

# IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE COURSE “ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIGITAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS”: A TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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## Abstract

In the Sumy Urban Territorial Community, one of the identified needs is a lack of understanding of entrepreneurship fundamentals, digital communication tools, and the integration of traditional business concepts with digital skills required in the modern business environment. This need has become especially relevant under martial law and in the context of post-war recovery in Ukraine. At the same time, education today goes beyond knowledge transfer and becomes a tool for resilience, social cohesion, and community recovery. In this context, service-learning transforms education into a socially engaged and practice-oriented process. Therefore, a service-learning approach was implemented in teaching the course “Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications” at the Department of Financial Technologies and Entrepreneurship of Sumy State University.

This was the first service-learning experience for both the lecturer and first-year bachelor students enrolled in economic educational programs. As the course is mandatory, it involved more than one hundred students studying in full-time, part-time, and distance-learning formats. The 5-ECTS-credit course consists of eight topics, including 24 hours of lectures and 42 hours of practical classes.

Through service-learning, the course integrated academic knowledge with community engagement and equipped students with entrepreneurial competencies and digital skills. Particular attention was paid to the digital economy and business digitalization. By responding to real community challenges, students directly applied their learning outcomes to local needs,

contributing to economic resilience and sustainable community development.

The methodology included interactive lectures, case studies, individual projects, reflection activities, and collaborative practical work. In addition to the academic curriculum, students participated in the Online Business Laboratory led by Ukrainian entrepreneurs and in the project intensive “Women’s Leadership and Entrepreneurship.” These activities created opportunities for communication with local entrepreneurs and representatives of the Department of Strategic and Socio-Economic Development of the Sumy City Council.

Direct service-learning activities within the community were implemented through socially significant events. One group of female students conducted an offline training session for women of different ages, including socially vulnerable groups attending the NGO “Girls” space. Participants were introduced to the process of registering as individual entrepreneurs through the Diia portal and learned how to develop business ideas using the Business Model Canvas. The training provided practical tools for starting a business, motivation to move from ideas to action, and support in overcoming digital fears. It also contributed to increasing self-confidence, encouraging lifelong learning, and promoting entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence. The long-term impact includes the potential growth of women entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, job creation, and the reduction of social vulnerability.

Another group of students conducted a webinar for community residents in cooperation with the NGO “Lifelong Learning Center.” Using presentations of their own business idea projects, students shared their experience in developing and implementing business ideas. Beneficiaries received accessible and practice-oriented information that reduced barriers for individuals considering entrepreneurship. The fact that the speakers were young people already taking their first entrepreneurial steps created an additional motivational effect. This format helped participants better understand how to transform a business idea into a viable project and contributed to the development of local entrepreneurship.

In addition, students developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey among local entrepreneurs and individuals interested in starting businesses using modern digital tools and the

university's Mix e-learning platform. The survey assessed interest in entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and readiness to use digital technologies in business. The results may be useful for the Department of Strategic and Socio-Economic Development of the Sumy City Council in improving programs related to business support, digital inclusion, and local economic development.

The implementation of service-learning revealed several challenges. Firstly, participants were first-year students in their first semester of study, which caused uncertainty among some community partners regarding students' ability to conduct activities at a sufficiently high level. Secondly, the project involved an unusually large number of students. Thirdly, as the course was mandatory, not all students were equally motivated to participate in community-oriented activities. Finally, the predominantly online learning format and wartime conditions limited opportunities for offline interaction and created additional emotional pressure.

At the same time, the project demonstrated significant benefits for all stakeholders. Students developed entrepreneurial and digital competencies as well as soft skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving. Direct interaction with the community strengthened their confidence, empathy, and civic responsibility.

For the lecturer, service-learning became both a professional and personal learning experience, expanding the role from traditional teaching to mentoring and community partnership building. Cooperation with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt strengthened international collaboration and introduced European service-learning practices.

For the community, the activities provided practical entrepreneurial and digital support, especially for women and socially vulnerable groups. Trainings, webinars, and student-led research contributed to reducing digital barriers and promoting self-employment.

Overall, the experience strengthened university–community partnerships and demonstrated that service-learning is not merely a formal educational approach but a transformative practice supporting education, local development, and resilience-building in wartime Ukraine.