

UPEI Centre for Entrepreneurship with Work-Integrated Learning at UPEI
University of Prince Edward Island

Background

Several entrepreneurship and engagement opportunities for students exist at UPEI. Examples include Business 3710 (Entrepreneurship and New Ventures), Engineering 3430 (Technology Management and Entrepreneurship), Science 3010 (Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Science), and the Experiential Education Department (Entrepreneurship Bootcamp; Entrepreneurship Work Term). The Panther Pitch is a University wide program supported by the MacLauchlan family. The Grant Thornton - UPEI Entrepreneurship Sandbox, an annual \$40,000 sponsorship agreement with the Faculty of Business, has contributed to a student entrepreneurship space in the basement of Don and Marion McDougall Hall (below the faculty offices of the Faculty of Business) at UPEI. Although individual activities exist across some faculties / schools at UPEI, there is a need to coordinate these activities and make student entrepreneurship more broadly accessible to all students across UPEI, as well as more visible, dedicated space and staff support to ensure their ongoing sustainability.

Vision

This proposal aims to strengthen the entrepreneurial culture among students at UPEI while addressing gaps and connecting existing elements of the PEI entrepreneurial ecosystem. This includes work done by faculty researchers in entrepreneurship and partnering with the Startup Zone. A student entrepreneurship centre at UPEI will serve as a catalyst for the early stages of the “startup funnel” to bring together students, faculty and business leaders in the community with a common interest in the advancement of innovation and entrepreneurship. It will expose students to experienced entrepreneurs and create new entrepreneurially oriented experiential learning opportunities, through the Experiential Education Department at UPEI. Also it will improve the visibility of new venture successes and motivate more students to consider entrepreneurship as a career option.

A new Centre for Entrepreneurship will develop student entrepreneurship teams from across various disciplines on campus; offer guest lectures on entrepreneurship; and host a series of "brainstorming" sessions for the development of new business ideas. It will support programming to connect new start-ups and entrepreneurs with appropriate expertise, mentors and funding agencies. It will also investigate a potential university-wide elective course that may be cross-listed with faculty-specific courses in order to bring together student teams from different disciplines. The following programs and activities will contribute to the Centre's goals.

Student Engagement Programs

Student Ambassador Team. This initiative aims to expose more students across UPEI to entrepreneurship. Students from across campus would be selected to be part of the program based on an entrepreneurial mindset, leadership qualities and academic merit. They would organize entrepreneurship events and engage fellow students. Students would have opportunities to go on an experiential learning assignment to a major entrepreneurship hotspot in North America. Inspired students would then take their ideas and promote entrepreneurship opportunities among the student community on campus, connect people and improve collaboration in the ecosystem.

Guest Lectures. The entrepreneurship centre would match experienced entrepreneurs and industry professionals with relevant courses across campus for guest lectures. The topics would be relevant to a specific course and include elements of entrepreneurship. Guest lectures would spark student interest and engagement in entrepreneurship.

Success Stories. Increased visibility of success stories builds more awareness of entrepreneurship, encourages students to participate, and allows people to see the benefits to personal and community success. Risks and failure become more accepted. Continued attempts at entrepreneurialism become embedded within the culture. The centre would serve a role in improving the visibility of those success stories.

Brainstorming Events. A series of events during each semester would be held where students, faculty, and community members are invited to sit together and brainstorm new ideas about starting a business venture. The centre would engage businesses with specific problems as part of projects in course(s) spanning weeks. Industry professionals could give presentations on specific problems at their company and use the gathering to brainstorm potential innovative solutions. Selected topics like Intellectual Property or Development of a Business Plan would be discussed as a learning experience for aspiring student entrepreneurs. To help students find ideas to work on and make connections with innovators, several approaches would be taken: a) connect students in entrepreneurship courses to the Centre for Entrepreneurship and to entrepreneurs for potential ideation (e.g., students work on advancing the ideas of aspiring entrepreneurs); b) connect students to faculty with intellectual property; and c) connect students to businesses with specific problems.

