Small Business Initiative:
Bay Area Region/Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Entrepreneurship Pilot Course

Entrepreneurship is often viewed as a business discipline, much like accounting or marketing. As such, it sometimes has been discounted or overlooked by those in disciplines such as the arts. Rapid changes in today’s economy require many applicants to create their jobs rather than apply for existing ones, which are quickly becoming obsolete by technological advances. Paradoxically, this entrepreneurial mindset of continuous, creative self-reinvention, and risk-taking dovetail well with the typical inventive nature of the artistic community, making them better prepared for the new market. At the same time, business owners, including those in the arts, are often very skilled and knowledgeable in the technical side of their businesses, but may lack the business and entrepreneurial skills necessary to succeed.

Several community colleges across the state have had success in offering courses, such as The Business Side of Art, geared toward both the arts and business, but these have typically been limited to not-for-credit offerings hosted by small business development centers. In response to the need for more credit-based programs in this area, Cabrillo College’s Visual and Performing Arts Division worked with Deputy Sector Navigator Alex Kramer to secure a mini-grant piloting a new contextualized model of Cabrillo’s BUS 88 – Starting and Operating a New Small Business. The programmatic goal was to create and offer a state-recognized arts entrepreneurship degree. This mini-grant was funded through Senate Bill 1070 funds as part of the new Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy framework.

The pilot course is largely student-project-driven and includes lectures from successful local artists as well as business experts referred by the small business development center. After a series of “mash-up” events held in 2013 to gauge student interest in an arts-focused entrepreneurship course, there was an overwhelming interest in a credit course offering. The course passed approval of the local curriculum committee and is currently being offered at full enrollment. Cabrillo College, with the assistance of the small business deputy sector navigator, is now working on gaining approval from the Chancellor’s Office for this degree.