The Entrepreneurial Mindset and Innovation Ecosystems
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Course Description - short

Despite popular heroic accounts of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation, it is often not clear how to engage with these activities in an organized manner. Entrepreneurial practice is often characterized by broad patterns instead of prescriptive methods. The entrepreneurial method can be learned, but it is based around developing an intellectual sensibility and applying it in practice. This is an interdisciplinary (i.e., cross-faculty) course for graduate students interested in understanding and cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset. Through approaching entrepreneurial activity with the lens of innovation ecosystems, we will enhance the notion that creativity and innovation can be applied across many spheres of life - including in academic research, nonprofits, government, big companies, and small start-ups.

Course Description - extended

Despite popular heroic accounts of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation, it is often not clear how to engage with these activities in an organized manner. Entrepreneurial practice is often characterized by broad patterns instead of prescriptive methods. The entrepreneurial method can be learned, but it is based around developing an intellectual sensibility and applying it in practice. Throughout their studies, graduate students in Alberta will often find themselves at the cusp of an enterprising idea. While they may conceptualize the idea in the abstract, they are then unclear about the process for how to take the idea and turn it into a reality. This reflects two major issues. First, despite popular heroic accounts of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation, it is not clear how to engage with these processes in an organized manner. Scientific training privileges novelty and invention, but successful innovation is often about assembling existing concepts and resources into valuable combinations situated in context. As William Gibson suggested, “The future is already here — it’s just not very evenly distributed.” This implies that opportunities need to be discovered, articulated and imbued with meaningful notions of value. Second, in order to successfully implement an idea, graduate students lack diverse team members with a broad set of skills and expertise, and most academic institutions are setup in such a way as to make such a team impossible to find and form. This course aims to solve both of these issues.

The Entrepreneurial Mindset and Innovation Ecosystems is an interdisciplinary (i.e., cross-faculty) course for graduate students interested in understanding and cultivating such a mindset. Through approaching entrepreneurial activity with the lens of innovation ecosystems, we will enhance the notion that creativity and innovation can be applied across many spheres of life - including in academic research, nonprofits, government, big companies, and small start-ups.

This course is designed to introduce entrepreneurship as an iterative process of opportunity recognition and value creation, and will examine issues around implementation.
The class has been composed into three parts. The first part of the course is designed to introduce an understanding of entrepreneurship and innovation as a multi-level phenomenon. We will address what entrepreneurs do in practice and how they assemble value and opportunities with social networks. By using case studies of evocative entrepreneurs from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, we will explore how entrepreneurship is based on some common principles. Individual entrepreneurs often have diverse backgrounds and are both tenacious and resourceful. However, this entrepreneurial mindset is not limited to one discipline or personality type. Entrepreneurial action does not occur in a vacuum, so much as it is enabled by groups, social platforms and ecosystems.

The second part of the course will focus on Entrepreneurial Opportunities. This will help to explore where value comes from and process of assembling resources when innovating. Students will learn about the iterative process of opportunity recognition and value creation and the sensibility of organizational ambidexterity. Opportunities are not “out there” waiting to be grabbed, so much as they are initially weak signals that need to be articulated in space and time. We will explore the inductive processes of “design thinking” as a sensibility for constructing value propositions. We will also cover some of the socio-cultural issues of recognizing new opportunities and challenge the popular notion of “building a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door”.

The third part of the course will cover material around implementation of an opportunity and the pragmatics of turning inductive insights into stylized facts through the lean process of “validated learning.” Although building out a new opportunity space can be messy, by considering lean methods for primary research of users, we can approach entrepreneurial organizing as an iterative empirical process. In addition to learning about entrepreneurial practices, students in this course will learn how to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Together, these will contribute to an understanding of how to develop an idea and steward it into reality.

**Learning Objectives**

- To introduce key concepts in entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Learning about entrepreneurial action through assembly of resources and social networks.
- Learn to identify, develop and articulate potential opportunities through processes of design thinking and validated learning.
- Develop analytical and critical thinking skills through the process of completing an opportunity assessment for launching a new product or service.

**Guest speakers**

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic and applied subject. Throughout the course we will have practicing entrepreneurs share their perspectives as guest speakers in person or via Skype. We will have speakers from each of: University of Alberta, the Edmonton Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, and Silicon Valley.
Course Outline

Introduction

Readings:


Video: “Great Barrier Reef” BBC Documentary presented by David Attenborough, Episode 1: Clip demonstrating a biological ecosystem and the symbiotic relationship between clown fish and anemones

Part 1: A multi-level view on Entrepreneurship

Micro view: What Entrepreneurs Do in Practice

Readings:


Video: Clip from “How We Got to Now” BBC/PBS Series presented by Steven Johnson, Episode 5: “Cold”


Entrepreneurial Action: How Entrepreneurs use Networks to Assemble value

Readings:


Case: Burton, D. & Lawrence, K. 1998 “Jerry Sanders” [purchase from HBS Press]

In class activity: Mapping out social networks using LinkedIn data
Macro view: Platforms, Networks and Ecosystems

Readings:


Part 2: Opportunities

Introduction to Entrepreneurial Thinking

Readings:


Opportunity Recognition as a Process of Discovery

Readings:


Case Discussion: The Longitude Problem and Innovation Prize, John Harrison and his Clocks

Video: Clip from “How We Got to Now” BBC/PBS Series presented by Steven Johnson, Episode 2: “Time”
**Design Thinking, Articulating Value Propositions**

Readings:


Videos:

- IDEO design process; from “60 Minutes”; https://www.ideo.com/60minutes/

**Part 3: Implementation**

**Introduction to Implementing Ideas in Practice**

Readings:


**Finding a Business Model: Experimentation, Measurement, Leaps of faith**

Readings:


**Disruptive Innovation and Venture Survival**

Readings:

Conclusion

Entrepreneurial Thinking, Entrepreneurial Organization

Essential reading: