

The University of Tampa  
Sykes College of Business  
John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center

FOR THE

**USASBE 2016 EXCELLENCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AWARDS  
IN THE CATEGORY OF  
OUTSTANDING EMERGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM**

NOMINATED BY:

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## USASBE 2015 OUTSTANDING EMERGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM AWARD NOMINATION

**Name of Nominee:** The University of Tampa Sykes College of Business Entrepreneurship Program

**Mission:** The University of Tampa will become the university of choice among entrepreneurially inclined students from the state, the country and the world who seek a unique private college experience on a campus with a wide variety of educational options.

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**Primary Objectives:** As an academic program, student learning is at the core of all entrepreneurship activities and programs at UT. The focus of the program is twofold: 1.) A nationally recognized academic program that engages students and the regional business community in mutually beneficial learning experiences; and, 2.) Research that encourages and supports the efforts of faculty and student researchers to explain entrepreneurial phenomenon and find solutions to problems faced by entrepreneurs and early stage companies.

*Stakeholders Served by the Program:* The primary stakeholders of the entrepreneurship program are the University of Tampa (UT) students (and their families) who take advantage of the resources offered. As a private, metropolitan university, the primary goal of the institution is to educate the young men and women who attend the university. The students are talented young people, mostly of traditional college age, who come from all over the world to obtain an excellent education with extensive engagement with their professors. The Sykes College of Business is one of the largest of 4 colleges with 70 full time faculty members who have excellent educational pedigrees and come to UT to teach and conduct applied research.

The regional entrepreneurial ecosystem is also an important stakeholder for the program. UT serves students from all of the states and territories of the US and from 140 different countries. More than 90% of the UT undergraduate student body comes from outside of the region and the state of Florida. The goal is still to keep bright young minds that study at UT in the Tampa Bay region after graduation.

In 2004 UT started a program for small and family businesses. In the fall of 2009, Rebecca White was hired to fill an endowed chair in entrepreneurship and Giles Hertz was brought in to teach in the program along with the 5 faculty members who were already at UT and teaching in the program. Since that time two additional full time faculty members have been recruited to join the team. Since 2009, the entire curriculum has been redesigned. The new programs include best practices from successful academic programs with a strong experiential learning component. See Appendices A and B.

The redesigned program is built based upon one fundamental question: What does a 21st century education require? The primary goal is that students who graduate the program have the capacity to find solutions to complex problems and take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. The curricular and extra-curricular programs offered provide the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to think creatively, design and recognize opportunities, and transfer that knowledge beyond the classroom. There is an emphasis on abductive reasoning – the logic of generating ideas and forming explanatory hypotheses – and implementation –turning those solutions into viable businesses.

### **Unique Aspects and Features of the Program:**

Our program is built upon the belief that students learn both in the classroom and outside through a series of courses and co-curricular programs that are designed to engage the student from Freshman to

Senior and beyond by providing bridge to the business community. Both the curriculum is and co-curriculum are built upon a Competency Based Education (CBE) model and employ a traditional competency structure model to measure outcomes. This model allows for not only more consistent delivery of content but also customized learning and outcomes assessment. For more information on our approach please see Appendices C and D. One of the unique features of our curriculum is the ***Freshman Entrepreneurship Experience***. Students in the program participate in a 2-semester course that takes them from idea generation to business pitching. The class has a \$4,000 purse of loans to be divided (as the judges see fit) among the teams to start and run a business during the academic year when they are enrolled in the class. Students keep the profits earned by their businesses. Another unique feature of our program is our entry assessment. Students in entrepreneurship take the Entrepreneurial Mindset Profile (<https://www.emindsetprofile.com>) and the DISC profile ([www.indabaglobal.com](http://www.indabaglobal.com)) and work with a faculty coach and student peer to develop an individualized program of entrepreneurship during their undergraduate studies at UT. The curriculum was redesigned in 2010 and includes all 4 credit hour classes with added experiential learning components. The new curriculum is delivered in such a way that faculty work with students to remove the stigma of failure and instead to focus on learning from these experiences. UT currently offers three undergraduate degree programs including: a Major in Entrepreneurship, a Major in International Entrepreneurship and a Minor in Entrepreneurship.

### **KEY Co-Curricular Programs**

Our Co-Curricular program engages students from freshman to senior and beyond.

***Live and Learn Community (freshman)*** – in order to better integrate Freshman into the program when they arrive on campus, we offer a dorm for students who wish to study entrepreneurship. The *Boathouse* dorm is a unique live and learn community, located on the waterfront, and with a communal living arrangement and meeting spaces that foster collaboration and connections. Programs are offered on a weekly basis.

***Pitch Sykes (freshman – senior)*** – An informal pitch session offered monthly for any student to pitch a concept and receive feedback from a panel of judges. Students receive structured feedback with action steps. Pitch Sykes prepares students to enter CREATE<sup>®</sup> and the Spartan Accelerator.

***CREATE<sup>®</sup> (freshman – senior)*** – Funded by alumnus, Michael Southard, this program provides students from all academic disciplines with the chance to pitch an idea and if selected win the chance to participate in a 6 week boot camp to help prepare them to pitch their concept (\$7, 500 purse) to a panel of qualified judges. CREATE is excellent preparation for entering the Spartan Accelerator.

***The Spartan Accelerator (freshman –senior)*** is a program designed to help develop entrepreneurs by helping current students and recent alums grow their startup businesses. The Center's Opportunity Review Board vets applications to the program. Selected students receive an advisory board and support needed to develop and grow their fledgling companies. Competitive non pay back grants are available through the ***Spartan Accelerator Seed Fund***. These students have workspace in the Lowth Center in the new Innovation and Collaboration building.

***The Main Street Speaker Series (freshman – senior)*** featuring nationally-renown entrepreneurs and thought leaders, is offered twice each year and is sponsored by NorthStar Bank of Tampa. Local entrepreneurs sponsor tables and bring 4 guests and sponsor 4 students and the students and business leaders are able to interact as they learn about entrepreneurs and their stories.

***The UT Entrepreneurs Club (freshman – senior)*** is the primary group for students who are interested in entrepreneurship. By joining this organization of organization of students from across campus and from any major with a passion for developing an entrepreneurial mindset, members become a part of the community of entrepreneurship at UT. This group hosts a number of student events including the *Southeastern Entrepreneurship Education Conference*. Held each spring, this event was the first regional conference of the National Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization (CEO). The club members run the

entire conference gaining amazing experience. More than 250 students from all over the United States attend to network and hear 2 days of outstanding speakers and workshops. For example, Jeff Hoffman, founder of Priceline.com is an example of the speakers at the conference. For example see <http://www.ut.edu/Students-Invention-Takes-Third-SEEC.aspx>

***Students compete for regional and national awards (freshman to senior)*** – UT students frequently pitch their ideas and business plans in competitions held throughout the United States and worldwide for prize money and investment funds. Our most recent success was at the 2015 HULT prize, sponsored by the Clinton Global Initiative. Our students competed with nearly every school in the US (including Babson, MIT, Harvard, Stanford, etc.) and international universities (Cambridge, Oxford, etc.) and one of our two teams, *Tembo*, finished among the top five (***the only US school***) for the \$1 million prize in September. *Tembo* is a social enterprise that focuses on providing early childhood education to kids aged 0-6 years of age in the urban slums of the world. More than 20,000 schools worldwide competed.

