

Suggestions for a research-focused executive education course on gender and entrepreneurship

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Please read below for some ideas shared by Professor Jennings at the University of Alberta

In a recent Open Access Government publication, Professor Jennifer Jennings from the University of Alberta teamed up with policy professional Jessica Carlson to share [ideas for bridging the academic-policy divide at the nexus of gender and entrepreneurship](#). One of their recommendations was for policy professionals to request that content-based courses on this topic be designed and delivered through Executive Education programs. In this follow-up article, Dr. Jennings offers suggestions for such a course.

Referent for an Exec Ed course on gender and entrepreneurship research

Professor Jennings' recommendations for developing a research-focused Executive Education course on gender and entrepreneurship stem from her recent experience designing and delivering similar offerings for PhD students at the University of Alberta. Her course usually consists of twelve three-hour sessions held once per week for a total of 36 instructional hours.

The readings for each session typically consist of four to six academic articles, which Dr. Jennings expects all participants to have read in advance. A list of recommended yet optional books and online resources is also made available. Respective examples are [Feminine Capital: Unlocking the Power of Women Entrepreneurs](#) and [The 2015 Female Entrepreneurship Index](#).

The course materials are grouped into four modules, as described below.

Module I: Foundational material related to gender and entrepreneurship

Professor Jennings kicks off the course by ensuring that students have a firm grasp of Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) highly influential statement on the scholarly domain of entrepreneurship research in general. She then assigns two literature reviews of the women's entrepreneurship literature in particular (Jennings & Brush, 2013; Deng, Liang, Li, & Wang, 2020).

These are followed by a set of six articles that collectively describe key theoretical perspectives underlying much work in the area. Examples include Ahl's (2004) overview of feminist critiques, Brush, De Bruin, and Welter's (2009) gender-aware framework, and Jennings and Tonoyan's (2022) summary of work drawing upon gender-based stereotyping.

Module II: Gender-aware research on topics pertaining to entrepreneurial entry

In the second module of her course, Professor Jennings asks her students to read and discuss studies that have applied a gender lens to topics pertinent to the phenomenon of entrepreneurial entry. One set focuses on differences in the propensity with which women and men tend to engage in various forms of entrepreneurial activity. These include, amongst others, high-growth entrepreneurship (Nelson & Levesque, 2007), academic entrepreneurship (Meng, 2016), and social entrepreneurship (Grimes, Gehman, & Cao, 2018).

Another set of assigned readings consists of articles describing studies of gendered beliefs about either entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship. Examples include Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar (2009), Abraham (2020), and Jennings, Rahman, & Dempsey (2023). Much of this work documents how entrepreneurship (still) tends to be perceived as a male-typed activity.

The third set of articles addresses gendered influences on the decision to become an entrepreneur. Some of these, such as De Martino & Barbato (2003) and Hughes (2003), focus on gender differences in motivations. Others document the role played by interpersonal and/or societal-level factors (e.g., Saridakis, Marlow, & Storey, 2014; Venkatesh, Staw, Sykes, Wamba, & Macharia, 2017).

The final set of readings in Module II features studies examining the gender composition of founding teams. Those focused on determinants include Yang and Aldrich (2014) and Gray, Howell, Strassman, & Yamamoto (2024). Those focused on consequences include Dai, Byun, and Ding (2019), Tonoyan & Boudreaux (2023), and Engel, Lewis, Cardon, & Hentschel (2023).

Module III: Gender-aware research on topics beyond entrepreneurial entry

In the first part of Module III, Professor Jennings assigns scholarly articles that have applied a gender lens to phenomena that occur after the decision to launch a business. Students are thus exposed to numerous studies that have investigated gender differences in entrepreneurial resource acquisition (e.g., Kanze, Huang, Conley, & Higgins, 2018), organizational and managerial practices (e.g., Cliff, Langton, & Aldrich, 2005), and venture performance/exit (e.g., Justo, DeTienne, & Sieger, 2015). In the second part of Module III, the assigned readings focus on the gendering of entrepreneurial ecosystem factors (e.g., Heizmann & Liu, 2022) and the effects of women's entrepreneurial activity (e.g., Alkhaled, 2021).

Dr. Jennings supplements the academic readings in Modules II and III with relevant sections from the [GEM 2022/23 Women's Entrepreneurship Report](#).

Module IV: Directions for future research on gender and entrepreneurship

In the final module, students read critiques of extant research at the nexus of gender and entrepreneurship (e.g., Ahl & Marlow, 2012). They also read articles charting directions for future scholarship in the area (e.g., Henry et al., 2021).

Nature of the in-class sessions

The in-class sessions of Professor Jennings' course primarily focus on student reactions to the assigned readings. Prompts such as the following are used to initiate and sustain the student-focused discussions:

- What did you like and/or dislike about the readings?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- How does each reading relate to the others within the topic area?
- How does the set of readings relate to other topics?
- What gaps, puzzles, or tensions exist within extant work on the topic?

Professor Jennings also asks course participants to share any ideas for future research stimulated by the readings. To help the students flesh out their ideas, she often asks them to prepare – and share – impromptu 'research posters' on whiteboards spread around the classroom. Peer feedback is strongly encouraged.

For Executive Education courses geared towards policy professionals, the 'posters' developed in class could focus instead on policy-related initiatives inspired by the research summarized within the academic readings. These initiatives could consist of ideas for specific policies and/or programs – as well as for future academic research that would be valued by policy professionals working at the gender and entrepreneurship nexus. In this way, the brainstorming activities might serve as a springboard for addressing some of the policy priorities raised by Jennings and Carlson in a [prior Open Access Government article](#).

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