

Expanding Business Strategy to Native American Communities Using Experiential Learning

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Abstract : Native American communities are struggling with unemployment and depressed economies. A major cause is a lack of business knowledge, education, and cultural desire. And yet, in the history of the American West, Native Americans were considered the best traders and negotiators for everything from furs to weapons to buffalo. To improve these economies, there has been an effort to reintroduce that heritage to today's and tomorrow's generation of tribal members, such as Crow, Cheyenne, and Blackfeet. Professors at the College of Business Montana State University-Billings (MSUB) teach tribal students in Montana to create business plans. These plans have won national small business plan competitions. The teaching and advising method used at MSUB is uniquely successful as these business students are now five-time national champions. This article reviews the environment and the method of learning to achieve a winning small business plan with Native American students. It discusses the five plans that became national champions. And it discusses the problems and solutions discovered in the process of achieving results. Students who participated in this endeavor have graduated and become CPAs, MBAs, and gainfully employed in their chosen professions. They have also worked to improve the economies of their native lands and homes. By educating members of these communities with business strategy and plan development, they are better able to impact their own economies.

Keywords : entrepreneurship, native American economies, small businesses, unemployment

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