***CEO Council Business Plan Competition (seniors)***– each year this program awards three \$1,000 prizes to the best business plan competitions among graduate and undergraduate students studying entrepreneurship

***John P Lowth Entrepreneurship Incubator (juniors and seniors)*** – The John P Lowth Entrepreneurship Center houses 6-9 businesses each semester in the incubator program. Businesses in this space are early stage companies and experienced students who have completed upper level courses consult with these companies.

***Student Scholarships (freshman – senior)*** – Nearly 80% of our students receive scholarship support that is generously provided by donors.

***Tampa Bay Startup Weekend Hosts (freshman – senior)*** <http://www.ut.edu/Global-Startup-Competition-to-be-Held-at-UT.aspx>

### **Funding and Support Sources:**

*University support* has increased significantly over the past six years. The Center budget includes an annual spending account, a Center Coordinator and a travel budget for the Director. In Fall 2015, the John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center was unveiled. Located on the 8th floor and mezzanine of the new Innovation and Collaboration Building, the space features a 80-person dedicated pitch room, multiple meeting spaces, collaboration zones, offices for Entrepreneurs-in-Residence and Venture Capitalists, Think Pods, and office space for startup businesses (students and community entrepreneurs) that are participating in the Spartan Accelerator program. State-of-the-art technology is utilized throughout, with multiple TV screens streaming from laptops, technology hookups to encourage mobility, and smartboards to promote idea sharing. See Appendix E for a visual of the Lowth Center.

The space is a one of a kind facility that was designed with learning in mind. Upon review of the latest learning models, it was determined that a model of situated learning is most appropriate for learning a craft like entrepreneurship, and that successful learning in this style incorporates the following common features: apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, and multiple practice. In fact, meaningful learning only takes place if it is embedded in the social as well as the physical context within which it is used. Due to the fact that classroom learning is often distinct from real world endeavors, a number of activities undertaken by students in the classroom are unrelated to the sort of activities carried out by practitioners in their day-to-day functions. With our new space, we provide an environment that is conducive to apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, and multiple practice.

Apprenticeship occurs working with entrepreneurs-in-residence, and through internships and mentorships. Collaboration occurs with the open space that is conducive to team efforts. Reflection is an option with moveable walls and soundproof materials that can cordon off areas for quiet focus, as well as individual Think Pods. Coaching occurs as we bring in mentors, speakers and advisory boards to help the student businesses that participate in the Spartan Accelerator program. Multiple practice is a benefit to students as they work together on their business concepts and continuously pitch their ideas in front of live audiences, utilizing the pitch room in the Center.

The university provides 3 staff positions, 9 tenure track faculty members and 2 adjunct positions. In addition, there is a team of Entrepreneurs in Residence and Visiting Faculty funded by the university who participate in coaching and mentoring our students.

*External Support:* The University is engaged in a \$30million campaign for entrepreneurship. To date the Center has received several significant gifts of note that provide sustainability for the program, including the naming of the Center (John P Lowth) and several key endowments: the James Walter Endowed Chair Fund and the John West Endowment for Entrepreneurship Programming. In addition, most programs have multi-year sponsorship from key donors in the region. For example, CREATE® is funded by Mike Southard (an alumni), the Main Street Series is funded by NorthStar Bank, the accelerator and incubator programs are funded by alumni (including John Lowth, Thilo Best and Benson Riseman), Scholarships are funded by alumni and external supporters, the Spartan Accelerator Seed Fund is funded by Mike Vail, etc.

*Advisory Board and Community Support:* Significant contributions to the program come from an exceptional advisory board. The center has developed a committed working board that regularly provides time, talent and treasure to the program. The board is currently composed of 15 business leaders (80% are entrepreneurs) from the Tampa Bay region and beyond, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Delaware, Ohio and Nevada. In addition, the Board of Fellows program currently has 220 members who support entrepreneurship at UT with time, talent and treasure. Both boards have an annual contribution requirement of a minimum of \$2,500.

### **Benefits to Students/Outcomes:**

*Short Term:* We have already seen the benefits of our program. A few examples include:

- Enrollment in major – Increase from 64 to 280 in the past 6 years
- Engagement – Increase in club membership from 5 to 100+ active members; several hundred students from outside of entrepreneurship engage in our programs annual; host more than 60 entrepreneurship related events each semester in the Lowth Center.

A few examples of student success and national recognition of UT student businesses:

- Student Team recent winners of the 2015 Global Startup Weekend Battle in the Disruptive Category <http://blog.up.co/2015/12/14/announcing-the-2015-global-startup-battle-champions/> and <http://www.ut.edu/Local-Win-Lifts-UT-Team-to-Regional-Startup-Competition.aspx>
- Students in Spartan Accelerator win local awards <http://www.ut.edu/Sherloq-Solutions-Awards-20k-to-UT-Entrepreneurs.aspx>
- Phil Michaels, ('15) – CEO and Founder of Tembo, competed in international Hult Prize (only US school among 20,000 worldwide). <http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/ecf196eb>
- Katelyn Edwards ('15) business featured in Forbes Magazine <http://www.ut.edu/Student-Forbes-Millennials-Changing-World.aspx>
- Paul Szoldra ('12) – business designed in class featured on front page of Wall Street Journal
- Nick Chmura ('12) and Duncan Abdelnour ('14) named one of INC Magazine's Coolest College Startups in 2012 and 2014 respectively <http://www.inc.com/diana-ransom/coolest-college-startups-2014.html>
- Art Linares ('11)– started solar energy company with more than \$200m in revenues
- Ed Carrie ('11) –successful social enterprise in Haiti that provides an income for an estimated 6000 Haitians

A number of new degree programs are being developed across campus from the arts to the sciences. Moreover, in 2014, UT served as Host institution for the National Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization (CEO) conference and in 2015 the UT Entrepreneurship program served as the host for the annual USASBE meeting providing the program with excellent national exposure.

## Recent Awards and Grants

2015 GCEC Outstanding Teaching and Pedagogical Innovation Award

2014 USASBE Outstanding Emerging Entrepreneurship Program <http://www.ut.edu/UT-Entrepreneurship-Center-Wins-Prestigious-Education-Award.aspx>

Selected as one of 63 campuses to host a HULT prize competition (2014 and 2015) <http://www.ut.edu/UT-to-Host-Local-Edition-of-Hult-Prize.aspx>

2015 Urban Excellence Award <http://www.ut.edu/UT-Entrepreneurship-Center-Wins-Prestigious-Education-Award.aspx>

Kauffman Grant Award of \$150,000 to study the Tampa Bay Entrepreneurial Ecosystem <http://www.ut.edu/UT-Receives-Grant-to-Study-Tampas-Entrepreneurial-Ecosystem.aspx>

*Long Term:* The long term goal is to continue to focus on student learning, encourage faculty development in the area of entrepreneurship and serve as a bridge to the business community and entrepreneurial ecosystem in which our students will operate. As we assess our current situation and look to the future, we are designing programs that will allow us to continue to grow in quality of programs as well as increase the number of student we impact. In particular we seek to increase our impact outside of the Sykes College of Business.

