

SUCCESS STORIES

In this column, I offer a story of success on a college campus regarding financial education. Given the chance to tell people I teach a money skills course at my university, students and parents alike unanimously respond with something like, “Everyone should take a class like that. I need a class like that!” Statements like these continue to encourage growth in a program that impacts lives.

My passion for teaching personal finance grew during my early career working in finance for a major aerospace firm. Transitioning my career from the corporate sector to the nonprofit sector, I began to see how application of corporate finance experience could help people figure out their personal finances. During this time, I worked in an organization run by Dr. Larry Burkett, a radio personality with a live call-in program on Christian radio channels. He inspired me to apply my financial knowledge to counseling and educating families and individuals dealing with financial issues. Transitioning my career (again) to academia, after finishing a Ph.D., I began teaching at Whitworth University in the Pacific Northwest.

Upon my arrival, noticing the lack of personal financial education, I decided to invest time in developing a program on campus. It began small with a peer financial education program. In partnership with our development office, we were awarded a grant from a local credit union with the same goals for financial education. I then hired a student leader and we began training other students, many majoring in economics or finance, to be peer educators and lead workshops across campus on topics such as budgeting, debt and credit, car buying, income taxes, and financial aid. This program continues to grow, teaching hundreds of students on campus. The credit union continues to invest in the program with increased funding and with direct involvement with the students by teaching specialized workshops three or four times a year.

In addition to the campus program, we added a new course to the curriculum for seniors. In the spring, immediately prior to graduation, they can enroll in a one-credit course called Money Skills for Life After College. The course has been overwhelmingly popular, exceeding classroom registration limits and overflowing with curiosity and interest from students. The students are able to grasp the practicality of the course and are thankful to take a course in college — among the many theoretical liberal arts courses — that will help them in their personal lives as well.

Both the peer educator program and the money skills course have brought much satisfaction to my work as a professor. Together with other offices on campus, such as the Financial Aid Office, the Office of Institutional Advancement, Alumni and Parent Relations, and our local credit union (Spokane Teachers Credit Union), we are working collaboratively to enhance the lives of our students, and it is an

absolute joy. I hope this story of success may encourage or spark a program on another campus (and many more).

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