Understanding Use of Entrepreneurial Support Platforms in Low-Income Communities

Background
Sustainable business creation through entrepreneurship is critical to economic growth, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Entrepreneurship is one of the primary ways people in low-income communities guard against economic instability by creating primary or secondary sources of income outside traditional forms of employment. However, as the work of entrepreneurship requires greater digital skills, entrepreneurs in low-income contexts face challenges to advancing their businesses due to barriers in leveraging and accessing technology (among a myriad of other resources).

Project Goals
The goal of this project is to understand the onboarding process and use of entrepreneurial support platforms by entrepreneurs in low-income neighborhoods. Potential platforms to focus on include Airbnb Experience, a relatively new platform for local business owners in tourism, Facebook Groups/Pages, and crowdfunding platforms (e.g. Kiva). Research questions could include, How do these platforms support or inhibit the work of entrepreneurs in low-income communities? How do the benefits of these platforms compare or contrast to traditional offline forms of support (e.g. entrepreneurial workshops by the Small Business Administration, mentorship through networks like SCORE)?

Student Role
The student will 1) perform a literature review of relevant studies, 2) perform qualitative data collection, and 3) perform data analysis under faculty guidance. Data collection will include in-depth interviews on the phone and in-person as well as observations of platform use depending on participant availability. Data will be analyzed through a coding software, such as Invivo. Through this REMS project, the student will gain expertise working directly with local communities of entrepreneurs and performing qualitative research methods with potential to co-author an academic publication.

Mentorship Plan
I will meet with the student weekly to provide guidance on both project progress and overall career goals. With respect to the project, I will provide guidance on how to perform a literature review, scoping a project focus, creating a study plan, and performing data collecting and analysis. I will also provide advice on potential career pathways (e.g. industry, academia, non-profits) depending on the student’s interests.