**Summary:** The entrepreneurship programs in the Sykes College of Business at the University of Tampa have shown significant growth over the past few years since the beginning of the new entrepreneurship curriculum and center. The program is exemplary in a number of ways.

**INNOVATIVENESS:** The curriculum is built on CBE and provides an opportunity for immediate immersion into the program from the first day on campus. The program emphasizes engagement with faculty and entrepreneurs in 4 credit hour classes allowing for additional time for experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, classes are complemented by programs that can engage students immediately upon arriving on campus and throughout their studies regardless of major. This combination, along with a dedicated space designed for learning, provides a unique learning experience.

**QUALITY:** The program has been built upon best practices in entrepreneurship education as well as scholarly research. Only one class each semester is taught by an adjunct and all full-time faculty members have been or currently are entrepreneurs. All faculty members are deeply engaged in the discipline and in practice. The result is a high quality educational experience built upon state of the art pedagogy.

**POTENTIAL VIABILITY:** The program has been built upon a strategic plan, has already shown great success and with the addition of a new facility, we believe the potential for continued growth is exceptional.

**COMPREHENSIVENESS:** The program delivers a broad based education and provides students with a well-rounded educational experience that is appropriate for a small to mid-sized (8,000 students) institution.

**DEPTH OF SUPPORT:** The current levels of funding plus the current \$30m capital campaign underway illustrates the depth of support from both the institution and the community.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** The region and the institution have a long history of entrepreneurship. The financial, human and organizational resources are in place to sustain this program.

**TRANSFERABILITY:** It is important to note that all courses and all of the programs we offer (except the Incubator) were offered prior to the new space so while it does enhance our ability to offer an exceptional program, a dedicated building is not required to implement a similar program.

**IMPACT:** The short and long term outcomes outlined in the earlier section illustrate that this program is creating value and will continue to have an impact on the students in the program and the broader entrepreneurial communities we serve. The number of students involved has grown from 64 majors and 5 student club members to nearly 300 majors and more than 100 active club members. The number of student businesses as well as the national and international presence of the program has grown exponentially. Local and national community volunteers have increased substantially.



