Pathways to Practice

One by one, teams of students and alums stepped up to the front of the room to pitch their ventures. There was a lack of gloss or theatricality present in the popular Dragon’s Den or Shark Tank Programs but this meant something more. To some, this open house was a first step to a dream come true; of entrepreneurship being firmly established at Western University.

Despite the rising profile of entrepreneurship in popular culture, and its quantified importance to economies the world over, establishing its legitimacy in academia has been a long time coming. Ivey Professor Eric Morse remembers being one of the first faculty hired at Ivey to specifically teach in the emerging field and still speaks to its importance in business education:

“Entrepreneurship covers critical business dynamics like change, opportunity recognition, innovation, and the disruption of markets and industry. Through a better understanding of these dynamics students build a capability for decision making under uncertainty and in many cases ambiguity.”

Fifteen years later, Morse is serving his second term as the Executive Director of the Pierre L. Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship and has played a major role in the inception of the Western Accelerator.
Building an ecosystem

“It’s long overdue in Western and I’m delighted to see the first group through the process,” said Morse. While entrepreneurship has manifested itself through the years in many forms across campus, Morse is excited particularly with the coordination of these efforts by different faculties with the help of the Western Entrepreneurship Steering Team, whose goal is to create an Entrepreneurship ecosystem at Western that taps into local, national, and global ecosystems.

A key piece of developing this ecosystem is the accelerator.

With Western’s strengths in areas of business, engineering and medical science, Kevin Matsui of the Ontario Centres of Excellence, sees the accelerator as a natural fit for Western. “It represents a good step forward for the university and the area. You can see the pent up demand for this type of thing,” said Matsui.

Since its inception in January, four teams have moved through the accelerator. Each team is provided a stipend to assist with living costs and has access to a range of resources from administrative to legal services. They also receive weekly programming that includes sessions with industry experts, entrepreneurs, faculty members and mentors to position their ventures for success.

The accelerator is located on the 3rd floor of Somerville House and consists of a working space, meeting rooms, a kitchenette and board room. Perhaps fittingly, the main working space has a prime view of the old Ivey building where the very idea of an accelerator was conceived by Morse and his contemporaries.

Gathering Support

Libro Credit Union has recently committed $50,000 per year for five years to support the development and implementation of the new program. “We think entrepreneurship is tremendously important to growing prosperity, not just in London but the broader region of southwestern Ontario,” said Stephen Bolton, President and CEO of Libro Credit Union.

The Accelerator is also supported by StarTech.com, a leading London-based manufacturer of connectivity devices, which was co-founded by 2008 QuantumShift™ alum Paul Seed.

Once fully operational, the accelerator will provide students, faculty and alums an avenue to realize their high-potential business ideas. “There are a lot of good ideas in the world. The Western Accelerator is key to taking some of Western’s best ideas and making them work at scale in the world,” said Darren Meister, Ivey Professor and John M. Thompson Chair in Engineering Leadership and Innovation.

An Immersive Experience

For the first cohort, the accelerator provided a fast-paced, immersive experience fitting the title.

“It’s definitely been an accelerator. The mentors and the resources we got from this were really invaluable and something we wouldn’t have access to, if we were doing it by ourselves,” said Ryan Bauer of Aunt Mary’s Corp.

Fellow team member Erik Lapointe enjoyed the intensity of the program, which didn’t taper off as he had expected. “It’s really good to have that type of resources and support from day one to week two, to the end of the accelerator,” said Lapointe.

With Aunt Mary’s composed of full-time students, they found the opportunity to work on their business while completing the MBA program an add-on to their experience. The accelerator has also allowed participants like recent grad Alan Kalbfleisch to see the bigger picture for his venture Pascal Press, a portable coffee press that was initially funded through a Kickstarter campaign.

Having been through a number of different entrepreneurship programs with Pascal Press, he credits the accelerator for preparing him to expand his current offering, converting a single product venture into a company. Colin McDougall, MBA ’06, is working on an online education program for hockey coaches with Dwayne Blais. Being a serial entrepreneur who has been through the process many times, he enjoyed the camaraderie that was created by a room full of motivated entrepreneurs and looks forward to what the accelerator will bring to Western.

“People are going to realize that the jobs of today are not the jobs of tomorrow and the ability to be nimble, adaptive and come up with new things will be better for the school and the province,” said McDougall.

During his nine years at Ivey, Professor Rob Mitchell was a strong contributor to entrepreneurship research and taught one of our most popular courses in New Venture Creation. Rob also contributed by taking on curriculum review committees and PhD coordination. He also gave of his time to instill entrepreneurial passion amongst high school students, coached young entrepreneurs pursuing their dreams, and taught experienced entrepreneurs through programs like QuantumShift™ & Entrepreneur 1.0. We wish him all the best with his new post in Colorado.
Entrepreneurship is often described as finding solutions to real pains. Some entrepreneurs have taken that mantra to another level to address some of the gravest problems in the world such as poverty, lack of education and access to drinking water. This phenomenon has also grown as an academic discipline and scholars are hoping their research can help further the impact of these social entrepreneurs.

