COURSE DESCRIPTION
Interest in entrepreneurship has skyrocketed. Much of the growth in established and
developing economies is driven by scalable startups. The availability of cheaper building blocks
has led to an explosion of new ventures, representing exciting opportunities for potential
founders, early employees, and investors. Social entrepreneurs are also employing
entrepreneurial thinking to address major societal challenges. Beyond startups, established
companies are aggressively seeking out new opportunities to sustain growth and competitive
advantage. In short, entrepreneurial thinking is a critical skill sought across industries and
sectors.

What does it take to launch a successful entrepreneurial venture? How does it happen? How
can we transform an idea and a blank piece of paper into an operating business with customers,
cash flow, and profits? And importantly, what are the pleasures and challenges of an
entrepreneurial career?

The mission of Foundations of Entrepreneurship is to expose you to the skills, joys, and
challenges of being an entrepreneur, and for those inclined, to prepare you to start and nurture
your own businesses, whether you do so immediately or later in your careers. We will work
together to develop your skills in opportunity evaluation, as well as your understanding of the
steps and competencies required to launch and grow a new venture. Specific topics covered
include characteristics of successful startups, techniques for identifying and evaluating new
ideas, customer discovery and acquisition, entrepreneurial finance, valuation and deal-making,
exits, and learning how to pitch. The course is based mostly on case discussion, enhanced by a
combination of mini-lectures, guest speakers, group exercises, and student work on team
entrepreneurial projects. The course is appropriate for anyone with a strong interest in new
ventures. It is useful not only for potential entrepreneurs, but also for those interested in the
financing of new ventures, working at early-stage startups, or in broader general management
(as the startup demands general management in an intensified way).
Foundations of Entrepreneurship provides insights into the following questions:

- How do you distinguish interesting ideas from real opportunities?
- How do you go from a real opportunity to a winning business model?
- How do you turn a winning business model into a successful venture?
- What do you need to consider when seeking funding?
- How do you think about the human side of managing an entrepreneurial venture? What is the perspective of co-founders, employees, and investors?
- What can you do to manage risk and maximize success in your venture?
- Is an entrepreneurial career right for you?

Your ability to answer many of these questions will emerge from developing some foundational skills, such as:

- Using a framework to identify and refine entrepreneurial ideas and understand how those ideas relate to core elements of a business
- Looking at different business models and working through breakeven analysis, cash flow, and other key financial metrics
- Using the customer development process to solicit the earliest possible feedback on your value proposition and the compelling (or not) nature of your business idea
- Better identifying early customers to gain and embrace their feedback
- Constructing founder agreements to minimize tensions that often tear founders apart
- Learning how to pitch ideas to investors, partners, and potential employees
- Understanding the different sources of financing and when each one is appropriate
- Determining the value of new businesses at various stages of development
- Knowing when and how to exit

How This Course Differs From Other Entrepreneurship Courses at CBS

This course is distinct from other courses on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking in two ways:

- Foundations of Entrepreneurship is the first course in a sequence of three “spine” courses: (1) Foundations of Entrepreneurship; (2) Launch Your Startup; and (3) Entrepreneurial Greenhouse. This course is especially relevant for those who do not have a venture idea or only have an early stage idea.
- This course provides a broad survey of concepts and concrete skills that benefit not just aspiring entrepreneurs, but also those who want to work for an early-stage startup, operate entrepreneurially within a more mature organization, invest in new ventures, or a combination of these options. The course is designed for students who (a) have limited or no experience in the startup world, or (b) have some experience but do not yet have a fully developed business idea or team.

As an introductory course, we cover many topics that are explored in more detail in other course offerings. At the same time, we will also address a range of relevant topics not covered elsewhere. Because of this, Foundations of Entrepreneurship can be taken in advance of, or in combination with, other entrepreneurship electives.
With that in mind, if you already know that your goal is to explore a specific idea in depth, you might consider taking *Launch Your Startup* instead. It is an accelerated, applied course that is more project-based and allows students to work individually. If your interest is in a deep understanding of the customer development process, you should consider *Lean LaunchPad*, which focuses on business model hypothesis testing. If you are primarily interested in deal structure, consider *Entrepreneurial Finance*. *Foundations of Innovation* focuses on the innovation process, and *Foundations of VC* explores venture capital and angel investing. Or if your interest is family businesses, you might consider *Family Business Management*. We touch on many of these topics, but clearly not as deeply as a course dedicated to the subject. A single course cannot fully cover all issues that entrepreneurs face in evaluating opportunities, securing resources, and growing their businesses. We must be realistic about what a 12-session course can accomplish. An important objective of the course, therefore, is to highlight key issues and develop an agenda for future learning.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

There are three requirements for the Foundations of Entrepreneurship course: 1) online polls for (almost) every class, 2) class participation, and 3) a team venture project presentation and paper.

