Narrator:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

The 2019 report by American Express indicated that more than 40% of U.S. businesses were owned by women. But as we all know, these businesses were dealt a major blow by the pandemic, and it disproportionally affected female-owned businesses. This may be attributed to the percentage of female-owned businesses in the hospitality and retail industry. I’m Nicki Donnelson. As part of Women’s History Month, today’s Missouri State Journal will focus on a business analysis project helping female entrepreneurs. My guests are Dr. Jenifer Roberts, associate professor in merchandising and product development, and Grace Mason, Missouri State University student. Roberts starts by highlighting the significance of the fashion industry and program.

Dr. Jenifer Roberts:

We’re educating students to work in a three trillion-dollar industry. And so, we’re focusing on product development, marketing, and entrepreneurship. And sometimes people just think fashion is going out and shopping and we’re so much more. There’s not one thing that you have touched today that hasn’t had to do with fashion, and so it’s an important industry. It employs 40% of the women that work outside of the home. So, it’s a great program for young women and even young men to get involved in.

Nicki Donnelson:

Roberts met with and partnered with Brenda Conroy, partner in Conroy Sales Group, otherwise known as CSG, a Springfield-based sales and consulting business, for a project this semester. Roberts is having her students work on a business strategy and marketing plan for “Yes! Athletics” which produces – among other things – wrestling shoes for girls. Roberts tells us more.

Dr. Jenifer Roberts:

And the lady who developed the shoe and started the business –her name is Deborah North. She’s a widow. She’s been raising three young daughters, and her youngest daughter Annie was in the non-traditional sports like wrestling, and as they went shopping to try to find shoes, they found out that there aren’t a lot of athletic shoes out there – specifically wrestling shoes – for girls. So, she thought, “I need to develop this shoe”, and so that’s what she did.

Nicki Donnelson:

The students in Roberts’ class are meeting the students who can benefit from these new shoes. Girls into powerlifting, kickboxing, and wrestling in particular. They are helping to design a social media presence to give “Yes! Athletics” a top-of-mind awareness among these powerful young women. Mason talks about this experience.

Grace Mason:

As we are getting into these higher level classes – getting to really apply the knowledge we’ve been learning to real-world business that’s trying to grow. So, I’ve loved getting to learn more about “Yes! Athletics”. I think that it’s a perfect example of women empowerment because it really is started by a single mom with three daughters who is just wanting to grow this business. So, it definitely gives us kind of even more of a driving factor, I’d say.

Nicki Donnelson:

Roberts’ students meet with the members of CSG regularly asking questions, sharing ideas, and getting inspired by the young professionals on the CSG team as well. This real-world application is, “Of great value”, added Roberts.

Dr. Jenifer Roberts:

And I think by doing a business analysis with an actual business it elevates the students’ work before graduation. And then at the completion of this, it may be within weeks, or it may be within a year, these students will actually see their work come to fruition. And so, I think that is very important that they may see the change of social media, they may see the change of the logo, they may see the social media marketing that they’ve put into play.

Nicki Donnelson:

Each year, Roberts works with the Small Business Development Center to identify businesses that might be open to partnering with her visual merchandising class too. This year, they’ve partnered with Mother’s Brewery to help improve their retail space. She tells us more.

Dr. Jenifer Roberts:

It is a destination business. There’s a lot of people that come in from all over the country that spend several hours there. They're wanting customers to come in and buy their t-shirts and other souvenirs that they have that will help get the word out there about Mother’s. And so, my students are going to revamp that visual area. It’s a small square footage area but there’s a lot of opportunity to grow the business. So again, that real-world experience I think is vitally important. We always used to do simulations, but I think as we have grown throughout the last five years, students really want that hands-on experience and I'm hopeful that in this class they’re able to see the difference that they are making within Mother’s and the gross margin.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Jenifer Roberts and Grace Mason. I’m Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Narrator:

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397.