Melissa Power remembers a time when doing laundry came down to a choice: Do I buy groceries and pay these bills or should I take some of that money to a laundromat? Today, Power is the founder of For The Love Of Laundry, a social enterprise that sponsors free laundry services for low income families with proceeds from its homemade, all-natural laundry products. She shared her inspiring entrepreneurial journey to a room filled with scholars working in the field of social entrepreneurship. It was an opportunity for academics and practitioners to see how their respective work could help each other.

With the growing popularity of social entrepreneurship as a phenomenon consumers want to support, the subject has flourished into a field of academic scholarship. To help continue the conversation, the Ivey Business School’s Pierre L. Morissette Institute for Entrepreneurship hosted many of the top minds in the field at an international academic symposium on April 6-8, 2017.

The symposium, titled the Journal of Business Venturing Special Issue Developmental Symposium on “Enterprise Before and Beyond Benefit: A Transdisciplinary Research Agenda for Prosocial Organizing,” brought together over 20 of the leading academics in the field, representing institutions such as the University of Cambridge, University of Pennsylvania and the Technical University of Munich.

**Translating to the real world**

Ivey Professor and symposium co-director Oana Branzei mentions that the growth of social entrepreneurship (also widely described as ‘prosocial organizing’) is a natural extension of entrepreneurship as an academic field. It is a sentiment echoed by Jeff McMullen, professor of entrepreneurship at Indiana University Bloomington’s Kelley School of Business:

“We want to see people always pushing the boundaries to what entrepreneurship means; what can it do, what can it be? Prosocial organizing fits beautifully because it’s basically asking questions of are there better ways to make people feel more engaged, make them feel part of a community while pursuing their own self-actualization.”

Due to the propensity of academia to explore more abstract concepts, the symposium’s co-directors made a conscious decision to root the conversation in the real world.

“You need a special issue to jump start (the conversation) so there is a toe hold in the literature,” said McMullen. “One of the problems in our academic approach is that you have to anchor the justification for what you are studying in the past and it’s difficult to get something new started without us doing something like this,” said McMullen, who is also the Editor-in-Chief for the Journal of Business Venturing.

The Special Issue is the first concerted effort to map out new developments in the social entrepreneurship space. “The success of this event (symposium) will be evidenced in the diversity and quality of accepted papers for the special issue, as well as the insights from the editorial pieces,” said Edward Gamble, Assistant Professor at Montana State University and co-editor of the Special Issue.

Parker was impressed by the range of interesting topics currently being explored in the area, as well the depth, quality and methodological rigor involved in these pursuits. “There’s rapid growth of this rather tight research community and there is potential for it to grow further,” said Parker.
CONVERSATIONS CONTINUED FROM P.3

The future of the field
The symposium was followed by a Thematic Doctoral Consortium with 28 PhD Candidates from across the globe, including seven representatives from Ivey. They were paired with 18 faculty members who provided mentorship and feedback on their research. The consortium was sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Claudia Moura Romero from the Pontificia Universidad Catolica is researching social entrepreneurs’ motivations and how they align with the goals of their ventures as well as their impact on performance. She found the experience a great opportunity to broaden her knowledge base and network with faculty and fellow PhDs in the field.

Jocelyn Leitzinger from McGill University was eager to be part of the doctoral consortium when she saw that many of the top minds in the field were listed in attendance. Being a smaller conference allowed her the opportunity to have more extensive conversations with faculty she was constantly reading in her own research. “It’s nice to have an opportunity to get time with the exact people you want to talk to,” said Leitzinger.

With an eager and enthusiastic crop of young researchers, Parker and Branzei are excited for the future of the field. As social entrepreneurs continue to find answers to our toughest social issues, scholars can continue to arm them with their findings and best practices to strengthen their chances of success.

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING – THEMATIC CONSORTIUM

Best Paper Awards
- Haley Beer (University of Warwick) – In the ‘social’ we trust? Uncovering relationship dynamics involved in the generation of social outcomes
- Tony Xiao (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) – A Motivational Approach to Social Enterprises
- Angelique Slade Shantz (York University) – The Effectiveness of Pro-Social Motivation on Non-Traditional Workforces: A Social Comparison Perspective
- Yusi Turell (University of New Hampshire) – Social Entrepreneurs as Institutional Entrepreneurs: Embedded actors of transformative social change

Entrepreneurs complete the 14th QuantumShift™ Program

“It’s widely recognized that entrepreneurs are the backbone of Canada’s changing economy. However, few programs exist to develop the next generation of business leaders. QuantumShift™ assembles Canada’s experienced business leaders for an intense 5-day program covering strategy, innovation, people and culture. I am honoured to have been a part of this program, and recommend it to other Canadian entrepreneurs who are eager to be challenged personally and help their companies become an important part of the Canadian business landscape.”

~ David Ciccarelli, QS ‘17