Pan-University Course. A one-semester elective course would bring together students from across different disciplines on campus to work on teams to turn a business idea into a new startup venture. Teams would be connected with an experienced entrepreneur or industry professional to learn areas of promising market potential. The course would strengthen the culture of student entrepreneurship on campus and inspire students with an entrepreneurial mindset and passion for improving society. Each semester the course would offer an original, interdisciplinary experience that connects learning in the classroom with the community and a creative space for students to reflect on their business ideas and why they matter. This elective course would typically enroll 4th year students following faculty-specific 3rd year courses to enable students to pursue entrepreneurship with their startup venture as an option after graduation.

Students would work in interdisciplinary teams on real-world challenges, sometimes identified by external community partners. They will learn how to apply startup business principles to bring innovative solutions to the market. Students will be sorted into groups and each team will focus on a capstone project that potentially becomes a new venture. At the end of the Fall semester, teams present their new venture as part of the course requirements, after which some may be selected to compete at the Panther Pitch in the following semester. Through interdisciplinary teamwork, students will learn diverse approaches and methods. Learning outcomes from the course include team-based collaboration, creative problem solving, applying knowledge from across different disciplines, and developing leadership, independent learning and entrepreneurship skills to solve real-world challenges. Mentorship will be available from local community members who are successful entrepreneurs today. Space is limited to 50 students in the course.

Entrepreneurial Work Term Fund. This fund would support students who wish to start a business as part of their co-op work placement. It would provide a support structure to increase their chances of success through collaboration within the ecosystem in the province. For example, the fund would cover a membership at the Startup Zone and a nominal stipend. Any profits generated by the student business would be retained by the student-owners.

Panther Pitch Program. The existing program at UPEI is dedicated to the development of students having an entrepreneurial outlook who will create and lead new ventures on PEI. Student teams compete for support to develop their ventures. In 2021, three teams of student entrepreneurs received start-up funding in the first UPEI Panther Pitch competition. International students are often interested in entrepreneurship but have significant legal restrictions on what they are allowed to do, where it takes place, how many hours they spend on it, and financial compensation (direct or indirect) received. UPEI will work with the Province to determine realistic options available to international students.

Some of the most successful ventures bring together skills from a diverse background. Students with winning presentations receive an award of \$500, and under the guidance of a coaching team, apply for entrepreneurial startup grants from the Harry W. MacLauchlan Entrepreneurship Program (HWMEP) to develop their venture. The annual sum of awards to teams is \$45,000. The centre aims to directly connect requirements of courses (Business 3710, Engineering 3430, and Science 3010) to university-wide entrepreneurship initiatives and competitions.

Connect Program. Entrepreneurship is not only about new startups, but also the entrepreneurial mindset of innovation and creative problem solving as a key competency required within existing organizations. Entrepreneurship within established companies is critical for their competitiveness and long-term success. If employees are not entrepreneurial, then companies will be caught flat-footed and unprepared for challenges faced by global competition.

The Connect Program is an outward client focused component of the Centre for Entrepreneurship. It aims to connect community and industry partners and other entities of the entrepreneurial ecosystem with students at UPEI through a range of possible work-integrated learning opportunities. Examples of how these external organizations will connect with UPEI include, but are not limited to, mentorship of student entrepreneurs in their startup venture, entrepreneurship work term, experiential learning semester, or co-op placement.

A Connect placement offers a company a way to engage with students in real-world challenges within the organization. The company would work with the student one-on-one on a specific project over the course of the semester. Examples may include, but are not limited to: organizational change problems (improving operations within an organization), client problems (improving the client experience) or systematic problems (solving an external challenge that impacts the organization).

Space

The Hostetter Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship was a student entrepreneurship space in the Don and Marion McDougall Hall (Faculty of Business) at UPEI. The centre no longer exists and was renamed to the Grant Thornton Playground. There have been a few challenges in engaging student entrepreneurship activities in this space. Its location in the basement of the building is a relatively remote and low student traffic area, especially for engaging interest among students outside of Business. Another location that is a high-traffic area with prominent visibility for students and faculty-neutral would be desirable to attract more students from a range of programs.

A joint space would serve multiple purposes and be interdisciplinary, for example, in a space that has complementary traffic (work-integrated and experiential learning). Another location would require the Grant Thornton Playground to be moved and funding to repurpose the new space elsewhere on campus for student entrepreneurship activities.

Another challenge in the Hostetter Centre is that no staff positions exist to support programming activities for students. A number of activities were initially envisaged for the centre, but without any staffing, it has not been a sustainable model. Dedicated staff support is required to continually and actively move entrepreneurship initiatives forward for the University.

