Featured School:

Centre for Social Impact

Kensington, New South Wales, Australia

www.csi.edu.au

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Centre for Social Impact

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) is a collaborative partnership between four of the top business schools in Australia: Melbourne Business School (MBS) at the University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology’s Faculty of Business and Enterprise, the Australian School of Business at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and the University of Western Australia (UWA) Business School. From its headquarters at the UNSW, CSI is devoted to its mission of creating “beneficial social impact in Australia through teaching, research, measurement and the promotion of public debate,” as well as assisting the efforts of its partner universities in providing socially responsible management education.

The CSI partnership originally came about in February 2008 when, during independent conversations with officials of the Australian government, top administrators from each of the Centre’s three founding schools (University of Melbourne, Swinburne, and UNSW) expressed interest in closing the apparent gap between Australia and countries in Europe and the U.S. in the development of the “third sector,” or not-for-profit and social enterprises. The government subsequently informed the universities of their common interests, and offered to help them to address this gap with funding for a joint effort between the three universities.

According to Anne Measday, General Manager of the Centre for Social Impact, the business schools of the universities were chosen as the vehicles for the partnership due to two facts: 1) housing the social enterprise development activity of universities in business units is the prevailing international model, and 2) the business schools of CSI’s three founding universities were already the primary drivers of interest in the topic for their respective institutions. Indeed, two of the three business schools had already established individual centers devoted to the topic, namely the Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (APCSIP) founded at Swinburne in 2001, and the Asia-Pacific Social Impact Leadership Centre (APSILC) founded at MBS in April of 2008.

APSLIC and APCSIP subsequently became the focal points for CSI activities such as joint teaching, research, and events at their respective universities, though they continue to conduct activities independently of the Centre as well. Approximately six months after the founding of the CSI, the business school at UWA also expressed interest in joining the partnership. In October of 2009 they did so, establishing the CSI (WA) within the UWA Business School as its branch of the Centre (similar in nature to APSILC and APCSIP).

The Australian government granted the CSI an initial endowment of 12.5 million Australian dollars (AUD), and requested that they gaining matching funds from private and corporate donations within five years. Ms. Measday says that the Centre is on track to do so before the end of 2011, and that about a third of CSI’s operational funding still comes from the interest on the government’s endowment. Each of the Centre’s partner universities also supports a joint chair in social impact, whose professorial appointees work as liaisons to the Centre for their schools. Finally, though it does not operate as a consultancy service, CSI gains some funding through commissioned research projects with partners from corporate, government, and third sector organizations (TSOs).

CSI has a well-defined set of strategic imperatives through which the Centre seeks to achieve its mission. These goals include:

- conducting instructional and practical research activities that grow the ability of Australian organizations to contribute to the third sector;

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promoting collaborative networks and lines of communication between CSI and its various stakeholders in order to enable a sustainable approach to fulfilling the mission of the Centre; and

achieving international recognition for the CSI as Australia’s primary center for activity involving the third sector.

Impact through Instruction

The first of the Centre’s strategic goals is to generate beneficial social impact via the influence of its educational programs. CSI’s most significant educational offering is its Graduate Certificate in Social Impact, designed by teaching staff from CSI’s four business school partners working in a collaborative Program Development Group. The program debuted in the 2010 academic year at the three founding schools, and in 2011 UWA Business School will begin offering it as well. It is designed to work both as a standalone course of study or as a complementary program for MBA or Master of Commerce students at the four schools.

The Graduate Certificate in Social Impact is designed to be a one-year program consisting of a total of four courses, available at each partner school. There is one required core course, Social Impact: Entrepreneurs and Social Innovation, which covers the interrelationships between business, government, and the third sector, how they drive social innovation, and other trends that are reshaping the dynamics of the social economy. After the core course, the students choose three out of four elective courses that are part of the Graduate Certificate suite. One of the three elective courses may, at the students’ option, be from their home university but not part of the Graduate Certificate suite.

The program has already generated demand far greater than CSI’s initial expectations. Several of the courses have had to be run more than once, according to Ms. Measday, and/or with enrollment in excess of the initially-envisioned 25-student cap. This is true particularly at Melbourne Business School, where Ms. Measday says that CSI is aiding a major review of MBA curricula based in part on the program. She also says the Graduate Certificate has proven very popular with students from outside the business units as well, and the Centre continues to work on developing new courses and materials to support the program.

