

Launching Social Ventures Syllabus SP2020

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Prerequisite: There are no prerequisite courses. Students should be prepared to engage in the topics of entrepreneurship, innovation, business processes and management, and to openly and freely discuss the place and role of values in business and social ventures.

Students are encouraged (but not required) to come to the first class with a social venture idea or project of their own which is to be used as a vehicle for applied learning of the course concepts. By the start of the second class all students need to have a social venture idea that they will develop throughout the semester (in-class partnering on venture ideas is encouraged).

Overview: This half semester course is taught by an impact investor and 'serial' entrepreneur. It will focus on: (1) identifying opportunities for using entrepreneurship to solve social problems; (2) introducing key concepts involved in start-ups that drive social change; and, (3) discussions relating to real-world experiences of impact investors and entrepreneurs as guided by the professors and select guest speakers.

The class will present the students with the key concepts and frameworks by which ventures can be formed and launched, as detailed in the six-week class description below. Various students or student groups will present on class topics throughout the semester with the goal of experiencing the iterative nature of social enterprise development.

Students interested in entrepreneurship, innovation, social entrepreneurship, impact investing, and the management and growth of businesses that have a social mission will find this class to be of value.

Grading:

10% - Homework assignments

40% - Final Project Presentation

50% - Class Participation: Thoughtful contributions will form a critical part of this grade. In addition, course attendance will be recorded at the start of class.

Readings: There are no specific assigned readings for the class. Rather, outside classroom work will be based on the development of students' social enterprise ideas based on the learnings from each week's prior class and the course as a whole.

Session 1 and 2: Overview and Opportunity Assessment

These classes will provide an overview of the key aspects of entrepreneurship and how to determine if an "idea" can be built into a social enterprise. We will drill into issues such as customer discovery, value proposition development, product/market fit, target market identification, the market size and the competitive landscape. We will also discuss mission/market fit and how to successfully marry social impact and financial viability.

Session 3 to 5: Moving from Whiteboard to Launch

These classes will involve the key elements involved in moving from idea to the launch phase of a start-up, including: forming the company and the core team; developing the 'company pitch'; establishing key business and impact metrics; creating a 'minimal viable product'; leveraging key partnerships; and finally, how to prioritize the aforementioned activities. Most especially, we will focus on the common challenges and pitfalls involved therein.

Session 6: Student Presentations

In the last class, students will present the evolution of their ideas, including any changes to their product/service, strategy or other high-level considerations. Student findings will be used to catalyze more general class discussions. The professors will also 'rate' the ideas for real-world viability based on their assessment financial and operational factors.