A conceptual layout of a high-visibility area on campus for student entrepreneurship is illustrated in the following figure.

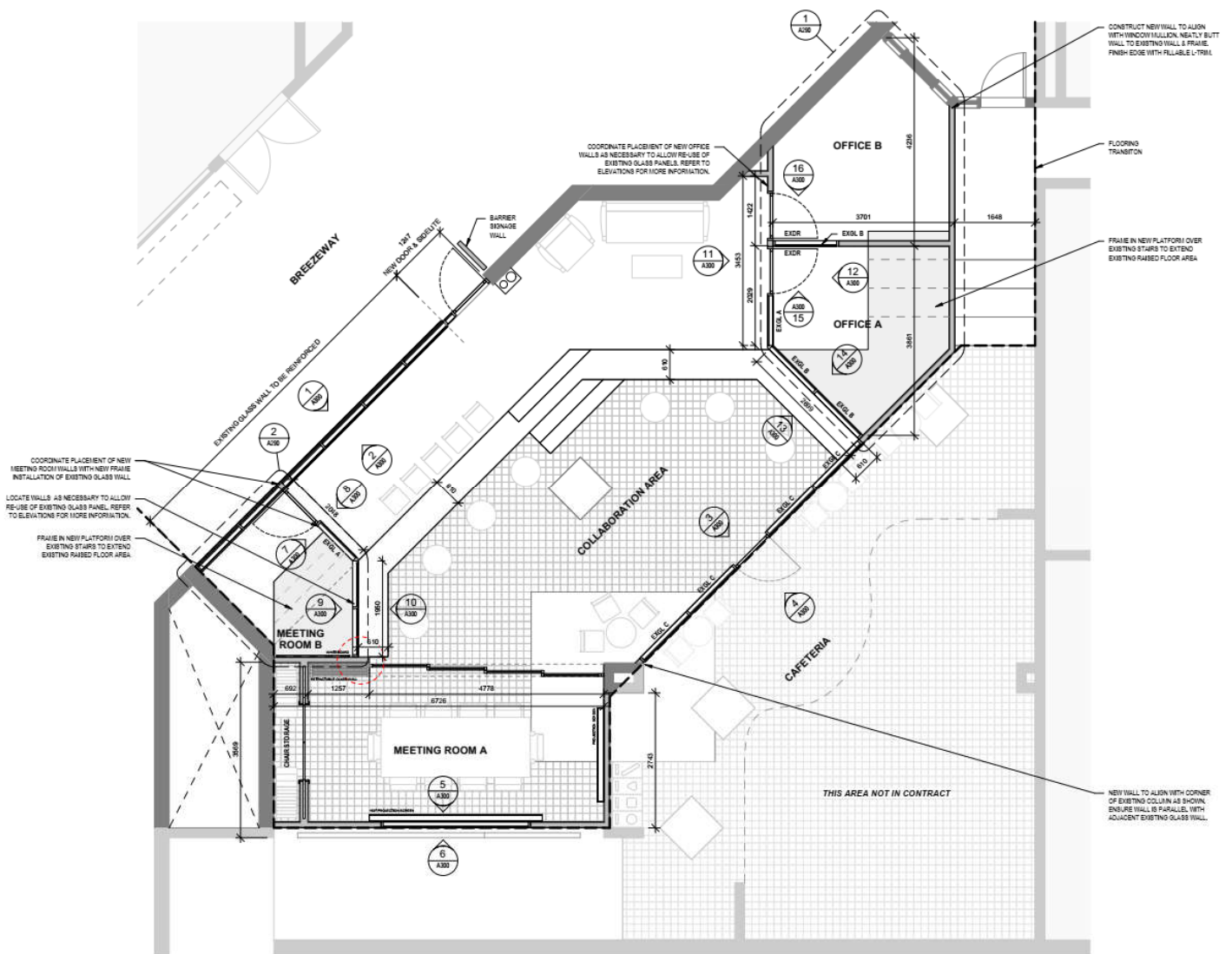


Figure 1 – New Centre for Entrepreneurship Beside the Robertson Library at UPEI

Budget

Recent ACOA / IPEI support for UPEI’s Office of Commercialization, Industry and Innovation (OCII), including salary and benefits for the Director of OCII, has expired. This proposal aims to shift the focus of past ACOA / IPEI support from OCII toward entrepreneurship and work-integrated learning by redirecting the previous Director of OCII to a Manager and Officer of Entrepreneurship as follows. To maintain support for commercialization, technology transfer and industry liaison at UPEI, two other existing positions within OCII will be funded separately through Springboard.