CSI has put together a number of workshops and executive education offerings as well, using faculty from its own collaborating universities and guest presenters from all over the world. For example, Nobel Peace Laureate Muhammad Yunus gave a presentation on microcredit for the economically disadvantaged that Ms. Measday says drew thousands of participants. In both 2009 and 2010, the Centre brought in Jeremy Nicholls, CEO of the UK-based Social Return on Investment (SROI) Network, to conduct an executive education course on the SROI framework for measuring and accounting for value, rather than money. Ms. Measday says that executive education is critical to CSI’s strategic goals, in that executive courses can deliver information about responsible management and social enterprise directly to practicing managers, and thereby raise the level of debate about the third sector and corporate social responsibility amongst them.

CSI offers a number of sponsored scholarships for employees or volunteers of TSOs to attend its executive courses, in the form of discounts of 20 to 50 percent off the course fees, in order to make them as accessible as possible and spread the benefits of attendance amongst a maximum number of organizations. CSI sponsor organizations fund scholarships for the Graduate Certificate in Social Impact as well.
Impact through Collaborative Research

Another important strategic goal of the CSI is to generate practical, action-oriented research capable of influencing public policy regarding the third sector, as well as enhancing the capability of TSOs to create beneficial social impact. According to Ms. Measday, the Centre is working to establish a framework by which to judge the impact of its research projects, in terms of relevancy (as measured by surveys of various CSI stakeholders and level of discussion amongst them), level of access to CSI research reports, and meeting CSI’s goals.

In support of this work, CSI partners with a number of TSOs, businesses, and government agencies on applied research projects designed to help measure and deepen their understanding of their social impact. Ms. Measday highlighted some examples of current projects that the Centre expects to be particularly impactful. These include: a collaboration with the city council of Parramatta, which seeks to document the variety of social, environmental and cultural purposes and different organizational forms social enterprises can take in Australia, through a publication of in-depth interviews with more than 30 established social enterprises; a project for Australia-based mining company BHP Billiton to aid in its efforts to conduct research on the firm’s levels of social impact and community engagement; and the development of an online database of transparency and financial benchmarking data for TSOs.

Impact through International Recognition

CSI’s strategic imperatives also include gaining international recognition as an organization capable of substantial contributions to the fields of social enterprise and corporate social responsibility. Although the focus of CSI’s activities are primarily on the improvement of the third sector in the Australian context, such recognition enables the Centre not only to serve Australia as an entry point for global best practices in social enterprise, but also to make the world more aware of what Australia has to offer in return. As a result of this goal, the decision was taken that CSI should apply to be listed as a participating institution in the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, independently of the four collaborating universities that make up the CSI partnership.

Though this approach met with initial difficulty, according to Ms. Measday, persistence on the part of the Centre paid off. CSI is now a Communicating Participant of PRME, having submitted their first Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) report in June of 2010. Ms. Measday says that becoming a PRME signatory independently of its partner universities has successfully raised the international profile of CSI. More importantly, however, she says that doing so has had an unforeseen but beneficial side effect. In order to meet the obligations of a PRME Communicating Participant, CSI has had to undertake a greater degree of self-reflection regarding its various activities than it otherwise might have done, which has led to a sharper focus within the organization on how the Centre accomplishes its mission and goals.

Impact on Public Policy

CSI is in a good position to contribute to public policy adjustments regarding third sector development, according to Ms. Measday, and the Australian government is not blind to this fact. Additionally, she says, having a number of people on the CSI staff with prior experience in the public sector helps a great deal with regard to how seriously CSI’s input is taken. People who have been in government or other public sector positions understand best what such personnel need, and tend to be more sensitive to what is politically feasible.
The Centre’s fact-finding initiatives for local, state and federal governments are informed by its extensive review of the social investment landscape in Australia. Ms. Measday says that the process of building up CSI’s aforementioned database in particular will prove enormously helpful in guiding the discussion around what the Australian regulatory landscape holds for the third sector in the future, and how the relationships between governments, businesses, and TSOs will change to bring about social innovation and address social needs.

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End Notes