1) **Online Polls:**

For each session that involves a case preparation, you are required to complete an online poll (link posted on Canvas) that is composed of a set of questions related to the case. Submissions are due by **11pm on the evening before each class** meets. Your poll answers are typically presented during the class discussion. You may discuss the case with your classmates, but your poll answers must be based upon your own careful analysis. Some poll questions are subjective, while others have correct answers. If you complete the polls you will get full marks (regardless of whether your answers were correct) provided that you indicate your answers were based upon your own careful analysis (per the honor code).

Answering the poll questions should not take much time beyond your normal preparation for class. As a guideline, you should aim to spend no more than 15 minutes answering the poll questions (not including the time needed to read and prepare the cases)—some polls may take you as little as 5 minutes to answer, while others may take you up to 20 minutes, depending on how comfortable you are with the particular subject matter. For the short answer questions in the polls, I am looking for only 1–3 succinct sentences or bullet points. These polls serve as a starting point for our class discussions.

2) **Class Participation:**

You will be evaluated on the quantity as well as the quality of your contribution and insights, with greater weight on quality. You should never hesitate to comment because you are concerned that you are wrong or unsure of your opinion. I will cold call, so please read and prepare the cases thoroughly before arriving in class. Cold calling is designed to move discussion along and give all students in the class a chance to participate, not to intimidate or create a hostile environment. If you are unprepared for any session and you let me know...
before class (via email or when you arrive in the classroom), I will not cold call you during that session.

Attendance, preparation, and active participation in our discussions and exercises are essential in this course, as in any course based on the case method. Quality class participation is a significant part of the learning process, and the chief criterion for this part of the grade is your contribution to the learning of others. Accordingly, quality comments include, but are not limited to: a) Contributing to moving the discussion forward, b) Building on the comments of others, c) Providing insights that show evidence of analysis and go beyond repetition of case facts, d) Offering a different, unique, and relevant perspective on the issue, e) Including some evidence or analysis of inherent trade-offs, f) Connecting related personal experiences to the discussion, and g) Asking good and thought provoking questions

Many of the benefits of the course will be obtained through in-class discussions and exercises. Especially in an area like entrepreneurship, learning occurs through interaction. Failure to attend class will have a significant impact on your class participation grade. Attendance will be taken at each class by passing around an attendance sheet that must be signed. If you cannot attend a class, please email me in advance. Finally, make it a priority to be on time. Please sit in the same seat for each session, and bring your name cards to every class.

Laptops and other technology in the classroom should only be used when relevant to the material being discussed. Please refrain from using your laptop and other electronic devices during class time to engage in non-class-related activities.

3) Venture Project—Final Presentation and Paper:
Students will form self-selected teams (of 4–5 students) to explore an idea for a new business. At the end of the semester, each team will make a 7- to 10-minute final presentation of their project followed by Q & A. For the presentation, teams will prepare a 10- to 12-slide investor PowerPoint pitch. A final paper is also required. The paper is a maximum of eight single-spaced pages (12-point font), plus five appendices (see details below). The PowerPoint pitch deck is due on the last day of class and the paper is due the day afterwards.

Each team is expected to meet with me at least once (by conference call for 30 minutes) to discuss their projects.

