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Media Relations
news@marshall.usc.edu
213-740-8674

Society and Business Lab Reflects on First Year

Changing the World, One Business at a Time

Last October, USC Marshall took a pioneering step in shaping the global business landscape with the launch of its Society and Business Lab, a groundbreaking effort to encourage the use of business models to address global social challenges. Funded with a \$1 million commitment from the Salesforce.com Foundation and led by Founding Director Adlai Wertman, the Society and Business Lab set itself an ambitious goal: leveraging cutting-edge education, innovative programming and world-class research to create the next generation of enlightened business leaders.

"As global challenges continue to grow in scope and complexity, new business models must be applied to create sustainable solutions. These models can exist as new entrepreneurial enterprises or within existing corporations looking to deepen their corporate social responsibility efforts. Our focus is to take a role in developing those ideas while making sure that our Marshall graduates are prepared to apply their business educations in a way that makes them enlightened corporate and social leaders," said Wertman, who is also professor of clinical management and organization at USC Marshall.

One year later, the Society and Business Lab has established itself at the forefront of the social enterprise arena. Its diverse initiatives and program offerings continue to attract attention from students, donors, scholars and practitioners dedicated to bringing business knowledge and resources to address issues around poverty, education, health and the environment.

"The Society and Business Lab is fulfilling our mission of graduating students who understand their expanded role in the global community," said USC Marshall Dean James Ellis. "By teaching and designing socially responsible business principles and new business models that address social and environmental challenges, the Lab is further establishing Marshall's leadership in business education."

This fall, the Society and Business Lab welcomed its inaugural class of Society and Business Fellows, a highly selective designation awarded to a small cadre of USC Marshall MBA students interested in pursuing careers in the social sector, the environment and health. Fellows receive individual mentoring from the Society and Business Lab faculty and staff; targeted guidance and counseling to assist them in obtaining summer internships; professional development tailored to non-traditional business careers; and valuable opportunities to meet with industry leaders.

The 11 students accepted into this year's class will also benefit from a program that focuses both on honing their skills and building a vital community of like-minded peers, says Margaux Helvey (Marshall MBA, 2008), the Society and Business Lab's associate director. "The resources available to most business students aren't always relevant to people who want to use their business skills but apply them to social and environmental problems," she

notes. "Not only are we here to help them, but we also provide them with an identified cohort from day one, which enables them to become sources of support and encouragement for each other."

This past summer also marked the Lab's first Non-Profit Summer Internship Subsidy Program, in partnership with the Career Resources Center, which helps USC Marshall MBA candidates gain vital hands-on experience by providing a generous stipend to support summer employment in the nonprofit sector. This year, students occupied a variety of high responsibility, high impact positions with a broad range of organizations, including the Fulfillment Fund, Chrysalis, Pacific Charter School Development, Green Dot, Families in Schools and New Ventures Mexico.

Another central component of the Society and Business Lab's strategy to redefine social enterprise is VentureBuild, an online learning program that allows social entrepreneurs to test the feasibility of their ideas. With seed funding from the Orfalea Foundations and a target launch date set for 2010, VentureBuild will be a tremendous boon to early stage social entrepreneurs, and will continue to distinguish the Society and Business Lab, and USC Marshall, as trailblazers in the global social entrepreneurship space.

The Society and Business Lab's emphasis on making a difference around the world makes it the ideal home for Global Business Brigades, an organization that offers undergraduates a chance to participate in international service learning. This January, Society and Business Lab staff will accompany students on a week-long trip to the Zurlular region of Panama, where they will work with a local micro-enterprise to improve the success and sustainability of the business.

Closer to home, this fall the Society and Business Lab will host a Lunch and Learn series open to USC Marshall students, faculty and staff, as well as members of the greater USC community. Engaging participants in the question, "Can business models save the world?" the 2009-2010 series will take place monthly, and will feature a who's who of influential leaders in the social enterprise arena.

The Lab's rich programmatic offerings are enhanced by related courses taught by Society and Business Lab-affiliated faculty. Open to both undergraduates and graduates, this year's courses explore topics including social entrepreneurship, ethics and corporate social responsibility.

Central to the Society and Business Lab's success during its first year has been the active involvement of donors and alumni, including Kevin Mintie, who recently made a multi-year naming gift for Society and Business Lab Fellows, and Daniel Powell, who is providing funding for VentureBuild. It's a collaborative effort that will undoubtedly continue to yield results as the Society and Business Lab enters its second year and looks ahead to future achievement.

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