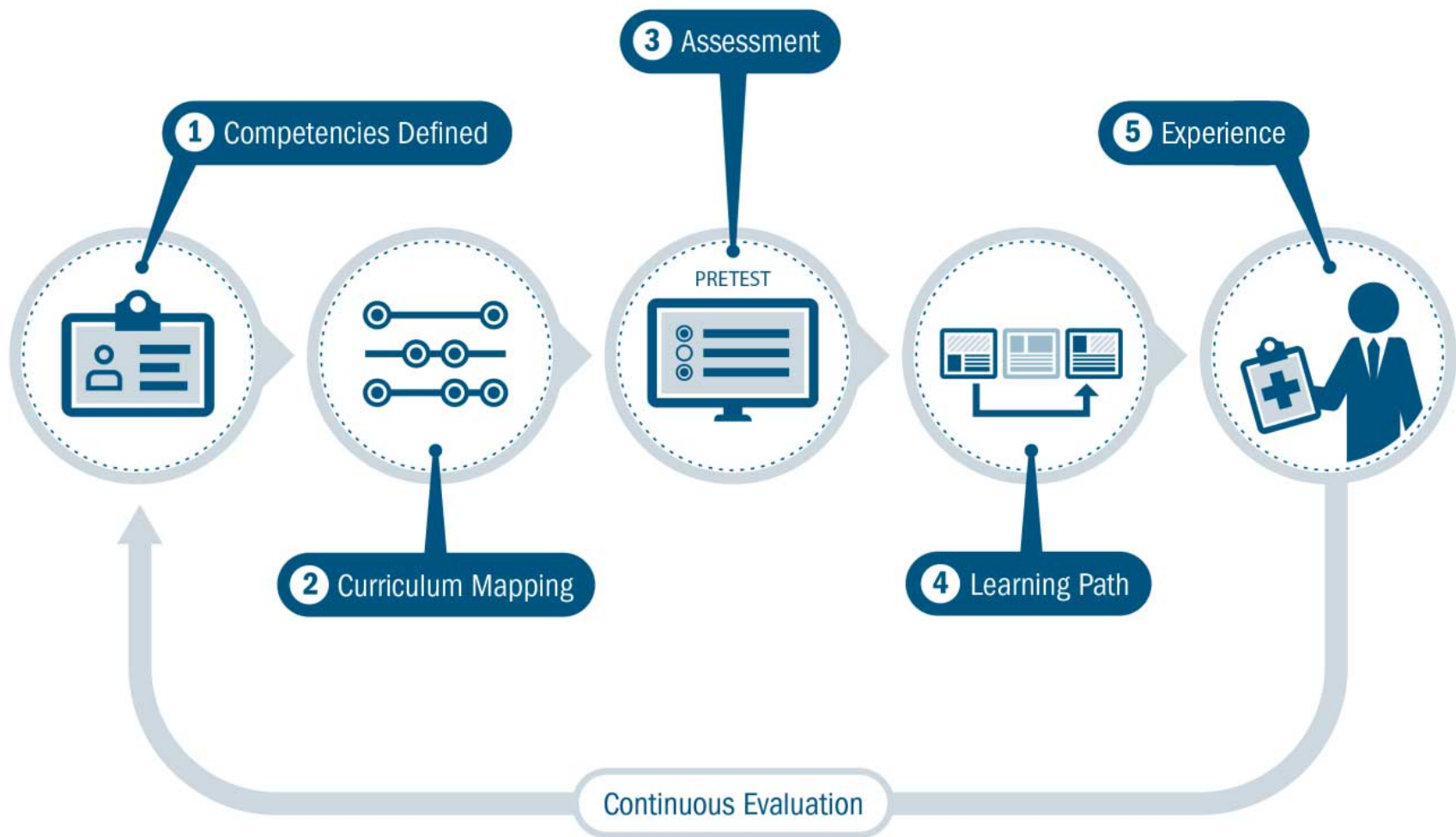
## Appendix A: Courses

Course Number and Title	Open to Any UT Student
<b>BAC 101 and BAC 102: Learning, Innovation and Entrepreneurship</b>	The theme of these 2 courses is learning, innovation, and entrepreneurship with a goal of creating lifelong learners that utilize the entrepreneurial mindset. Students are coached to develop an innovative solution to problems faced by students and launch a business to address the issue.
	<b>Required Course for ENT Majors - 4 hours Credit Each</b>
<b>ENT 320: Introduction to Entrepreneurship/Feasibility</b>	This course requires students to develop a feasibility study for a new business venture. The study will be utilized throughout courses in the major and will form the basis of the business plan in ENT 487. In addition to a historical review of entrepreneurship, students assess the value of a concept and explore opportunity recognition, innovation and creativity, pro forma financial statement development, the legal structures of business, risk analysis and types of entrepreneurial ventures..
<b>ENT 360: New Venture Finance</b>	Major sources of funding for new ventures - including family and friends funding, angels, venture capitalists, informal investors, banks, investment banks, suppliers, buyers and the government - are reviewed and evaluated in this course. Some topics for this course include debt and equity capital markets, valuation, bootstrapping, joint ventures, strategic alliances, private placements, IPOs and management buyouts. Students create pro formas and develop a funding plan for a new venture.
<b>MKT 360: Marketing Research</b>	A methodological approach to marketing and consumer research problems and opportunities, using both primary and secondary research. Examines the information needs of marketing managers and the use of information for making effective marketing decisions. Covers the marketing research process, including research design, analysis and interpretation, and reporting of findings
<b>ENT 487: Business Plan Development</b>	This course draws on a broad range of business disciplines including management, marketing, finance and accounting to develop the business plan. Critical elements of the plan include industry/market analysis, clear opportunity and concept definition, target market analysis, a comprehensive human resource plan, financial pro forma analysis, as well as statements of sources and uses of funds, and an assessment of critical risks. Semester-long work on the business plan culminates with a business plan competition.
	<b>Elective Courses - Students must take 2 or more</b>
<b>ENT 486: International Entrepreneurship</b>	This course includes the study of cross-national comparisons of entrepreneurial activity and examines the formation and functioning of innovative, proactive and risk-taking organizations that cross national borders. Attention is given to understanding the skills necessary to successfully launch a new venture in the global economy.
<b>ENT 490: Entrepreneurship Internship</b>	This internship exposes the student to a real-life learning experience in an entrepreneurial/startup business. Students are hired by an organization for the specific objective of gaining work experience in that organization. 4-8 credit hours.
<b>ENT 495: Seminar in Entrepreneurship</b>	Topics vary and focus on emerging ideas and the latest research in areas of entrepreneurship that are not covered by the current curriculum. Sample topics include creativity and problem-solving, innovation and technology entrepreneurship, legal issues for entrepreneurs, corporate entrepreneurship, real estate venturing and social entrepreneurship.

## Appendix B: Courses

<b>ENT 390: Managing the Family Business</b>	This course begins with an overview of the basic business principles as they apply to multi-generational businesses. The course covers the vital importance of family businesses to communities and national economies, and the unique problems and opportunities they face. A systems perspective is used to understand the dynamics among family members, the ownership and the management of the business. The course uses speakers, case studies and assessment tools to develop understanding and strategies for managing those dynamics. It is designed for majors and non-majors either from or interested in family businesses.
<b>MGT 355: The Art and Science of Negotiation</b>	This course focuses on the development of problem-solving and communication competencies relevant to a broad spectrum of negotiation settings from personal relationships to the global business environment. Students learn useful analytical frameworks to understand the effect of content and communication skills on the negotiation process and outcomes. Through the use of extensive role-playing, students have the opportunity to practice an array of negotiation techniques and to develop their communication and problem-solving skills.
<b>MGT 365: Business Strategies for Emerging and the Base of the Pyramid Markets</b>	Emerging and bottom of the pyramid (BOP) markets represent almost 90 percent of the world's population and offer great opportunities for businesses, and even greater challenges. This course describes the nature of emerging and BOP markets. Students will examine case studies that describe the innovation required of companies as they enter these marketplaces as well as the institutional voids inherent in these markets, voids that must be recognized and overcome in order for companies to be successful. Strategies for emerging and BOP markets will also be discussed and analyzed by students during the course of the semester.
<b>MKT 371: Personal Selling and Sales Management</b>	Examines the personal selling process and the use of a professional, customer-oriented, problem-solving approach in selling situations. Studies the nature of the sales job, selection of salespeople, sales training programs, and issues in the compensation, supervision, motivation, and ethical challenges of salespeople.
<b>ENT 380: Introduction to Hospitality Management</b>	This course provides an overview of the trends and developments in the hospitality industry with a focus on startups. The primary segments of the hospitality industry are examined including lodging, restaurants, theme parks, clubs and event management. Students study the fundamental management functions as applied to the hospitality industry.







Development of  
a Personal  
Learning Pathway



### Personal Learning Pathway

#### Process for Content Filtering

1. Identify All Learning Outcomes
2. Analyze Learner to Determine Baseline Knowledge (Pretest)
3. Provide Personal Learning Pathway based on Results



Instructional Design  
Best Practices



Curricular and  
Co-Curricular Classes  
and Programs



### Design Principles for Personal Learning

#### Learner-centered Focus

1. Gain and keep the learner's attention through:
  - Meaningful interactivity
  - Engaging relevant visual content
  - Questions
  - Challenges
2. Address multiple learning styles
3. Exploratory learning
4. Practice