The Manager of Entrepreneurship will implement the vision of the Centre and its programs to strengthen the student entrepreneurial culture across all faculties / schools at UPEI. The Manager will improve collaboration among participants in the PEI entrepreneurial ecosystem; complement the programs and activities of existing organizations in the province; and improve understanding of entrepreneurship and innovation in PEI. Additional duties will include providing strategic direction for the Centre for Entrepreneurship; managing the Centre’s administration and finances; and serving in the Centre’s advocacy efforts for entrepreneurial ecosystem in collaboration with an Advisory Board.

The Program Officer will assist the Manager of Entrepreneurship by supporting the day-to-day operations of the Centre for Entrepreneurship. Duties include coordinating student engagement activities; communication of success stories; organizing student entrepreneurship events such as Panther Pitch; working with faculty members to build experiential education and entrepreneurship into their courses; and other administrative and financial support as needed for the operations of the Centre for Entrepreneurship.

Operating funds are also needed to support the above student engagement and funding programs. Funds would be used to support one or more of the following activities: travel for a student ambassador team; brainstorming events and workshops; course delivery for pan-University entrepreneurship teams; entrepreneurial work term fund; and operating funds for the Connect program. An amount of \$60,000 per year for operating funds is allocated. A summary of the centre’s budget is presented in the following table.

	Year 1	Year 2
Manager of Entrepreneurship	\$110,000	\$113,000
Program Officer	\$95,000	\$98,000
Student Programming Activities	\$60,000	\$60,000
Entrepreneurship Space Renovation	\$394,000	
Support Services	\$36,000	\$36,000
TOTAL	\$753,000	\$369,000
GRAND TOTAL	\$1,002,000	

Table 1 – Budget Summary

	Cash	In-Kind	Percent
ACOA	\$372,000		37%
IPEI	\$372,000		37%
UPEI	\$186,000	\$72,000	26%
TOTAL	\$930,000	\$72,000	100%
GRAND TOTAL	\$1,002,000		

Table 2 – Partner Contributions

UPEI would contribute towards the operating costs, through cash and in-kind support in the form of experiential education, research services and other related administrative support and services within the University. Funding over a period of two years is allocated by ACOA / IPEI with an expectation of continued longer term funding afterwards once the outcomes and deliverables of the centre are shown to be successful.

Expected Results and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

It is anticipated that the activities of this project will generate the following outcomes for the first year with a further ramp-up and increase in the subsequent second year.

- Number of external organizations engaged in an activity of Centre for Entrepreneurship: 20
- Workshops / seminars focusing on investor and student entrepreneur readiness for a new startup: 6
- Number of students selected for the Student Entrepreneurship Leadership Team: 8
- Entrepreneurship guest lectures and brainstorming events: 6

- Success stories reported on the website and in University publications: 3
- Co-op students employed in start-up companies: 3
- Jointly coordinated events in partnership with the Startup Zone: 3
- Assistance in the development of new start-up companies: 2

For the above first KPI (engagement with external organizations), efforts will be focused on sectors aligned with the Federal and Provincial governments. Specific organizations will include the PEI BioAlliance, Food Island Partnership, Startup Zone, Tourism Industry Association of PEI, and ACADA in the KPIs. When targeted organizations are well defined in this manner, the remaining KPIs will drive alignment and measurement success with respect to the expectations of funding partners, ACOA and IPEI. These represent minimum expectations in terms of the quantitative estimate for each of the KPIs. In the first year, procedures and policies will be established for new activities, such as the Entrepreneurial Work Term Fund. The creation of a new pan-University capstone entrepreneurship course is also envisioned in the first year.

Concluding Remarks

The Centre for Entrepreneurship will complement existing entrepreneurship activities and programs within the University and Province and connect them with the external ecosystem, particularly the Startup Zone. It will bring together students from across different disciplines and provide additional programming support while connecting to individual nodes of entrepreneurship activity that currently exist within individual faculties / schools. The ACOA / IPEI support includes funding for staff positions (manager of entrepreneurship and program officer).

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