

# THE NEW ENTREPRENEURSHIP,

*Let Your Imagination*

BY MANDY PHILLIPS

**A**n artist steps to the canvas. Leaving external thought behind, she becomes introspective, allowing her emotions to take over as she dips the brush to the paint, then makes broad swaths across the canvas. As the

work of art begins to take shape, so too does the identity of the painter:

She is an artist.

She is a scholar.

She is ... a social entrepreneur?

Absolutely—if we're talking about Dr. Lisa Esposito, chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Drury.

In fact, Esposito—and many others in the Drury community—agree that the long-standing image of entrepre-

neurship as a purely capitalist pursuit is unfair to a new breed of innovators known as social entrepreneurs. For social entrepreneurs, developing creative ways to improve the lives of others is just as important as supporting themselves financially. For Esposito, entrepreneurship comes in the form of sharing her artwork—and its ability to evoke emotions—with others. With the launch of her Web site, Esposito now sells her art commercially. Despite the financial benefits, though, the real satisfaction comes through the impact her work has on others. People are drawn to art, she explains, because it allows them to explore their own emotions and their inner state of being.

“What I've heard from people interested in my paintings is how the images encourage them to look inward,” Esposito says. “The images can serve as vehicles for their own self-understanding and can prompt them to explore who they are, what's important to them, and where they're going in life.”

## Defining Social Entrepreneurship

So what exactly is this concept of social entrepreneurship? In the pursuit to discover what social entrepreneurship is all about, I found that faculty from across several academic disciplines and different backgrounds all offered surprisingly similar explanations. The Breech School of Business seemed like a logical place to start when exploring entrepreneurship, so I asked Robin Sronce, assistant professor of business administration, why entrepreneurs are sometimes seen—often unfairly—in an unfavorable light. Most entrepreneurs, she explained, are simply trying to find a way to support themselves

while still finding a way to do something they are passionate about.

“Entrepreneurs don't go into business just to make money,” Sronce explains. “They go into it because they have ideas, these creative concepts and innovative approaches to solve problems or fulfill some need. If others value these ideas, the entrepreneur may be able to turn it into a profitable business. Entrepreneurs are drawn to the challenge of translating their ideas into success. For some, that success is measured in financial terms, but for social entrepreneurs success is determined by providing solutions to social problems.”

By Sronce's definition, many entrepreneurs are to some degree social entrepreneurs working to create positive change by addressing the needs of a community or society.

Some, though, take the concept of social entrepreneurship a step further and specifically seek out opportunities that are designed to improve the lives of others while still being profitable. Dr. Erin Kenny, assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies, has seen first hand what social entrepreneurship can do for communities. In her travels to Africa and Jamaica, Kenny has seen social entrepreneurship in its most raw form. In Jamaica, for instance, groups of local women will find work by braiding tourists' hair on the local beaches. With the earnings they make, these women re-invest that money into the growth and well-being of their communities.

“It's about trying to improve the common good,” Kenny says of social entrepreneurship. “It's trying to provide the best good for the most people by injecting the most capital into these communities so that people can promote change.”



But perhaps the most surprising aspect of social entrepreneurship is how truly interdisciplinary it can be. Social entrepreneurs are not all MBA-wielding business professionals. These innovators come from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. Dr. Allin Sorenson, chair of Drury's music department, has been involved with several forms of social entrepreneurship through the department's music therapy major and Drury's arts administration program. For Sorenson, the concept of social entrepreneurship is straightforward and simple.

"Social entrepreneurship deals with trying to identify and define a need, then finding a creative way to meet that need," he explains.

And for Esposito, whose art recently transformed her into a social entrepreneur, the idea is one centered around sharing passions for the betterment of everyone involved. "As I've experienced it in my life," she says, "social entrepreneurship is being creatively engaged with what one is passionate about and living out that passion while trying to share the benefits of that life with others."

### Social Entrepreneurship in Action

At Drury, evidence of social entrepreneurship crosses departmental lines. While Esposito's endeavors are based in art, it is her background as a scholar that initiated her passion.

"After spending 25 years studying philosophy and religion, I realized that there were quite a lot of images in my head," says Esposito. "They were all abstract images, so I decided to try painting as a counterbalance to my teaching and scholarship."

So during a sabbatical in the fall of

2005 while working on a book about the history of women philosophers, Esposito decided to get some acrylic paint and let those images out onto a blank canvas. "I just started painting," she says. Before too long, a few paintings on small canvases grew to several works on larger canvases. Each piece is an autobiographical expression of emotions and states of mind, though the interpretation of those elements is open to the person viewing the painting.