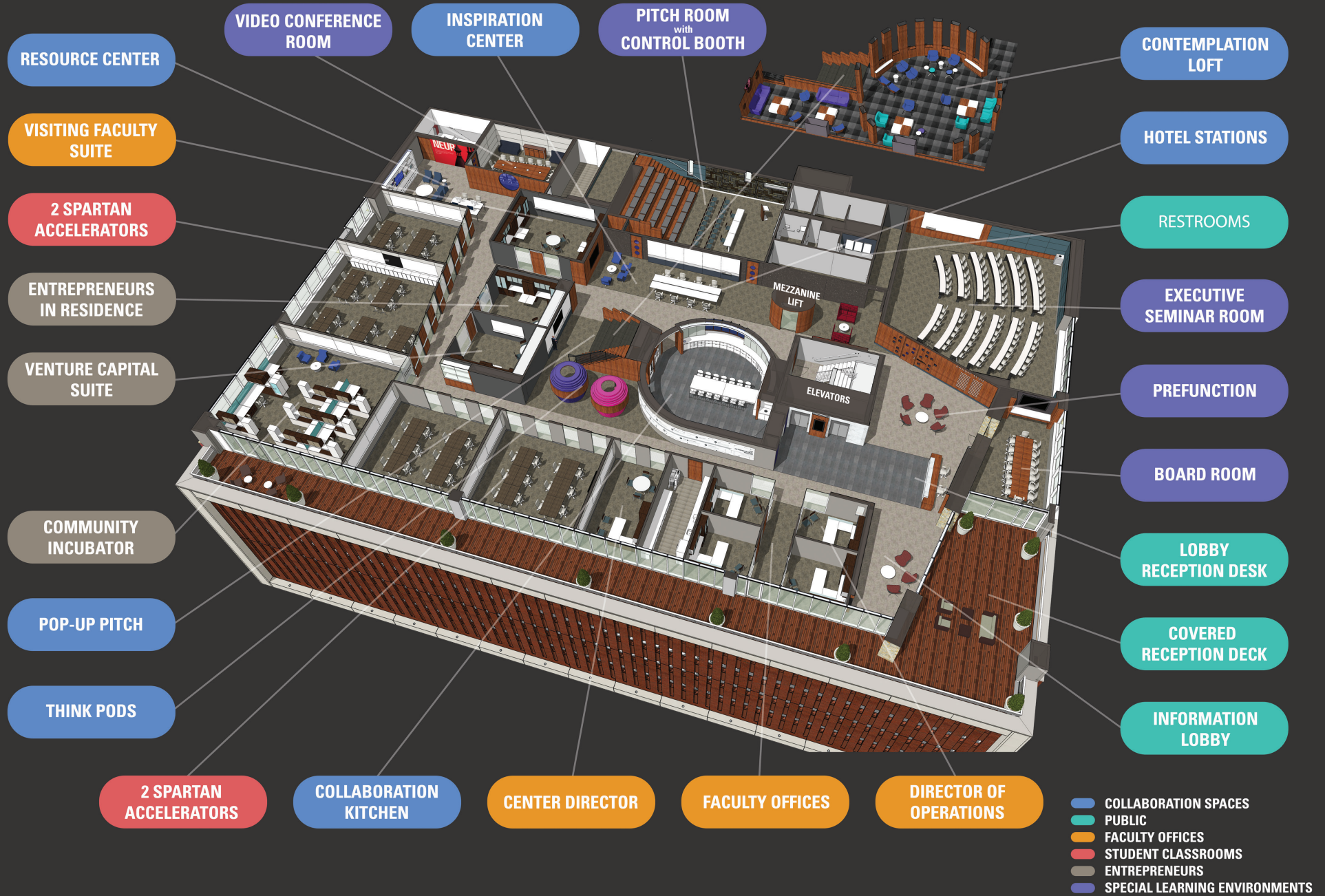
#### Higher Level Thinking

1. Application
2. Evaluating
3. Analysis
4. Reflection

#### Emotional Engagement

1. Multiple perspectives/stories
2. Make emotion part of the experience
3. Conversational style in writing

# John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center Floorplan







# OPEN FOR

The new ICB is a place where students come together to solve problems,

BY MARY ELLEN COLLINS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DRUE WAGNER







# BUSINESS

learn, answer questions, relax, interact, teach and be taught.





STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS WHO ARE LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO WORK ON THEIR business plan, cybersecurity majors who need hands-on experience with security tools and programs, and faculty members who want to park and grab a latte before teaching a class all have a new destination on campus — the Innovation and Collaboration Building (ICB).

“This was one of the most complex and thoughtful building projects we have ever undertaken at UT,” said UT President Ronald Vaughn about the ICB, which is located at the corner of Kennedy and North Boulevards.

When planning the ICB, Vaughn said the challenge was to address academic, administrative and student needs in a single building, and build within it unique spaces that would support students in their academic and co-curricular endeavors.

“Each area had their own space and functionality requirements, which required a lot of strategic thought and design,” said Vaughn. “We spent a good deal of time studying model examples of design and function in higher education and industry, and tried to improve on those. There are designs, spaces and amenities for learning in this building that simply do not exist anywhere else in the world.”

### FLOORS ONE TO SEVEN

The first floor of the ICB is home to the Sykes College of Business’ new cybersecurity program. In a classroom, lab and technical support area, students learn how to protect organizations’ information and information systems by using industry standard tools. A dedicated server network with sophisticated software provides hands-on practice in a real cyber network.

The Campus Safety Center, which is also housed on the first floor, includes meeting and interview rooms, video monitoring and training rooms, evidence processing space, a walk-up window and a 24-hour dispatch center.

Perhaps the most popular occupant of the first floor is a Starbucks, which offers Starbucks Reserve®, a collection of unique coffees from farms all over the world. The Starbucks, with its comfortable indoor and patio seating and adjacent meeting and study areas, has already become a regular gathering spot for UT community members.

One floor up, visitors will find 22 faculty offices and several classrooms.

Though not glamorous, a much-needed expansion of the Rick Thomas Parking Garage occupies floors three through seven and adds 386 parking spaces to the garage’s original 725 spaces.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON EIGHT

The John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center occupies the entire eighth floor, providing aspiring entrepreneurs with a unique space that encourages introspection, creativity and innovation.

“I was blessed to be involved (in the design process) from the beginning, and I visited many different entrepreneurship centers in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East,” said Rebecca White, director of the Lowth Entrepreneurship Center. “We decided we wanted a very different kind of space, and it was designed with a focus on learning and the development of an entrepreneurial mindset.”

The new space was built with the expectation that the number of entrepreneurship majors and minors will double in coming years, while an increasing number of students from other disci-



plines will also be inspired to explore their own entrepreneurial ideas.

Unique features of the center include a Collaboration Kitchen to facilitate informal interaction, Think Pods for private thought or conversations, and a Contemplation Loft for reflection and creative play.

### EFFICIENCY AND FIT

Achieving a physical design that blended with the rest of the campus was a challenge, mainly due to the fact that four floors of the ICB are parking decks, according to Vaughn. “Despite that, we were still able to maintain our campus’ architectural style of glass and red brick, while adding nice touches, including the chiseled arch over North A Street.”

Vaughn also said one of the most visually attractive elements of the project is Agliano Park, with its fountains and unique landscaping. “This undoubtedly will become one of our students’ most favorite outdoor hangouts, for both studying and socializing,” said Vaughn.

It was also important the building demonstrate the University’s ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship. The ICB has been designed to be a candidate for the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

In addition to the fact that 30 percent of building materials were sourced locally, the ICB’s connection to the campus’ high-efficiency chiller plant results in significant energy cost savings. The building’s lighting controls facilitate the use of natural light whenever possible, and low voltage lighting promotes energy efficiency.

From its creative design to its cutting-edge academic programs, the Innovation and Collaboration Building provides a stimulating environment for students to explore, discover and work together while carving out their own paths to success. **UT**

Previous spread; top row: The Lowth Entrepreneurship Center includes spaces that encourage introspection, creativity and innovation, including (from left) the Inspiration Center, a covered reception deck, a Pitch Room and the Contemplation Loft (viewed from below). Bottom row: The first and second floors are home to (from left) dedicated computer labs for the cybersecurity program, study and meeting areas, a Campus Safety center and a Starbucks Reserve®.







# A CREATIVE HAVEN

WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF NATURAL LIGHT, EXPANSIVE VIEWS OF TAMPA BAY AND walls featuring displays of inspirational and educational graphics, the John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center provides an environment where creativity thrives. It is a place where current and aspiring entrepreneurs can find camaraderie, advice and support.

According to the center's director, Rebecca White, the design for the space was based on an experiential education learning model that has five modalities: collaboration; coaching and mentoring; reflection; apprenticeship; and multiple practice. This has resulted in a design that incorporates designated spaces for every aspect of the entrepreneurial experience, from conducting daily business operations to practicing the art of the pitch.

## ALUMNI INCUBATE NEW BUSINESSES

Nestled in the southwest corner of the center, the Community Incubator hosts up to nine community businesses in the early stages of development for 14 weeks as their owners work to move their business to the next level. Although the first six individuals to be accepted into the incubator are UT alumni, anyone can apply.

In addition to having physical space in the incubator, participants have access to experts in the entrepreneurship field. At any time, they can walk down the hall to meet with faculty who have offices on site, including the center's first visiting scholar, Colin Jones, from the University of Tasmania. Jones is

a leading contributor to the field of entrepreneurship education. There are also opportunities to interact with visiting entrepreneurs and venture capitalists.

"Whether it's the community of fellow entrepreneurs or professors or Tampa Bay business professionals, there's always someone there to provide support and feedback. I love the open office area that allows us to connect with other businesses. The incubator really fuels the entrepreneurial spirit," said Phil Michaels '10, MBA '15, M.S. '15, co-founder and CEO of Tembo, a current incubator resident. Tembo, a finalist in the 2015 Hult Prize competition, uses mobile phones to distribute an early childhood

curriculum for at-home instruction to children living in urban slums.

## STUDENT STARTUPS ACCELERATED

Current UT students benefit from the center in several ways. Those in the Executive MBA program are working directly with the incubator entrepreneurs in a live case study arrangement, a relationship that has benefits on both sides.

