



Entrepreneurship training now the norm at Ontario schools

Panel: **The Role of Post-secondary Institutions in Building Ontario's Entrepreneurial Class**

Organized by the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation (MRI)

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Panelists: **Bill Mantel**, Assistant Deputy Minister, MEDEI/MRI; **Tony Bailetti**, Director, Technology Innovation Management, Carleton University; **Steve Farlow**, Lazaridis School of Business & Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University; **Deepak Gupta**, Director for Applied Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Services, Centennial College; **Francine Schlosser**, Director, Research and Interdisciplinary Learning, Entrepreneurship, Practice, and Innovation Centre, University of Windsor; **Abdullah Snobar**, Executive Director, DMZ, Ryerson University

Takeaways and recommendations

- ✓ Champion an institutional commitment to entrepreneurship
- ✓ Provide exposure to entrepreneurship education, programs and services
- ✓ Actively promote entrepreneurship as a career option
- ✓ Build companies within the institution and link them to the broader business community

The policy issue: As the innovation agenda grows globally, so does the need to ensure that entrepreneurship is strategically embedded into post-secondary institutions. That's because "**student entrepreneurs are the fastest growing vector of knowledge transfer**," said Mantel.

"One of our strategies is to build an army of entrepreneurs that takes inventive ideas and turns them into solutions people will pay for and build companies that make money ... These types of activities have now become the norm on campuses."

The options: In 2014, the province launched the Campus-Linked Accelerators (CLA) and On-Campus Entrepreneurial Activities (OCEAs) programs as part of the Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy. Forty-two universities and colleges in Ontario participate in these programs, which help student entrepreneurs gain business skills, mentorship and hands-on experience to start and grow a business.

"You're building an ecosystem on campus," said Mantel, "but you're linking that ecosystem to the off-campus community of entrepreneurs," including the province's 18 regional innovation centres. Tech start-ups use these hubs to access sophisticated programs and services as well as expert advisors, investors and researchers. "We believe this builds a more integrated entrepreneurship ecosystem city region by city region."

In terms of results, the CLA has served about 36,000 young entrepreneurs, created some 1,300 jobs, helped launch over 730 new businesses, invested in over 105 youth-led companies, connected over 400 students with R&D internships and leveraged over \$45.8 million in investment for new companies. Bailetti said Carleton University has embraced an "ecosystem approach" that reaches out to undergraduate, master's and Ph.D. students, and closely collaborates with the local business community and region's the other three post-secondary institutions—University of Ottawa, Algonquin College and La Cité College. "**Instead of being just a service provider, we wanted to create a venture creation machine that could be scaled up and scaled out.**"

Carleton has 162 companies in the incubator phase, 35 in the accelerator phase and more than 200 that have “graduated”. Companies move into the university’s campus accelerator, based on their ability to generate \$1 million in revenue within three years. Carleton takes no equity in the companies and makes no claim on the intellectual property.

“It’s all about talent, so attracting, developing and retaining talent to work with the ventures is very important,” said Bailetti.

Farlow lauded MRI’s “entrepreneurial institution” initiative, which has encouraged universities and colleges to be entrepreneurial throughout all faculties, and not just in business schools. “(Entrepreneurship) is now part of a strategic plan that’s being resourced. We’re hiring faculty and have an academic body of knowledge and applied experience and that has had an impact on the culture of the university, across all faculties.”

Students with further business ambitions can migrate to Laurier’s CLA called LaunchPad. “You have science students working with arts students working with business students, and lots of support from the regional innovation network, other public and private resources, and a network of mentors,” said Farlow. That support, he added, is helping students create meaningful, sustainable and profitable enterprises.

At the University of Windsor, Schlosser said few of her students were interested in starting companies because of a booming auto sector. But the recent recession killed many of those jobs, leaving Windsor with the highest jobless rate in Canada at about 9%; youth unemployment is even higher, hovering around 25%.

That economic reality changed the culture among both faculty and students. “Suddenly students were thinking about making their own job instead of taking a job,” said Schlosser.

At first, Schlosser said the previous entrepreneurship centre supported student business ventures like a restaurant or a car wash. “No technology, no science.”

The Odette faculty, with strong support from the president’s office, then worked with the university’s tech transfer office to build a multi-disciplinary CLA called the Entrepreneurship Practice and Innovation Centre (EPICentre). This created opportunities for business and law students to work with faculty and student inventors and scientists. “We also began a program called EPICentre Faculty Fellows that involved key professors in other faculties. The faculty helped us gain credibility with the president’s lead and helped us to translate entrepreneurialism in their own faculties.”

Ryerson’s DMZ (formerly the Digital Media Zone) is one of Canada’s largest business incubators for emerging tech startups. Launched six years ago as a small student-focused incubator, DMZ has evolved into a tech-based incubator housing 86 companies and over 500 people from across the world.

DMZ has helped create over 2,000 jobs and helped companies attract over \$150 million in funding. The Stockholm-based research organization UBI Global recently ranked the DMZ number one among university-based incubators in North America and number three globally.

One of DMZ’s biggest assets, said Snobar, is the larger community it makes available to start-ups: the 500 people working at other start-ups, over 80 mentors and advisors, five full-time entrepreneurs in residence, and several “extremely involved and committed” government, business and industry officials, which drive about 10-15 tours a week”.

Other faculties have since jumped onboard. “Just two years ago we went from having one zone to 10,” including zones for biomedical, fashion, social ventures and transmedia, said Snobar.

“Ryerson has 40,000 students. The goal is not to create 40,000 entrepreneurs. The goal is to create 40,000 people who understand what it means to be creative, the role of entrepreneurship and how they can take those skill sets and experiential learning to an environment where they become ‘intrapreneurs’ and entrepreneurs. It is very much about building a culture of entrepreneurial thinking.”

Centennial College’s Accelerator for Centennial Community Entrepreneurs and Leaders (ACCEL) is focusing on 12 adjoining neighbourhood improvement areas in Toronto where the youth unemployment rate remains high. The program is designed for youth who are most in need and hardest to reach, often from diverse backgrounds or those facing multiple barriers.

Many of these youth are also “very enterprising” said Gupta, adding that Centennial has always been very engaged in entrepreneurship, especially with the community. Over the past 28 years, its Centre of Entrepreneurship has helped 3,600 previously unemployed individuals start up their own businesses with 97% start-up success rate.

He said Centennial has committed, as part of its strategic plan, to embed entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship and financial literacy in most of its 250 full-time and part-time programs across all its eight schools. “By 2018, nearly every one of our 19,000 full-time students will have exposure to entrepreneurship as part of their core curriculum at the college... It will teach them to be resilient, to be enterprising and to be more capable employees.”