So at what point did this passion become an entrepreneurial endeavor?

A year after first discovering her love of painting, Esposito joined the Springfield Visual Arts Alliance and began showing her work in various galleries and shows. As paintings began to sell and as she began hearing more and more about entrepreneurship through the establishment of the Edward Jones Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Drury, she realized that the potential for an endeavor that could help others existed in her work.

And so began this scholar's first real entrepreneurial experience. Esposito launched her own Web site, [lisaesposito.com](http://lisaesposito.com), in order to offer her paintings to a global marketplace.

So far, it's working.

The Web site averages 4,000 to 5,000 hits a month, with many online shoppers logging on from countries around the world. Not bad, especially considering Esposito is a self-described technophobe who is learning about running her business as she goes.

"It's totally new," she says. "I'm learning about all of the aspects of it—marketing, promotional, financial. It's all new to me."

Elsewhere on campus, students and

faculty who are quite familiar with the marketing, promotional and financial aspects of entrepreneurship are working to use their expertise to promote social change. Sronce's spring 2008 Project Management class, for instance, decided to start the Drury Gives Global fund. The class worked to raise \$1,000 to use for a microloan project through Kiva.org. Kiva offers the opportunity for groups and individuals to loan funds to entrepreneurs around the world—especially in impoverished areas.

"They were intrigued by the idea that it was entrepreneurially based and that they would be able to help people from other countries as well," Sronce says. "They were intrigued by the global aspect of it, the social aspect of it."

Drury hosted Kiva.org co-founder Jessica Flannery on April 18 as part of the convocation series theme day, and several of Sronce's students had the opportunity to sit down with Flannery to talk about the project. As the students told Flannery why the project struck them so deeply, it was clear that this was about much more than a class project. It was about helping other entrepreneurs in largely impoverished areas find ways to create better lives for themselves.

The message behind social entrepreneurship has spread across the Drury community. The International Student Association donated a portion of the proceeds from the International Food Festival to the Drury Gives Global fund. Students donated at tables set up during the university's theme day festivities. And the Edward Jones Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation offered to match the amount raised, as well as manage the funds when the loan is repaid. This is especially important to ensure that future

classes and student groups will be able to continue the microfinance project in future years.

For Sronce and her students, the Drury Gives Global fund presents the opportunity to explore social entrepreneurship around the world and to help promote the positive aspects of entrepreneurship.

"Business students are often assumed to focus only on money and furthering their own careers, but I find they definitely respond to opportunities to make a positive difference." Sronce says, smiling: "So I tell my students that this is a way to use their 'powers' for good."

But her business students aren't the only ones experiencing social entrepreneurship in and out of the classroom. Other programs at Drury are aimed at finding ways to help graduates support themselves financially, follow their passions and help others all at the same time. Take the music programs at Drury. At many universities, music majors have two basic career options: teach or perform. But through the music department's music therapy program, graduates have the opportunity to change the lives of other

people through music. And Sorenson explains that programs like the music therapy major showcase Drury's commitment to social entrepreneurship.

"It allows us to offer something that you can make money with and still be a music major," he says. The arts administration program also offers opportunities for musicians and other artists to gain business experience while incorporating their passions into a potential entrepreneurial career.

"You're going to get skills working with budgets, audience development, insurance, management and all you need to be successful," Sorenson explains.

Some students, though, choose to leave campus—and the country—to experience social entrepreneurship. Earlier this summer, Kenny traveled to Jamaica with a group of Drury students. The Drury group worked directly with the Bluefields Peoples' Community Association and the Bluefields Bay Fishermen's Friendly Society. The BBFFS is a group of social entrepreneurs from the local community who are dedicated to implementing sustainable fishing practices in Jamaica's Bluefields Bay.

Kenny and her group also explored ways to help the Jamaican women who braid hair on the beach find ways to break into the global economy.

"We're hoping to find funds to help these women get organized to train other women to join in the beauty industry," Kenny says. "You're not actually giving anybody anything because they're going to pay you back, but you're basically inviting them into the global economy. Without that capital, they have no way to join the global economy."

Like so many of the entrepreneurs Kenny encountered during her years spent in Africa, these women are using what they have available to forge a better way of life for their communities. "They have this immense capacity to work, but they don't have the raw materials," she said. "They're incredibly innovative."

After all, innovation is the cornerstone of entrepreneurship.

**Mandy Phillips is assistant editor of Drury magazine and senior Web editor.**

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