Bryan Galan '15, founder, owner and sole employee of Midnight Waxers, an overnight mobile auto detailing company, goes to the incubator daily, where he has five EMBA students doing research for him.

"My end goal is to turn it into a franchise opportunity," he said. "The students are figuring out what a franchising plan would look like. It's a very hands-on experience for them; and for me to have free access to a whole research team is pretty amazing."

All undergraduate and graduate students who are already running their own businesses can work in the Spartan Accelerator spaces, which, like the Community Incubator, gives them access to the center's resources.





The Collaboration Kitchen (above) is a space for discussing business ideas around the kitchen table. The Contemplation Loft (right) gives students a place to reflect on what they're learning.



One Spartan Accelerator participant is senior Andrew Visnick, who started Cool College Cleaners in Fall 2014 and currently has 100 customers who take advantage of his weekly cleaning service. He particularly appreciates the chance to be surrounded by people who are knowledgeable about every aspect of starting and running a business.

"It's a nice community where you can reach out to anyone. There are always a few entrepreneurship professors hanging out, or entrepreneurs who come in and donate their time. Or you can always turn to people in the incubator," he said.

Visnick said having instant access to people who can help is far more attrac-

tive than having to make an appointment with someone. "A lot of times you have an idea, and you can take that to the next level pretty quickly by talking to people who've been there, done that," he said.

#### CONTEMPLATION PART OF THE PROCESS

While the Community Incubator and Spartan Accelerator foster the coaching and mentoring, and apprenticeship learning modalities, the Entrepreneurship Center includes a number of areas that incorporate the collaboration, reflection and practice aspects.

"For the Collaboration Kitchen, the idea was that a lot of business ideas are hatched around the kitchen table," said White. "Just like the kitchen is the heart of the home, it's the heart of our space." The welcoming room includes a refrigerator, microwave and large table, along with displays of businesses that were started by alumni.

Entrepreneurs need to perfect their ability to explain their business in a way that will attract the interest of potential investors. "They have to practice their pitch over and over again, so we created a unique room designed especially for pitching," said White. The space includes an audiovisual booth for recording and reviewing pitches.

Those who appreciate the lively and collaborative environment of the center also make good use of the spaces designed for quiet time.

"People here are learning a lot, and you need the opportunity to reflect on what you're learning," said White. For that, individuals can head to the Contemplation Loft on the mezzanine level or one of two egg-shaped Think Pods. These unique, freestanding magenta and purple pods have bench seating inside along curved walls and offer the perfect place to brainstorm, problem-solve, or, as Michaels does, center oneself.

"I meditate in there every day," he said. "It's great for getting yourself out of the day-to-day (activity)."

#### IT'S A WINNING FORMULA

Although the center just opened in September, it is already garnering rave reviews, especially from the Community Incubator participants, like Matt Rutkovitz '13.

"We get unbelievable mentorship from faculty, and we have state-of-the-art everything at our fingertips," he said. "Not only is the incubator going to have a major impact on the community, it's also a great place for students to learn, and to live and breathe what it's like to start a company. It's 50,000 times more beneficial than what you can learn in a classroom."

Rutkovitz launched Outeraction, a digital marketing firm in 2014 and is in the incubator with his current venture, SurgeCurve, a company that will enable people to save money, make money and learn how to start their own business in less than two days.

The thoughtful design of the center, the breadth of available resources and the valuable input and support from faculty and fellow entrepreneurs has resulted in a one-of-a-kind creative haven for anyone at any stage of turning a business dream into reality. **UT**

### CURRENT COMMUNITY INCUBATOR PARTICIPANTS

- Andrew Favicchio '13, Sauce Digital
- Brian Galan '15, Midnight Waxers
- Ricardo Garcia Stenftenagel '14, ClassSuite
- Phil Michaels '10, MBA '15, M.S. '15, Tembo
- Matt Rutkovitz '13, SurgeCurve
- David Wistocki '13, DJ Dayve & Associates

BY KILEY MALLARD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX MCKNIGHT

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DRUE WAGNER



Jake and Cassie Greatens,  
CASS Contemporary Art Space

# PASSION. SACRIFICE. CREATIVITY.

A few young UT alumni entrepreneurs  
share what it takes to start up your own business.





ASK THE QUESTION, “WHAT TAMPA BAY BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN STARTED BY YOUNG UT alumni?” and the list you will get will go on for pages. From services to restaurants, retail stores and websites to new products and beyond — the list is as varied as the people who started them.

We sat down with handful of our young alumni entrepreneurs to learn a little more about their businesses, why they chose to base them in the Tampa Bay area and what advice they have for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

## JAKE '11 AND CASSIE '10, M. ED. '12 GREATENS

**Business:** Co-founders and co-owners of CASS Contemporary Art Space and Studio

**Other job:** parents of four children, ages 2 to 13

Though Jake and Cassie Greatens have been partners in life for many years, it was only recently they took the plunge into being business partners.

“Jake and I, we both have an adventurous streak, though nowadays that’s tamed down a bit,” said Cassie with a laugh. “We never wanted that 9-to-5, clock out, go home kind of life.”

Originally from the Tampa Bay area, a couple of years ago they spent three and a half weeks soaking up the art scene in Paris, London and Berlin. After they returned to Tampa, the pair decided the timing was right to open their own gallery. “We wanted to open a gallery, but we wanted to do something different,” said Cassie. “We didn’t want a small space that would limit what artists could do.”

After finding and renovating a space off MacDill Avenue in South Tampa, the Greatens opened CASS Contemporary Art Space and Studio, which specializes in contemporary art from local, regional, national and international artists. In addition, they provide consulting services to collectors and businesses.

“We like to mix local, national and international artists so we travel a lot. We almost see it as recruiting,” said Cassie. “We feel it is important to support local artists, but it’s also equally important to infuse the area with international artists.”

Jake said they bring in a lot of edgy work from places like L.A. and Berlin. “We always wonder how it’s going to be received. So far the response has been unreal,” he said.

The latest addition to the gallery is a print shop, where they produce limited edition prints of works in the gallery. The prints, Jake said, are great for young collectors who are just starting out.

“There is this image of owning a gallery where you sit behind a desk and wait for people to wander in,” said Cassie. “We don’t want to do that. We want to get involved in the community so we’re teaming up with other brands, like opening a satellite location at the Epicurian Hotel.”

The first exhibition in that partnership is *Keep it Simple* featuring works by Brazilian multimedia artist Mateu Velasco. They are involved with a mural project in Hyde Park Village, also featuring Velasco. As part of that they organized an outreach project with seventh and first graders at St. Mary’s School to watch Velasco in action.

While Cassie said her favorite moments are landing a coveted artist or nailing an opening, for Jake, it’s all about the art. His favorite times are when they get new artwork in. “I’m like a kid on Christmas,” he said. “Before an opening I’ll be here until 3 a.m. every night because if I don’t do it, it’s not getting done. But when I’m here alone at midnight hanging a show, I have this epiphany that I have the coolest job in the world.”

Their advice for aspiring entrepreneurs is threefold. First, they said take the leap, but make sure you do something different that makes you stand out. Second, hire well. And third? “Realize you’re going to be working 90 percent of your life,” said Cassie. “But you will love it.”

