

Milken-Penn GSE Education Business Plan Competition Innovation @ Penn GSE

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Share your idea. Change the World. With this principle at its core, the Milken-Penn GSE Education Business Plan Competition (EBPC) is designed to catalyze game-changing innovations in the field of education. Organized and hosted by the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education (Penn GSE), the EBPC receives primary support from the Milken Family Foundation as well as substantial assistance from McGraw-Hill Education, ESA, APUS, Microsoft, ACT and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

In the six years since its inception, the Competition has offered hundreds of emerging, new and established entrepreneurs a forum to test their solutions to some of the most intractable problems in education by harnessing the power of technology. Entrepreneurial ideas span a diverse range of topics in education including: college access, digital skills for students with special needs, financial education for youth, professional development for teachers, parent involvement and mobile test preparation. Many of the problems identified by

entrepreneurs arise from their own personal or professional experiences. In addition, participating ventures target a variety of markets, including public and private PreK-12 and higher education in the United States, adult and corporate learning and emerging markets in developing nations.

As the nation's leading business plan competition in education, the EBPC attracts applicants from around the world and offers multiple prizes and prize categories. To date, EBPC winners have received more than \$650,000 in cash and services. Winners are also rewarded with a host of benefits in addition to funding, including access to Penn GSE's vibrant network of faculty, students and alumni, exposure to educators and venture capitalists, and an opportunity to receive business incubation services through the Education Design Studio, Inc. (EDSi), a hybrid incubator, design studio, seed fund and social impact company for education ventures.

EBPC also serves as a venue for addressing one of the greatest challenges in educational technology innovation: cooperative, cross-sectoral stakeholder engagement. In the past, entrepreneurs have operated largely in silos rather than working directly with teachers and researchers to develop more effective products/services. The Innovation @ Penn GSE team believes that meaningful conversations between stakeholders lead to higher rates of product/service adoption and to higher fidelity implementation. The EBPC provides an opportunity for

stakeholders (entrepreneurs, investors, academic researchers and education practitioners) to engage in in-depth, productive dialogue that ultimately benefits all stakeholders.

Resting on the premise that the collective capacity of these stakeholders will result in higher-impact, innovative educational technology solutions than would be created by any one stakeholder alone, the EBPC strategically brings disparate stakeholders to the table, and through a variety of programming and networking opportunities, builds and strengthens relationships among them. Central to this goal of fostering a more effective educational technology "ecosystem," the EBPC is designed to:

- Connect education research to practice;
- Incentivize new and experienced entrepreneurs to enter the education space;
- Encourage idea generation;
- Screen and vet early stage education ventures;
- Provide access to funding for promising ideas and ventures; and
- Serve as a forum for conversation about education innovation.

The EBPC has attracted, identified and accelerated the success of a number of innovative ventures, such as Autism Expressed, a nationally-recognized organization that teaches digital life skills to students with autism, and Osmosis, a venture with global reach that provides a

personalized learning platform to assist medical students in learning course materials. Several winners have been recognized by Forbes 30 Under 30 for their impact in education, including Ben Levy, co-founder of eduCanon, Zac Ringelstein, co-founder of UClass, and Stephanie Shyu and Lydia Pierce Fayal, co-founders of AdmitSee. In addition, EBPC alumni Eneza Education, a mobile test-prep platform, and Ubongo, an edutainment company, were both named to Fast Company's "World's Top 10 Most Innovative Companies in Africa." Jason Young, founder of financial literacy company MindBlown Labs, was named to President Obama's Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans.

Realizing that innovation is not a linear process and that promising entrepreneurs can be evident at different stages of venture development, the EBPC hosts two application paths to meet education entrepreneurs at two key stages of ventureship. Believing that early stage ideation is a critical part of the entrepreneurial process, the EBPC offers an Idea Path to help passionate people - particularly teachers- define good questions and test emerging hypotheses. The Idea Path is intended for applicants who do not have revenue, customers, investments or grants. The EBPC also offers a Venture Path for entrepreneurs who are at a later stage of the entrepreneurial process, and is intended for ventures that already have revenue, customers, investments and/or grants.

Applicants in each path are vetted through a crowdsourced judging process that harnesses the diverse experience and backgrounds of professionals from multiple fields, including university researchers, classroom practitioners, entrepreneurs and investors. This crowdsourced approach allows judges to recognize and help identify impactful innovations and provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs to receive actionable feedback from multiple perspectives and areas of expertise. The Innovation @ Penn GSE team actively recruits potential judges through social media channels and through direct marketing and communications. Many of these recruitment efforts target teachers, who are end users for many of the emerging products and services. The EBPC encourages judges from a variety of professions with the belief that varied perspectives enrich and enhance the scoring process.

