



Coffee With Professors Oana Branzei and Stewart Thornhill

Is there an Ivey prof, current or retired, who you'd like to have coffee with? Send your suggestions to intouch@ivey.uwo.ca

Oana Branzei, who grew up in communist Romania, holds a degree in international relations from her home country, an MBA from the University of Nebraska, and a PhD from the University of British Columbia. It was at UBC that she met her husband, Stewart Thornhill. Thornhill came of age in a small town in New Brunswick and tried out careers in radio news and mechanical engineering before deciding to become a university professor. He holds a BSc in engineering, and an MBA and PhD from UBC. He's Executive Director of Ivey's Pierre L. Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship. Branzei is a strategy professor with a special interest in the pro-social functions of business.

How did you end up doing what you're doing?

Thornhill: After working for five years as a manufacturing engineer in a tire plant, I was ready for a change. I had started a little venture and made all the mistakes that engineers tend to make when they start a business with no business training! While doing my MBA I got a job teaching tutorials for undergraduate finance

students, and that gave me the teaching bug.

Branzei: When I started university in Romania, business was a very new and exciting topic. I was fortunate to be one of seven people in the country chosen for the first student exchanges to the U.S. At the University of Nebraska, everything about business was different—I had no experience of marketing or brands or finance or accounting. My professors were fascinated by my ability to transition between the two worlds. It soon became clear to me that if I wanted my work to have relevance and impact, business was the way to go.

What is your approach to teaching?

Branzei: I want the classroom to be an adventure, an experience that engages the whole person. I want to inspire my students to figure out what they would really love to do, and to imagine the possibility of making a better world for others.

Thornhill: Like Oana, I encourage my students to step away from the traditional MBA analytical mindset and imagine a different world. As an entrepreneur, you



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can't analyze a market that doesn't exist. Entrepreneurship takes imagination, creativity and intuition.

Oana, did your early experiences in Romania shape your research interests?

Branzei: In a sense, yes. Romania had no market, no exchange, no supply and demand as we teach it to our students. I had to imagine business—to create and believe in an ideal vision of business. Now when I teach social innovation and social enterprise, I draw on that vision of what business could be.

Stewart, what are your hopes for the Pierre L. Morrisette Institute for Entrepreneurship?

Thornhill: I want us to become the gold standard for entrepreneurship education and research in Canada. If you're a student looking for a great grounding in entrepreneurship or a policy maker who wants to know how to make life easier for entrepreneurs, Ivey will be the place to go.

How did you meet?

Thornhill: We met at UBC, but I was on my way out and Oana on the way in. It's a small world of management academics in Canada, so our paths continued to cross. Eventually we found ourselves in the same place at the same time. I invited her for a ride on my motorbike, and the rest is history.

Branzei: Many of our academic friends were advocating for us to get together! Although our backgrounds are very different, both our mothers are math teachers. Having educators on both sides of the family means that they have an appreciation for the work—teaching and research are more a calling than a 9-to-5 job.

What are the pros and cons of being an academic couple?

Thornhill: It takes patience. We spent the first four years of our marriage in different cities.

Branzei: We share a lot of the same friends and interests. We probably talk about work too much, but we do understand the ups and downs of academic life.

www.ivey.uwo.ca/Faculty/Oana_Branzei.htm

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