## Q-AND-A WITH LISA VODOLA '05, M.ED. '10

**Business:** Founder and Owner, Preschool Readers LLC, an accelerated early literacy program

**How did you get Preschool Readers off the ground?**

For one year, I taught in the classroom during the day and then worked after school with clients. This helped ease the transition from teacher to entrepreneur and gave me the confidence I needed to take the leap.

**What lessons have you learned as a business owner?**

I’ve learned the importance of cultivating my creativity, which

often includes making down time a priority. Our brains foster creativity when we’re having fun and relaxing. When I’m stressed, I close myself off to new ideas. This has been huge for me as I never used to allow myself slowing down has been so beneficial!

**What is the best part of owning your own business? Most challenging?**

The best part is the ability to be creative with my work, as well as the freedom, from writing all of my own curricula to being able to make my own schedule. The most challenging would be trying to be “in the know”



## JOE ORSINO '06, M.S. '07

**Company:** CEO of Caledon Concepts, parent company of Ceviche Tapas and Rococo Steak

**From:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada; came to Tampa to attend UT and decided to make the city his home

When Joe Orsino graduated, he thought he'd be in finance forever. But in 2007, when his investment group was approached with the concept for Ceviche, his interest was piqued. He soon found himself forming Caledon Concepts and taking on a majority role in the restaurant.

"I was suddenly tasked with learning the restaurant business," he said. The concept behind Ceviche is tapas, which can be a wide variety of hot or cold appetizers. Orsino liked that tapas are sharable and thus social and felt the concept "had legs."

Caledon would go on to open Ceviche restaurants in multiple parts of Florida, and currently has locations in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Orlando.

The company has since evolved to

about all areas of my business, from the newest social media platforms to the most recent research-based methods for teaching reading.

### **Any advice for potential entrepreneurs waiting to take the plunge?**

Take any steps you can toward what you want to do. Read, research, seek out mentors. Don't let those who don't understand the passion you have deter you. Similarly, don't allow your own fear to stop you. If you can, start the business on the side while holding your current position. This will make the transition seem much smoother as you'll have a client base and have hopefully worked out some of the kinks before making it your full-time job.



include a second concept with Rococo Steak in downtown St. Petersburg. Rococo Steak is named for the 18th century artistic movement.

"Rococo was a time in art that was rebellious, where they revolted against the strict guidelines of the Baroque," said Orsino. "It was an artistic ideal that represented what we wanted to achieve with the steakhouse. We wanted to break from tradition, have more artistic side dishes and appetizers and different steaks than you traditionally find."

Rococo specializes in sustainable fish and organic, free-range, grass-fed beef. In fact, he said they are particularly unique to the area in the number of selections of grass-fed beef on the menu. His favorite? The dry aged New York strip, medium rare.

The restaurant's wine cellar is a particular point of pride for Orsino, who holds a Certified Sommelier designation. When they opened Rococo Steak, Orsino said their goal was to win *Wine Spectator's* Best of Award of Excellence their first year — which they did. There are only 50 restaurants in Florida who have this designation.

Orsino said the best part of his job

is seeing happy customers. "What's great about this business is you get to see very immediately the results of the work you put in," he said. "Say we just added a new dish. I can be in the restaurant the first night and see a table enjoying it. That's something unique to this business."

As for lessons he's learned along the way, he said it's important to surround yourself with the right people. "Build your organization for where you want to be, which may not be where you are today. Prepare for growth," he said. "We built our office first, knowing we wanted to expand."

He also said don't be afraid to admit when you're wrong. "You might come out of college thinking every decision should be right, but don't let one failure or mistake hold you back," he said. "You're going to hit some home runs, and you're going to strike out."

Orsino explained how Caledon converted a restaurant space that wasn't doing as well as they wanted into a rental space that has been much more profitable. "Ask yourself how you can maximize your return on investment. Don't be tied to something when there may be better options."



Chris Findeisen,  
Black & Denim

## CHRIS FINDEISEN '06

**Company:** Co-founder and co-owner, Black & Denim, Blind Tiger Café and Cowork Ybor

**Day job:** Seasonal Design Manager at Majestic Athletic/VF Licensing Group

Chris Findeisen's entrepreneurial journey began with an unexpected knock on his door in 2008. Standing on his doorstep were Roberto Torres and Luis Montanez with an idea to start a clothing line and a need for a designer.

Together the three honed the concept for the line to a vintage Americana vibe and found a U.S. vendor willing to produce the clothing

at a reasonable price. The origin of the company's name comes from a photo of American actor James Dean.

"He looked so cool and all he had on was a black T-shirt and denim jeans," said Findeisen. Black & Denim was born. "We like to say we have a James Dean look with a Johnny Cash soundtrack."

Though they started by selling the clothing out of their trunks, these days Findeisen says they are no longer a "mom and pop" business. They have product in 80 boutiques up the east coast. Disney ordered 3,000 Black & Denim T-shirts to sell in stores in

Epcot's American Adventure.

"Black & Denim is skyrocketing into a brand people recognize," said Findeisen. Also taking off are the trio's latest ventures, The Blind Tiger Café (with locations in Ybor City and soon the Seminole Heights neighborhood of Tampa) and Cowork Ybor.

"A good entrepreneur doesn't focus on just one thing," said Findeisen. "He (or she) focuses on multiple things." Which is why when they were looking for a larger space for their Black & Denim storefront in Ybor City, they noticed there was no café in Ybor City and decided to open one themselves.

The Blind Tiger Café opened about a year ago and focuses on selling local coffee, tea and, of course, textiles. Findeisen said the idea of a café mixed with retail makes sense.

"A lot of coffee and tea drinks take a while to brew, and what do you do while you're waiting? You browse," he said.

Aware of Cowork Tampa, they decided to open a similar space in Ybor City, but with their own style. The space has a laid back, vintage vibe and can be rented out for as little as an hour or for weeks and molded to whatever the client's needs are.

For Findeisen, the best part of growing the business has been seeing customers appreciate not just the product, but the brand. There's also "the satisfaction of a yes" and seeing it all come together.

The worst parts of being an entrepreneur? "All the no's. And there's also a lot of sacrifice — sleep, time. Entrepreneurship is not a get rich quick thing — that's our culture's microwave thinking. This takes time," he said. "But you won't appreciate what you have until you've worked hard for it. It just keeps getting bigger. At this point all it's going to take is one big deal."

He also said you don't have to go to New York or Los Angeles to be successful. "We did it ourselves based out of my little apartment on Waters Avenue," he said. **UT**



For the three alumni profiled here, being involved in the process of bringing the Entrepreneurship Center to life was a no brainer. Each credits UT with nurturing their own entrepreneurial bent, and they wanted to give students the same edge, too, especially in a business world that is always looking for the next big thing.

# THEY MADE IT HAPPEN

Lowth pictured  
in the center that  
bears his name

BY JEN A. MILLER '02  
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX MCKINIGHT

# "A CENTER LIKE THIS WILL HELP STUDENTS MAKE THOSE CONTACTS AND CONNECTIONS AND FIND THOSE MENTORS WHILE STILL IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING."

— JOHN P. LOWTH

## JOHN P. LOWTH '82

SOME PEOPLE COME TO UT BECAUSE a family member went here first. For others, it's to play for a UT sports team. For John Lowth '82, it was snow. "The snowstorm of 1978," he said, to be exact. "I was going to go to college in western New York, and there was a huge snowstorm that redirected me to Florida."

