, cultural and academic pursuits.

“We know that not everyone is destined to be an entrepreneur, but we do believe that exposing our students to entrepreneurial concepts is one of the best things we can do for them,” Wander said. “It gives students other ways of looking at their academic majors, at their career preparation, and ultimately how they will fit into the working world.”

BELL is a major piece of UNCG’s Economic Development Initiative for 2007-2010. Its leaders are Wander; Dr. James Weeks, dean of the Bryan School; and Dr. Timothy Johnston, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences – all reporting to Dr. David H. Perrin, UNCG’s provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. BELL is the cornerstone of UNCG’s response to the priorities and strategic directions that the UNC Board of Governors has set for the university system in promoting economic development in the state.

The UNC Board of Governors has mandated that the economic development and needs of the state must become a central objective of the university system. While preparing citizens through a thorough grounding in the arts and sciences will always be the UNCG's primary task, the BELL program recognizes that the university must prepare students for a work environment that is increasingly interdisciplinary.

"This program is a statement that a liberal education and an entrepreneurial mindset do not have to be mutually exclusive," Johnston said. "We have always believed that a liberal education provides a strong foundation for success in a wide range of careers, and that liberally educated people are well-equipped to adapt to a changing world.

"As we move into the new century, our students need the opportunity to acquire a combination of creative thinking, technical proficiency, business expertise and communication skills. By infusing entrepreneurship across the academic disciplines, BELL will enhance UNCG's capacity to impart learning that meets the needs of the 21st century economy in which our students will work."

During the 2007-08 year, BELL will implement initiatives and activities aimed at building entrepreneurial awareness and the application of entrepreneurial principles and resources for the transformation of academic units across campus.

The Bryan School is developing entrepreneurship courses to serve the needs of all students and majors across campus as well as developing a new major and minor in entrepreneurship. "We believe that it is our responsibility to support this campus-wide initiative by providing entrepreneurship foundation service courses or course-modules that will give every student across campus the opportunity to learn what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur," Weeks said. "Our hope is that we will have many non-business majors developing discipline-specific entrepreneurship courses to build on what we will offer."

On Sept. 19, the first BELL Forum will be launched, addressing the impact of race, gender and ethnicity on entrepreneurship and small businesses. Similar series for UNCG faculty, staff and students and the community will be held each semester and built around a different topic.

In the spring, Entrepreneurial Innovation in the Arts (EIA) will be launched under the direction of Dr. John Lee Jellicorse, professor of broadcasting and cinema, with support from faculty and administrators within the Schools of Music, Health & Human Performance, Human Environmental Sciences, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Bryan School. EIA will provide training in entrepreneurship in the creative

and performing arts by offering courses for practicing artists as well as engaging students in research that supports entrepreneurship.

Building on BELL's support of entrepreneurship in the arts, UNCG will host a public symposium on design, art and technology March 27 -29. The symposium will bring together artists, educators, students and business people with the aim of promoting economic development by accelerating the growth of creative industries within North Carolina's Piedmont Triad region.

"This will be an important first year," said Wander. "The experience gained and interest raised through EIA will serve as a model for other areas and academic departments across campus."

Wander said that BELL proceeds from a definition of entrepreneurship as "the process of starting new enterprises that are sustainable and create value." This definition is deliberately broad, she said, to encourage participation by students and faculty in many disciplines and with many interests.

The relevance to business ventures is obvious, she said. But the definition also appeals to students and faculty more interested in developing self-sustaining non-profits or in addressing education and scholarship.

"What matters is that BELL will create an atmosphere that fuels the creative energy and entrepreneurial spirit of students and faculty across the campus," Wander said. "They can benefit from BELL, whether their passions and interests are commercial, social, civic, cultural or academic in nature."

Like all major new programs, Wander believes that BELL will take time to perk down into the curriculum and the campus. Through BELL, anyone at UNCG who wants to be an entrepreneur will have an opportunity to become one, regardless of discipline.

"We believe that this program will give faculty, students, and the public the opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship and its role in 21st century organizations and the global economy," Wander said.

"This year is our starting point." #####