Your project will be graded along four dimensions: 1) the quality of the final idea and the entrepreneurial insight; 2) the learning and progress that has occurred during the semester; 3) the diligence with which you have executed the study; and 4) the quality of the pitch or presentation. I am looking for good (but not necessarily “ready-to-bring-to-market”) ideas that have been well developed and iterated based on customer feedback, and that are also well researched and presented. Keep in mind that the quality of your team’s final idea is not the majority determinant of your final project’s grade, and it is possible to receive a high grade even if the idea is not of the highest quality.
The paper should address the following aspects of your proposed venture:

- Brief Description of the Opportunity
- Analysis of Market and Customer Segments
- Description of Product or Service and Value Proposition
- Identification of Competition and Competitive Insulation
- Key Risks
- Timing and Financing

In addition, there are five important appendices that support your venture proposal:

**Appendix 1: Business Model Canvas**
The Business Model Canvas: Summarizes the key components of your business model (customers, value proposition, revenue streams, etc.)

**Appendix 2: Customer Discovery**
Summarize, in 2–3 pages, what you learned about your venture idea from Customer Discovery, including market and value proposition analysis, along with brief summaries of interviews with at least fifteen named (not anonymous) strangers. Provide one short summary paragraph per interview. A stranger is someone you do not know, but have reason to believe has knowledge that will assist you in evaluating your idea. Important interviews with people previously known by you can also be included and can be valuable, but do not count towards the required fifteen interviews. These interviews can and should include: potential customers (including, if applicable, purchase decision makers, distributors, store buyers and end-users), suppliers, investors, people in similar businesses, experts, etc.

**Appendix 3: Breakeven Analysis**
Provide a “simple” one-page breakeven analysis. Identify your economic unit of analysis (typically a single sale). Identify and list your venture’s important fixed costs, including amortized capital expenses. Determine selling price, variable costs, and the marginal contribution from each sale. **Be certain to list all of your assumptions.** Divide fixed costs by marginal contribution to determine your break-even point. Calculate break even in terms of U.S. dollars and unit sales. After completing the analysis, assess and comment on the likelihood of your venture being profitable.

**Appendix 4: Cash Flow Analysis**
Provide a cash flow analysis. Start by listing (1) all potential sources of income, loans and investments, (2) all major expenditures, including items that will be capitalized and amortized, and (3) the assumptions used to calculate your financials. Do this monthly, until your cash flow turns positive, and then yearly starting in the following year. Leave yourself a cash balance, as a cushion, at the end of each period equal to at least three months’ expenses. Remember to plug in the source and timing of equity investments and/or borrowings. Your cash flow analysis should answer two questions:

1) In what month are you cash flow positive?
2) In what month do you recoup your total investment?

Appendix 5: Action Plan/Roadmap for Launch
Create a to-do list or action plan for launching your proposed venture. This should include a list of your organizational, development, production, and sales goals, and the step-by-step tasks that need to be accomplished to achieve your goals. Describe the theoretical backgrounds and competencies of the full- and part-time team members and/or advisors you would need to recruit to ensure the successful completion of these tasks. Examples of necessary tasks, from the mundane to the sophisticated, not necessarily in order, might include: (1) Meeting with actual customers and securing orders; (2) Lining up possible distributors; (3) Lining up manufacturers and/or sources of supply; (4) Identifying and securing key personnel; (5) Finding and renting office space and equipment; (6) Securing financing; (7) Establishing key partnerships; and (8) Coming up with a founders’ agreement/memorandum of understanding. Be sure to highlight any crucial milestones you are aiming for.

Grading
The following weights will be used to calculate grades for the course:

- Online Polls 25%
- Class Participation 35%
- Final Presentation and Paper 40%

At the end of the course, each student will be asked to complete a confidential poll indicating the percentage that each team member contributed to the final project.

Course Schedule
I have attached a detailed three-page course schedule. This lists the required cases for each session and the due dates for your assignments. Please read the course schedule carefully. I reserve the right to make occasional adjustments to the scheduling. This may include, on occasion, the reduction or elimination of a case discussion.

