

BALTA

Social Economy Course Development Project

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to explore the feasibility of developing a collaborative inter-university course on the social economy in order to promote the integration of social economy learning into existing academic institutions and programs within BC and Alberta.

At the BALTA Steering Committee meeting in May 2009, the idea of creating a university-level course on the social economy was raised. A lively discussion followed resulting in a brainstorm of ideas, and an agreement that this was an idea worth exploring further. Lena Soots was hired as a student researcher to conduct preliminary interviews with BALTA academics and a few practitioners in order to develop a more focused framework for discussion at the November Symposium.

Specific project objectives include:

1. To identify current educational gaps related to the social economy and identify opportunities for BALTA to promote SE learning in academic institutions.
2. To understand the interest and capacity within BALTA membership (and their institutions) to house, support and promote SE curriculum.
3. To determine the feasibility of developing and delivering an inter-university course related to the social economy, or similar initiative, in BC and Alberta.
4. To outline options and points for further discussion at the Symposium in Calgary (November 2009).

And, based on the outcomes of the Symposium discussion:

5. To develop a detailed plan for moving for moving the project forward in January 2010.

Thank you to everyone who provided input and ideas! I look forward to our discussion in Calgary!

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2.0 BALTA LEGACY

Why develop a course on the social economy? There has been much discussion over the past year about the 'legacy' of BALTA – How will the research from BALTA live on and continue to support and strengthen the social economy after the project is complete in 2011? A curriculum development project provides a unique opportunity to synthesize and package the work and research of BALTA in a way that will extend the benefits of our learning and support the social economy sector in BC and Alberta beyond 2011. Furthermore, SSHRC is looking for outputs from the project that include new courses and programs, tools and teaching methods, and they count the number of courses where social economy research is presented.

3.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The interviews explored three general areas related to course development:

1. **Educational Gaps & Needs** – What are the gaps in current academic programs re: social economy education and does BALTA have a role to play in filling these gaps?
2. **Interest / Capacity / Support** – What is the level of interest and capacity within BALTA membership for developing course materials and supporting its use and dissemination?
3. **Form & Content** – What would a course or curriculum on the social economy look like? Brainstorm ideas on form and content.

The conversations were insightful and a general summary of the findings is as follows:

- There are significant gaps within academic programs and university education in general re: social economy.
- There is both a need and a desire for social economy-related course materials to integrate into existing university programs and courses.
- Although there is a high level of interest, there is limited time and capacity amongst BALTA academics to develop course materials or to be involved in such a project.
- Preferred form would be on-line teaching resources and course materials that could be put together into a stand-alone course or selected from to adapt and integrate into existing courses.

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4.0 DESIGN OPTIONS

The following is an outline of several design options based on the results from the interviews:

Option 1: Teaching Resources – Online Clearinghouse

An on-line resource centre that would serve as a clearinghouse for academics and other community educators interested in social economy learning. The resource centre could include:

- Literature and reading materials; access and links to social economy-related journals
- Case studies
- Community-based research methodologies
- Media centre
- Activities and exercises

Access: Open

Option 2: On-Line Course (stand-alone)

A modular-based on-line course offered through Athabasca University and accessible to all BC and Alberta university students through the Western Deans Agreement. AU would hold the right to offer the course with the possibility of negotiating a shared copyright agreement with BALTA members/institutions.

Access: Limited

Option 3: On-Line Course Materials and Resources (*preferred)

This option is more curriculum and module-based than the 'clearinghouse' model (option 1). A framework for the course would be developed based on theme areas (modules). Each module would include:

- Module description and learning objectives
- Readings and related literature
- Case studies
- Activities and discussion questions
- Possible assignments

Modules could be put together and offered as a stand-alone course or selected from to adapt and integrate into existing courses.

Access: Open / Limited

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5.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Other points from the interviews that need to be considered:

Academic + Community-based Learning Materials

Because BALTA is an academic and practitioner-based project, it is important to consider opportunities for both university and community-based learning on the social economy. In many ways, community-based learning on the social economy is far more advanced than university learning.

For any of the above options, we could develop both university and community-based learning materials in tandem (ie. developing both credit and non-credit courses).

Connection to Broader Communications / Dissemination Strategy

Discussion of course material as a form of knowledge dissemination has created an opportunity to consider course/curriculum development in the context of BALTA's broader communications and dissemination strategy and the development of other communications materials.

Opportunity to Link Course Development with Book Publication

There is an opportunity with course development to push the agenda on publishing an edited book based on BALTA research (organized around the three core areas with contributing authors from each SERC). A book could serve as a text for the course and be promoted for use in other courses.

Access and Authorship

No matter what option we choose, we will need to discuss and outline clear understandings and agreements around authorship, access and copyright (a point for discussion).

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6.0 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

BALTA academics have made clear that they have limited time and capacity to participate or contribute to a course development project. Most interviewees expressed a desire to see such a project move forward and a willingness to contribute research materials and participate in discussion.

What we need:

- Someone to coordinate and lead the project.
- Someone who is familiar with BALTA, the social economy and good at synthesis to compile, develop and write learning material.
- Commitment from BALTA members to contribute to the development process (ie. providing research materials, existing course materials, and/or case studies); and a commitment to use and provide feedback on the materials.

Proposal for Discussion:

Based on the above report, the following project development and implementation proposal is put forward for discussion:

2 year project (18 months development; 6 months pilot and revisions)

- **Coordination** – Mike Gismondi (AU) to serve as coordinator/lead of the project. Mike has expressed an interest and a willingness to coordinate given his current position within AU and his access to on-line course development resources.
- **Material Development and Writing Support** – 2 positions (post-doc + sr. RA). A team of 2 student researchers would work with the coordinator to compile, develop and write materials. The hours would be taken out of the post-doc position and the sr. RA would be paid on a contract basis.
- **Course Development Advisory Committee** – To be made up of BALTA members interested in supporting and contributing to the project.

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7.0 POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is course material / curriculum development something that we want to allocate BALTA resources to in the final years of the project?
2. Discuss design options.
3. Discuss access and authorship.
4. Discuss proposal.
5. Decide next steps.