Submissions are scored through a proprietary online judging platform, which allows judges to participate from anywhere in the world. In the Idea Path, judges score the merit of the idea, product or service, the feasibility of its implementation and the size and scope of its potential impact. In the Venture Path, where submissions are more developed, judges are asked to consider a number of salient criteria such as the quality of the product or service, the market opportunity, the competitive advantage, the financial grounding of the venture and the potential impact of the product or service. Each venture or

idea is individually reviewed by multiple judges from a variety of backgrounds.

A live Competition Finals and Conference is held in mid-May each year at the University of Pennsylvania. Finalists present their ideas and ventures to the assembled crowd and connect with other ecosystem stakeholders. A panel of competition sponsors, as well as select experts from the field of education, chooses the winners. The combination of crowdsourced online judging and live finals judging work in tandem to capture and balance traditional and nontraditional stakeholder perspectives and to identify ideas and ventures with the greatest potential for adoption, impact and success.

For the 2015 Competition, there were approximately 250 applicants and 240 judges. 56% of Idea Path applicants and 70% of Idea Path finalists were female, while 49% of Venture Path applicants and 40% of Venture Path Finalists were female. About 19% of Venture Path applicants came from outside the U.S., while Pennsylvania accounted for another 19% as well. International applicants constituted 19% of the pool of Idea Path entrants while Pennsylvania represented 25% of Idea Path applicants. Of the Venture Path applicants, 61% of applicants had revenue, 84% had customers, 59% had outside investment, 67% had intellectual property and 28% of applicants had all four of these items. 41% of judges were female and about 60% of judges had run or founded a startup. More than 70% of the judges had previously worked/volunteered in not-for-

profit or education settings, and a significant portion of judges were current educators, investors or entrepreneurs. These statistics demonstrate that impactful innovations can come from people regardless of background and location, and that purposeful collaboration among various stakeholders is key to both identifying and advancing these innovations.

For education entrepreneurs to move the needle in improving teaching and learning, there must be opportunities that meaningfully engage the entire stakeholder community. The Milken-Penn GSE Education Business Plan Competition is one pathway to achieve this goal and will continue to inspire innovations for years to come.

For information about how to participate, please visit the Competition website at www.educationcompetition.org.

About the Authors:

Barbara Kurshan- Dr. Barbara Kurshan provides executive level leadership of a series of entrepreneurially focused programs and efforts and helps develop new degree and non-degree programs at Penn GSE. Dr. Kurshan has been involved with education and technology for over thirty-five years, and has had a career as both an academic and award-winning entrepreneur. Dr. Kurshan has honed her vision of "what can be" using technology while

supporting the growth of new education companies and developing innovative software products. She began her teaching career at Virginia Tech, and was the director of academic computing and assistant professor of computer science at Hollins College for many years. As a professor, she researched the impact of technology on learning and helped her students explore the applications of technology across the curricula. Dr. Kurshan then became an education entrepreneur. As president of Educorp Consultants Corporation, she provided strategic consulting and seed funding in the areas of education, technology and innovation; and as the executive vice president of WorldSage, a consortium of for-profit higher education institutions in the European Union to address education for the 21st century, she identified innovative investments in learning institutions. As the past executive director of Curriki she helped to build one of the most innovative and robust global open source education communities. She has previously served as the co-CEO of Core Learning, an education investment fund, and the chief academic officer of bigchalk. Dr. Kurshan currently serves on the board of several education companies. She developed the first children's software products for Microsoft and also created award-winning products for McGraw-Hill, Apple, CCC (Pearson) and others. Recent awards include the prestigious WISE Award for Innovation at the World Innovation Summit for Education in Doha,

Qatar and "20 to Watch" award from NASBE in 2009. In 2008, Kurshan was named Laureate, Tech Awards from Technology Benefiting Humanity. In 2007, she was awarded the UNESCO King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize. In 2005, she received the ISTE Making It Happen Award and the Women's Venture Fund's Highest Leaf Award. Dr. Kurshan holds a BS in mathematics from Tulane University, a MS in computer science from Virginia Tech University and an EdD in curriculum and instruction from Virginia Tech University.

Cat McManus- Cat has previously served as an admissions officer at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania, and served as the coordinator of Penn's partnership with QuestBridge, a nonprofit organization that connects talented, low-income students with top colleges. Cat received a BA in anthropology from Dartmouth College, a MEd in education, culture and society at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and is pursuing an EdD in educational leadership at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

Jenny Janovitz,-Most recently, Jenny worked in school district administration as the project manager to the chief academic officer in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Prior to serving in that role, she worked for Mass Insight Education, a

nonprofit organization that consults with school districts to develop school turnaround strategies. She also taught fifth grade in the Boston Public Schools through the Teach For America program. Jenny received a BA from Washington University in St. Louis with double majors in education policy and urban planning, a MSEd in curriculum and teaching at Boston University and is pursuing an EdD in educational leadership at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.