

GSB business course challenges myth of the struggling artist

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) Business Acumen for Artists programme, the only short course of its kind in South Africa, offers creative professionals a practical guide to mastering essential business skills and helps them create sustainable businesses around their creative talent.

If you don't believe that the creative industries are good for business, think again says Elaine Rumboll, founder and convenor of the Business Acumen for Artists (BAA) course at the UCT GSB.

Take, for example, the blockbuster HBO drama, Game of Thrones, that returned to television screens this week. The series is one of the most watched and most lucrative ever made and is credited with helping British broadcaster Sky UK reap [record-breaking profits in 2016](#).

"There is a prevailing mindset that distinguishes between great art and commercial endeavours. But the success of shows like Game of Thrones is helping to shift that," says Rumboll, who says she was inspired to create the BAA course to challenge the myth of the struggling artist. "Making money doesn't make you a bad artist," she says.

Now in its 11th year, the course - which teaches the basics of business to creative professionals enabling them to elevate their art and develop a sustainable business around their talent - continues to gain in stature.

Rumboll explains that there is a growing realisation that business itself is a creative act and quotes Andy Warhol, who believed "being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art."

Art and business are intrinsically linked. A [2015 study by Ernst & Young](#), jointly presented by UNESCO and the International Confederation of Authors and Composers Societies (CISAC) estimates that as much as 3% of global GDP is derived from the creative industries – everything from architecture and music to advertising and television. Creative industries also employ about 1% of the world's working population.

However, "creatives are frequently not taught the importance of the commercial aspect of what they are doing. It is a systemic problem, not just in South Africa but worldwide," Rumboll says. "It is really important to change this. Just think what success might be achieved if our creative professionals were better equipped to build sustainable businesses and industries around their art."

This deep conviction of the importance of art in the economy led Rumboll to create the course over a decade ago. The course is not theory-driven, it is practical and tailored to each delegate, allowing them to hone and develop their specific talent into a viable business offering that can be marketed and sold by the end of the programme. Creatives from all disciplines are encouraged to apply. The diversity of the participants is a much valued component of the course as it fosters artistic collaboration and delegates build strong networks with other creative professionals.

BAA has many success stories, and its graduates are amongst South Africa's leading creative entrepreneurs, including actor and MC Odidi Mfenyana, fine artist Lorraine Loots, designer and patternmaker Renée Roussouw, writer and director Sjaka S. Septembir and the much-loved YouTube sensation Suzelle DIY created by Ari Kruger and Julia Anastasopoulos, after they met on the course in 2014.

During the course, delegates explore all aspects of business; from defining a product, pricing a product or service,

branding, finalising a business plan, negotiating, and project managing to entrepreneurial finance, making money online and tax. BAA includes a social media and marketing component, essential for artists to engage with their audiences online. “Marketing is about attracting, engaging, and retaining customers, without whom you don’t have a business,” says Dave Duarte, a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader who teaches social media and marketing on the course. He adds that “marketing and advertising have never been easier for people who know how to use the web.”

With this scope of business essentials, BAA is a practical investment for artists who emerge more confident about their creative offering and are much better equipped to work creatively without being vulnerable to exploitation. Applicants are encouraged to have a specific artistic goal to be achieved by the end of the programme.

The GSB is currently running a competition, which will see the winner awarded a full scholarship for the course, which is valued at R8,700. The competition runs until 28 July 2017. To enter, visit <http://creativenestlings.com/learn-the-business-of-art/> and answer the following questions: How would you benefit from the BAA course; what is your artistic field; and what would a success look like for you at the end of this programme?

For more information on the course, please visit <http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/Business-for-artists>.

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