I look forward to getting to know you in class!!
## Foundations of Entrepreneurship – Course Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>DELIVERABLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 May 17 (8:30–11:30am) W311</td>
<td>Course Overview Ideas &amp; Innovation</td>
<td>The Founder’s Dilemma (in class)</td>
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| 2 May 18 (8:30–11:30am) W311 | Elevator Pitch Day (one-minute pitches) Opportunity Analysis | PieSky Ventures (Canvas) | • Poll #1 (by 7am on Sat, 5/18)  
• Intro Poll & Resume Upload (by 11pm on Sat, 5/18)  
• One-minute pitches (in class) |
| 3 May 31 (3:45–6:45pm) W311 | Business Models | Zipcar: Refining the Business Model (Canvas)  
Watch: The Business Model Canvas video (42 min)  
Optional Reading: Business Model Canvas (Canvas) | • Poll #2 (by 11pm on Thurs, 5/30)  
• Finalize teams (by end of class: submit team member list) |
| 4 June 1 (8:30–11:30am) W311 | Business Models Lean Startup | Dropbox: ‘It Just Works’ (Canvas) | • Poll #3 (by 11pm on Fri, 5/31)  
• P&L for Dropbox (by class time; hard copy to class, upload to Canvas) |
| 5 June 15 (3:45–6:45pm) W311 | Customer Discovery & Metrics Startup Funding | Dinr: My First Startup (A) (Canvas)  
Dinr: My First Startup (B) (in class)  
Optional Readings: The Most Important Equation for Your Business; Glossary of VC Terms | • Poll #4 (by 11pm on Fri, 6/14)  
• Group: Business Model Canvas + One-page venture project description (by class time; hard copy to class, upload to Canvas) |
| 6 June 28 (8:30–11:30am) W311 | Startup Accelerators & Funding Entrepreneurial Organizations | Optional Reading: Raising Startup Capital | • Poll #5 (by 11pm on Thurs, 6/27)  
Negotiating Equity Splits at UpDown (Canvas)  
UpDown: Confidential Instructions (Email) |
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<td>7 June 29 (12:30–3:30pm) W311</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Organizations Customer Validation</td>
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<td>• Poll #6 (by 11pm on Fri, 6/28)  • Group: Summary of 15 customer discovery interviews + Revised BMC (by class time; hard copy to class, upload to Canvas)</td>
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<td><strong>Schedule 30-minute Team Conference Call #1 with Prof. Wu on July 7–11 to discuss project progress</strong></td>
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<td>8 July 13 (8:30–11:30am) W311</td>
<td>More Opportunity Analysis</td>
<td>Early Pitch Decks (Canvas)</td>
<td>• Poll #7 (by 11pm on Fri, 7/12)</td>
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<td>9 July 26 (12:30–3:30pm) W311</td>
<td>New Venture Finance</td>
<td>WebTracker (Canvas)  <em>Optional Reading</em>: NVCA Model Term Sheet</td>
<td>• Poll #8 (by 11pm on Thurs, 7/25)  • Group: Breakeven Analysis (by class time; hard copy to class, upload to Canvas)</td>
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<td>10 July 27 (3:45–6:45pm) W311</td>
<td>Family Business Angel Investing</td>
<td>Jackson Cookware (Canvas)  <em>Guest Speaker: Rob Delman (Jackson Cookware; Angel investor)</em></td>
<td>• Poll #9 (by 11pm on Fri, 7/26)</td>
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<td><strong>OPTIONAL: Schedule 30-minute Team Conference Call #2 with Prof. Wu on July 31–August 6 to discuss project progress</strong></td>
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<td>11 Aug 9 (12:30–3:30pm) W311</td>
<td>Scaling Startups Harvest &amp; Exits</td>
<td>Nantucket Nectars: The Exit (Canvas)  <em>Optional Reading</em>: A Catalog of Pivots  <em>Optional Reading</em>: Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2019 (pages 11-17, 28-29)</td>
<td>• Poll #10 (by 11pm on Thurs, 8/8)</td>
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<td>Session</td>
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<td>12 Aug 16</td>
<td>FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS! (Attendance Required)</td>
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<td>• <strong>Group: PowerPoint Pitch Deck</strong> (by class time; upload to Canvas)</td>
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<td>(12:30–3:30pm) W311</td>
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<td>• <strong>Group: Final Project Paper</strong> (by 11pm on Sat, 8/17; upload to Canvas, email single complete PDF to <a href="mailto:geraldine.wu@columbia.edu">geraldine.wu@columbia.edu</a>)</td>
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<td>• Venture Project Team Participation Poll (by 11pm on Mon, 8/19)</td>
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**NOTES:**
(Canvas) = Case posted on Canvas; Read & Prepare **before** class
(Email) = Case will be emailed to you; Read & Prepare **before** class
(in class) = Case will be handed out during class session (no need to read before class)