He wanted a university in an urban environment, too, but the timing of the storm that turned him south was serendipitous. At UT, Lowth got his start on the road to the creation of Arnone, Lowth, Wilson, Leibowitz, Andriano & Greco LLC, where he is currently president.

He is also the Lowth behind the Lowth Entrepreneurship Center that occupies the eighth floor of the new Innovation and Collaboration Building (See page 12).

"A lot of people have the entrepreneurial spirit but don't find it until they leave college," he said. "I support the center, because it provides this opportunity for young people to develop mentors and develop real life experience before they leave the cocoon of college."

Lowth studied criminology at UT and was also a resident assistant and a founder and president of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity.

"The small classes and the ability to communicate directly with professors — and adults — at that time in my life was very important," he said. "And then I had the added experience of being a resident advisor and solving problems. Being someone that was a trusted individual dealing with the administration, security and other departments within the University gave me a very well rounded and sure way of looking at the world."

Though he considered law school after graduation, he decided to work in the UT Office of Admissions for a year to "research and find out what I wanted to do in life, and that's what

I did," he said. It lead him to his first career move.

While working in the admissions office, Lowth met a few people who worked in finance and real estate. "They mentioned life insurance," he said, which led him to his first job in that field — another change in his life he said was totally by chance.

"I loved the idea of being my own business, and that was the draw into the financial world," he said. He joined a firm that allowed him that flexibility and moved back to New York. There, he and a partner took over the company's Long Island offices.

That was the first step in becoming a top name in the field. Arnone, Lowth, Wilson, Leibowitz, Andriano & Greco LLC is a life insurance firm specializing in estate planning and business continuity planning for high net worth estates.

"I started the firm with a partner and a secretary," he said. The business grew to the point of going public and being part of the New York Stock Exchange. Recently, they took the business private again.

The firm has offices in Long Island and Manhattan, NY, and Palm Beach and Coral Springs, FL. He divides his time between both locations because of clients and, yes, the weather, but also because Lowth's son is a freshman at UT.

Lowth said the University has certainly changed since he was a student ("I was at Howell Hall, which isn't even on campus anymore," he said), but that the growth of the school has matched that of the city, and has been for the benefit of the University. He sees the Entrepreneurship Center as part of that growth, and a boon for students who might otherwise take longer to stumble into what they were really meant to do.

"When I first started, there was nothing like the Entrepreneurship Center at the University — or at any university as far as I know," he said. "A center like this will help students make those contacts and connections and find those mentors while still in a university setting. The Entrepreneurship Center can help students get a jump start."

## RODNEY PIATT '74

WHEN ROD PIATT '74 WAS in high school, he split his time between Fort Lauderdale, FL, and his family's home in Pittsburgh. When it came time to pick a college, he had to choose between the two states and went south. He's glad he did. While at UT, he started on

a path that would take him to leading a company that developed one of the most talked about commerce parks in Pennsylvania.

At UT, Piatt played for the school's golf team, served as president of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity and then



as president of the University's Interfraternity Council.

Through playing on the golf team, he met Bob Ford '76, now a professional golfer, who has become a lifelong friend. Working within the fraternity system nurtured leadership skills in him, too.

"You learn as a young person how to work with people in different situations, and you learn some of the basics of leadership and decision making," he said.

Piatt enrolled as a business major, then focused on accounting. That may seem a far leap from what he



does now, but he says the experience helped him become the businessman he is today.

That's because when he graduated, he went to Ernst & Ernst (now Ernst & Young). "Working as a CPA at a big national firm and the exposure I got to a lot of different industries helped me immensely as I went through my career," he said.

After his time in accounting, he worked for his family's business, and then, 15 years ago, started his own real estate development company, Horizon Properties. He's also the lead independent director and vice chairman of the board of directors of Mylan, a pharmaceutical company.

Horizon's crowning achievement has been Southpointe in Cecil Township, PA, a world-class commerce park that the company started working on in 1988 and began developing in the early 1990s. Since that time, it's become a mixed-use commerce park that includes 5 million square feet of office space and a championship golf course that has hosted PGA Championships. About 14,000 people work in the park, which also has more than 1,000 residential units.

"It's just a cool place, and we've been able and fortunate enough to develop it," said Piatt.

Piatt said his own entrepreneurial spirit lead him to be involved with the John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center. "If you don't have entrepreneurship in a certain sector of America, you don't have America," he said.

"If you look at all the great companies that are here today and have been here, they all have been bred out of someone's vision and someone's entrepreneurship and someone's passion. What the University has tried to do and is doing is really creating an opportunity for all these young kids to collaborate together," he added.

## BENSON RISEMAN '78

Benson Riseman '78 came to UT for two things: "to play sports and explore the wild frontier," he said.

Riseman, who is from Boston, is now a man about town in Las Vegas with a successful public company and an entrepreneurship incubator under his belt, but he started his career trying just about everything at UT: he played on the baseball team for four years, was a resident assistant, served as chief justice on the student judicial board, held roles in student government and yearbook, and was the student representative on a committee that was looking for a new university president (they selected Richard Cheshire, who served as president from 1977–1986).

"I was really pretty active," he joked.

He didn't stop after graduating, either. With no idea what he wanted to do with his business administration degree, he went to the Tampa library, checked out annual reports of various companies and wrote to the number one or two person at each company.

His strategy worked: he was hired by the Carnation Company to be a territory manager. That job didn't quite fit, so he moved back to the Boston area and got a job in radio advertising, which led to a 20-year career in broadcasting.

That's where he met Steve Streit. At first, they were competitors at different media companies, but through radio consolidation they started working with instead of against each other.

"We would always talk, and one day he said he had this crazy idea for a product," Riseman said. By then, Riseman saw that the radio business was changing, and he was looking for a different kind of challenge. This seemed like a product that could be that challenge. "After about 45 minutes



on the phone, I said we can do this."

This conversation happened in the late 1990s, right when shopping online started to become popular. "The retail world had this question: how does a youth buy something online if they can't get a credit card?

They can't take a \$10 bill and shove it through a hard drive," Riseman said.

The solution was a card that acted as a credit card but would be loaded with money by parents — "a card that kids can use whenever they wanted, and parents would feel good about it," he said.

Green Dot became much more than that. Today, Green Dot products are available in more than 60,000 stores and the company issues pre-paid debit cards on behalf of Visa and MasterCard.

At that point, Riseman transitioned out of Green Dot and looked again for a new challenge. He found that in creating BENSEA Enterprises, an entrepreneurial think tank and consultancy that helps transform ideas into independent, free-standing businesses. BENSEA Enterprises specializes in strategy, branding, marketing, revenue generation and the distribution of supportive business resources to client companies.

"I've always had interest in startups and the entrepreneurial spirit," he said. BENSEA is a place to do that. "We're working towards developing full blown entities that will then go off on their own to develop their own businesses," he said.

He became involved in the John P. Lowth Entrepreneurship Center, because his goals perfectly align with what the center hopes to do. "I feel really loyal to the University and want to be a part of it and participate," he said. "When I look at it now, it gives me so much pride, because it's just a great place." **UT**